

The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 *"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

The Parable Jesus gives here concerns a well-to-do man about to embark on a journey. Before he leaves, he calls his servants and distributes **VARYING SUMS** to each. Each servant was required to use the money given to him by the master, in order to make as much as they could for the master while he is away. The master knew his servants quite well, because the amounts given to each were based on their ability to handle money. The amount given matched each man's financial skill.

As soon as the master left, his servants got busy. The man who received five talents (about \$5000, we'll say) negotiated to earn another \$5000. The one who had received the two talents (\$2000), earned \$2000 more. However, the one who had received the single talent (\$1000) did nothing with his master's money. **He didn't even try to do anything.** He merely hid his talent in a safe place ready to hand back to his master, whenever he returned. Then he proceeded to go about his **OWN** business, totally indifferent to what he had been commissioned to do.

The master returned. He calls for his servants to stand before him and asks each of them to account for how he had fared in investing the master's money.

The first servant joyfully reports that he had *doubled* what was given to him. The master is delighted - he promises that his servant would be trusted with far greater responsibility in the future. The second slave had the same report. He too had doubled his master's money. Though he had less to start with, his **reward was identical** to that of the servant with the \$5000. He too was

promised greater responsibility. His reward was **NO DIFFERENT** from the man with the greater opportunity.

That is the point of the parable!

As you read the account of this parable which Jesus gives, you realize that Jesus is teaching on **FAITHFULNESS TO OUR TASK**. (even though our abilities and opportunities differ) **FAITHFULNESS brings the SAME REWARD!** Not all of God's people are gifted the same, therefore, not all do the same work for Jesus. **HOWEVER**, all can be **FAITHFUL** with what they have. All can fulfill the task assigned to them. This is what the Master requires.

The recompense is **NOT** based on what someone else does. We are responsible only for what God gives **us** to do. Our attention should primarily rest on our **own** task. What some other Christians does - or - is able to do, does **NOT** affect our reward in the slightest. This is what the Judge teaches by this parable.

Now we come to the third man!

No doubt there were other servants, but Jesus gives three examples as representative of the situation. This man received less than any of the others - He receives only \$1000. All he had to do was earn an additional \$1000 and he would receive the same reward as the others. If he demonstrated the **same faithfulness**, his reward would be equal to the rest. But what does he do? - **Nothing!**

He ignored both his opportunity and responsibility. It didn't matter that he was **told** to **USE** the money for his master in order to gain more. He busied himself with whatever he pleased, indifferent to his master's instruction. He selfishly went about his own interests, caring not that his owner trusted him. How does he react when called to give account to his master? He says, *"I knew you were a hard businessman. . . [To help understand this better, I share what some other translations render this as: - severe - tight fisted - difficult to please - have such high standards - hate careless ways - demand the best - make no allowances for error] . . . expecting to profit even though you do not do the actual work yourself. It is clear that you make gains off of what others do. And, I was afraid of your severity. So I decided not to risk your money on investments. Instead, I kept it safe for you, so that it would be here waiting for you when you got back."*

Did you hear what he said to his master? He pretends to care about his master's interest, however, it is evident that he doesn't. Neither does he have any respect for his master. He wouldn't dare take his master to task for being an "**investor**," rather than a "**laborer**," if he did. Impudently, he suggests his master has no right to expect any profit from him at all. If he really cared for his master, he would have made some effort to bring him a profit.

What a wicked fellow he is. He lies! The truth is, he simply couldn't be bothered. Notice he says he fears his master as a "**hard man**." That, simply, was not the truth. He really thinks his master was a softie, otherwise, how could he expect to get away with such impudence? He expects to get away with it. That seems pretty obvious.

Ever know any Christians like, *"God is a good God and because He is such a good God, He would never deal harshly with His own servants, even if they fail to fulfill their assignments?"*

Consequently they have forgotten the Master's commission, and so they live as they please. They are just like this servant. They put their own interests first, thinking it doesn't matter that the Lord has assigned them a job. It is a low estimate of Jesus that expects Him to be satisfied with disobedience. Let me ask, "***Why should Christ expect less than any other master?***"

Any one who does not fear God's judgment is a fool. Pity those who shrug off their responsibility to Christ. What a surprise they will have when He calls them to account. Let's see what awaited the servant who thought his master would wink at his indifference. He's in for a shock.

Jesus says that this master said to this unfaithful servant, "*You wicked and lazy servant! If you really believed that I was a hard man, you would have at least put my money in the bank so that it would draw depositors interest. But no, you wouldn't even bother to do that.*"

This master (in the parable which Jesus gives) certainly sees right through this unfaithful servant. He calls him wicked as well as lazy. The very least he could have done was to take the trouble of earning bank interest for his master. Even though he feared to speculate with it, he could have put it in the bank. But, obviously, he despised both his **master** and **the commission** given to him. He expected to get away with the whole business by this excuse. I pray that no one here plans to try that on the Lord at the Judgement Seat of Christ because Christ will see right through it.

