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Parable's Resonance

Most readers of the Post, Bible-readers or not, will be acquainted with the story (Matthew 25: 14-30) which compares the kingdom of heaven with a rich man going abroad who divided his property among his servants, to one five talents, to another two and to a third one, with the instruction to do their best with it while he was away.

And most will guess that these were considerable sums of money, a talent being 6,000 denarii and a denarius about a day's wage for a day labourer.

'After a long time' the lord returned to find that the first two servants had done well with their nest egg, while the third, who had buried his talent in the earth, excused his inactivity on the ground that the lord was a hard man, reaping where he had not sown. This was clearly calumny against the bounty of a master who had endowed his servants so lavishly.

Interpretation of this parable usually concentrates on what is meant by the talents and their improvement; but the story falls to the ground if the master, here a figure standing for God, does not fit. And his principal feature here is that he is away most of the time in a 'far country'.

It is this that gives the parable its modern resonance. We approach the world through intellectual disciplines in which God is not a gambit and cannot be if He is to be the Lord of this story.

In the same way that the prolongation of life does not obviate the certainty of death, the manipulation of a secular culture does not obviate the possibility of an encounter with God.

And since the story is not about money but about God's redemptive purposes, the reward of his faithful servants is to 'enter into the joy of their Lord'.