The servant's excuse didn't work. The master says in verse 30, "*Therefore take away the talent he has and give it to the one with the ten . . . and throw him into outer darkness - in that place where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.*"

This verse (Matthew 25:30) is a very difficult verse to comprehend.

The passage of this parable is very definitely referring to Christians. First of all, Jesus said in the verse just preceding the giving of this parable, "*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*" (Matthew 25:13). Jesus is referring to the rapture of the church and He likens Himself to a man who is taking a journey, expecting, someday, to return. Jesus says, in verse 14, that this master "*called his own servants,*" therefore, these servants cannot be representative of anyone except Christ's own servants. It would be a distortion to apply this to non-Christians.

This parable, which Jesus gives, has to do with the **REWARDING** of those who are **FAITHFUL to their assigned work.**

I realize that this may surprise some of you but, I can be wrong! I do not want to impose my own views upon others. Jesus Christ is the umpire . . . the final Authority . . . the only dependable witness. Other parables, however, shed light on this question.

I do believe that Scripture is clear on the matter that *only* Christians will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ, immediately after the rapture of the church. Jesus pictures this servant as a slothful servant, one who does not do what has been assigned to him. Jesus calls this servant,

"*an unprofitable servant*," (verse 30). because he did not do what he was born to do. He is a withered member of the body of Christ, a barren tree in the vineyard, an idle drone in the hive.

He is good for nothing!

God's Word teaches that, "*It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*" If we are not "*faithful*," we will be the losers at the Judgment Seat of Christ

(1 Corinthians 3:9-17 speaks of this Judgment Seat of Christ)

I realize that the phrase, "*weep and wailing and gnashing of teeth*," and being "*cast into outer darkness*" are phrases most often referring to one being cast into hell, however, I believe that Jesus was using expressions, or colloquialisms, of that day, when He said: "*Cast into outer darkness*," "*weeping and wailing*" and "*gnashing of teeth*." These were a paraphrases of that day which referred to misery. Note different degrees of anguish, "*Weeping*" speaks of great sorrow, while "*gnashing of teeth*," refers to great vexation and indignation. "*Weeping*" is less intense than "*wailing*;" "*Wailing*" is less intense than the rage which makes a one "*gnash their teeth*," however, all of this has reference to distress and heartache. "*Outer darkness*," in the minds to whom Jesus spoke, referred to a dismal uncomfortable and frightful place. Whatever it may mean, it will be a fit punishment for the "*unprofitable servant*." While the faithful enter into "*the joy of the Lord*," the unprofitable servants experiences outer darkness.

This is the portion of the slothful servant.

This servant, in this parable, certainly, miscalculated his master. Jesus presented the master as a **JUST** man - as faithful to hand out *consequences* to those who did not fulfill their responsibilities as he was to *reward* those who took their responsibilities seriously. Do you think that if this servant had truly *known his master* he would have dared to be so callous with his commission? He got into trouble because he **didn't know his master** as he should have. He thought he knew him. He was sure he had sized him up correctly and could get away with being re-responsible. But he didn't really know him. How many Christians are mis-judging the Lord Jesus Christ in the same way? They're going to be horrified to discover their mistake - but it will be too late!

They are blood-bought, born-again, Children of God. Since this is so, then how can it be to even think that they would be treated harshly by the Lord? Didn't Christ love us enough to die for us? People cannot bring themselves to believe that God is **JUST**. Because Christ loves them, they expect Him to *overlook* all the lack in them. What a surprise there awaits those with this low estimate of the Lord.

1 John 2:28 tells us that some believers will "*Draw back from Him in shame*," when He comes to catch the church out of this world. Why would Christians *shrink* from the Lord? It is because they have failed to honor Him as Lord in their lives. They will "*tremble*" at the sight of Him. They will fear judgment because they have refused to serve Him as Master. Anyone who ignores the interest of his Lord, can expect to be treated as a "*wicked servant*."

Note that he is still "*a servant*" of his master, however, he is an "*unprofitable servant*." The word "*wicked*" here, is the same idea as the word "*evil*," when Jesus, in Luke 11:13, said, "*You being evil*

know how to give good gifts to your children," meaning: "human," or, "living by the natural, carnal man."

No tricky theology can alter this hard fact. Those who feel and live as this servant did, cannot avoid the consequences.

This parable which Jesus gives, was an illustration of a familiar event in the life of those who lived in Jesus' day. For landlords to leave their land to the charge of their servants, when they would go on a long journey, was something that was very common in that day.

In the Middle East it was the custom to hold a party upon the landlord's return. More so when his prosperity is increased at the hands of his faithful servants. When a man's servants added to his wealth, it was the custom to have a celebration and let them share in the joy of it.

In this parable, Christ is the Master. He is absolute Owner and Proprietor of all persons and things. The *servants* are Christians, Christ's own servants. Jesus says, "*The master delivered to them [his servants] his goods*" (verse 14). The reason that the servants received from their master was so that they might fulfill the purpose of the master.

Jesus has "*traveled into a far country.*" Ephesians 4:8 tells us that, "*When He ascended on high, He gave gifts unto men.*" 1 Peter 4:10 states that we are "*stewards of his manifold grace.*" When Jesus went into heaven, He was as a "*man traveling into a far country,*" that is, He went away to be gone for "*a great while.*" However, when He went away, He took care to furnish His servants with all that was necessary for fulfilling His purpose while He was absent. 1 Timothy 6:20 speaks of "*the great depositum*" and 2 Timothy 1:14 refers to the "*the good thing*" that is committed to us. ***What am I saying?*** I am saying that Christ sent His Holy Spirit to enable His servants to accomplish His will in their lives. Thus Christ, at His ascension, left His goods to His servants.

Keep in mind the parable Jesus uses was a very familiar event in the life of those to whom He was speaking. The master went on a long journey and left his possessions to the responsibility of his servants. When the master returned it was not uncommon to hold a party to reward his servants who had done well in his absence. After all, hadn't his faithful servants increased his prosperity?

It was a custom to have a celebration and let them share in the joy of it. Jesus states that this master said to his ***faithful*** servants, "*Enter thou into the joy of your master,*" or, as the New International Version states it, "*Come and share your master's happiness.*" The invitation is accepted and they join him at his table. Servants never would do this unless bidden to do so.

Whenever a servant was asked to sit at his master's table, it amounted to a tremendous elevation of that servant. Servants, ordinarily, were not even allowed to stand **near** the table, let alone be seated as friends. Jesus draws a picture of a time of celebration, and elevation, for faithful servants.

WHAT ABOUT THE WICKED SERVANT?

The disobedient servant had his one talent taken away. Never again would he have the opportunity to invest for his master. He could never recover from his blunder, His talent was given to someone who could handle it. This faithless man had proven himself unfit.

What's to become of him?

He is not allowed in the banquet room. He is not even to have the privilege of waiting on the table. He is still a servant because his master still owns him. However, instead of being elevated, he is humiliated. He suffers embarrassment and loss of rank. He isn't even allowed in the house, so that he might enjoy the light. Banquets were held at night, with the halls lit brightly by oil lamps. Outside it was dark. Eastern nights were pitch dark. Into the darkness he goes, away from the light and festivities. The closest he can get to the celebration is to observe it through a window. As he sees his former companions enjoying themselves, listening to the happy sound of the master's voice, he certainly would feel disappointment and say to himself, "*If only I had done more for my master.*" He grinds his teeth as he thinks how he might have been soaking in the pleasure of the occasion. He isn't alone. There are other unfaithful servants. It is with these that he must be content. All of them will be upset to one degree or another. All have forfeited the privilege to being near the master and a place at his table. This unfaithful servant will be miserable. He had the easiest job of all. "*If only he had used his one talent for his master,*" but, he hadn't, so now he was weeping and wailing.

Jesus taught that those who spurn their stewardship will **NOT** enter into the same joy as those who were faithful. Whatever their position, it will be a far cry from what they could have enjoyed, had they elected to live for Christ instead of themselves.

Note what Jesus says in summing up this parable, "*For to everyone who has, shall more be given, and he shall have abundance; but from the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away.*" (Matthew 25:29) What a sobering truth. Have you ever realized that something you had in Christ, could be taken away?

Remember the word . . . **LOSS**? Paul used it in his warning of the Judgment Seat of Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:15, "*he will suffer **LOSS**.*" 1 Corinthians 9:27, "*I keep myself under subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, **I myself should be a castaway**.*" (Other translations read: "*fail shamefully of the prize,*" or, "*disqualified for the prize.*") It is possible to **LOSE** much in Christ.

Revelation 3:11, "*Behold I come quickly; hold fast that which you have, that no man take thy crown.*" This passage is given to the church - to those representing the true ones in Christ. The Greek word "*crown*" means "*reward, which was secured by participating in competition.*" What is important to us, is to see that the "*crown*" is something which can be **LOST**.

Isn't it true that God's Word teaches that we are in a race and any race can be won or lost? If we believe that we can not lose in this contest, we better review our theology. It just might be that your doctrine is lulling you to sleep - making you careless. How foolish it is to assume you have won something - when you haven't. Jesus' words speak of the "**LOSS of reward**" Once something is taken away, as in the case of the unfaithful servant, all hope of recovery is gone. There is nothing a person can do to improve his situation after the opportunity passes from his hands.

The meaning is clear: **IF WE (AS CHRISTIANS) THROW AWAY THE OPPORTUNITY WE HAVE TO SERVE CHRIST IN THIS LIFE, THE LOSS WE WILL SUFFER AT THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS IRRETRIEVABLE!**

That's certainly a sober side of our salvation. If you think I have made too much of this parable, we will be looking at other parables to see what Jesus teaches concerning our responsibilities to Him as servants.

We will, in following messages, be looking at other parables which Jesus gave to show what will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ.