

The Parable of the Talents

Mt. 25:14-30

Introduction

The term 'talent' was first used for a unit of weight (~75 pounds), but in time it changed to a unit of coinage. The present-day usage of 'talent' indicating an ability or a gift is primarily derived from this parable. See also Lk. 19:13, ***"So he called ten of his servants and gave them 10 minas. 'Put this money to work', he said, 'until I come back'."***

The Lord Jesus told this parable in Mt. 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 5 talents of money, to another 2 talents and to another 1 talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the 5 talents went at once and put his money to work and gained 5 more. So also, the one with the 2 talents gained 2 more. But the man who had received the 1 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 5 talents brought the other 5. 'Master' he said, 'you entrusted me with 5 talents. See I have gained 5 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 2 talents also came. 'Master', he said, 'You entrusted me with 2 talents; see, I have gained 2 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 1 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 10 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.' "

A servant of the Lord said to God's people, ***"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."*** (Joshua 24:15) It is nearly always appropriate for us to respond to this request. It is our belief and our conviction that each of us should say, ***"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."***

Our great longing is to be familiar with the words of the Lord Jesus. No one has ever spoken like the Lord Jesus and we need to hear from Him. In this parable the Lord Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God and about a man who was going on a journey. As we have seen, one servant gets 5 talents, one gets 2 talents and one gets 1 talent. He then went on his journey. The servant

who got 10 talents managed to double this while his master was away. The servant who got 2 talents also doubled this, but the third servant hid his talent in the ground and was totally unproductive. This parable is extremely appropriate for the days in which we live (2020 AD). Trading for profit is at the heart of our economy. Many people check daily what is happening on the stock market.

But I think what the Lord Jesus is talking about is spiritual trade. As the spirit of the world gets more sinful, the believers in the Lord Jesus – i.e. us – need to get more active in discipling and evangelism. So often when commercial values slump, spiritual values soar.

Matthew's positioning of this parable is strategic. It is linked with what the Lord Jesus was saying about "The Last Judgement". It is about the fact that the end is coming. This parable indicates that there is no shortage of things to be done! The Bible does not rate 'watchfulness' highly. What is rated more highly is spiritual resourcefulness. Watchfulness apart from work is useless. This story isn't about making money; it is about spiritual business. Now, in the times in which we live, let us encourage one another to great resourcefulness as we manage and administer in a godly manner the gifts given to us by the Lord Jesus and put them to work in bringing blessing to both the saved and the lost. In both Matthew and in Luke 19:12-27 we see some of the significance of the apparent wealth and power going away. This is put very vividly in the Luke passage. A day of reckoning is coming.

The main object in this story isn't about what happened when the owner returned. The real object of interest is the third man who hid his talent and did nothing. A talent was the equivalent of ten years' wages! It was a lot of money! It isn't possible from the parable to explain why the three individuals did what they did and why some got more than others. The issue in this story the Lord Jesus told is not what they received but what they returned – not what they got, but what they gained. It isn't about avoiding robbery. It is about taking risks!

In Luke the story is presented a little differently. The story is really rammed home. Every servant gets exactly the same amount. They each get the same 'seed' money. This parallels the teaching in the New Testament that we have all received the One Spirit. It doesn't matter if one is more privileged than another. The issue is that each of the three men in the story got more than he had before. The point is not about financial cleverness. In two cases it is simply about faithful work. In our case this means faithful work in the cause of the Lord Jesus. This story is about capital. It is about investment. It is about yielding a profit. The application is nothing to do with income. It is about your personal spiritual account. The rich man going on a journey is the Lord Jesus. He has left us physically, but He has not left us without great resources. He is going to return and He is going to ask each servant (including us) for an account of our stewardship.

This is a consistent theme throughout the New Testament. You see it in Paul's writing to the Romans. ***"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God."*** (Rom. 14:12) Again we read in Hebrews, ***"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*** (Heb. 4:13)

Clearly we can say, "The more that is given the more will be required". But it isn't about what we profess and it isn't about what we possess. The Lord Jesus is concerned about what we actually produce!

In this parable the responsibility given to the servants is proportional to the evidence of their resourcefulness and their returns (profits) on what they have already received. We need to understand that natural talents and ability need to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit as a result of us submitting our lives to Him. The Bible also speaks about the supernatural ability to do miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. It isn't enough to talk about these gifts. We need to understand that the life of the Lord Jesus has been given to us at great risk and at great cost.

Remember the parable Jesus told about the sower. (Mt. 13:3; Mk. 4:3; Lk. 8:5) What is the seed? Is it giving out tracts or selling Christian books? The Bible says, ***“The Word was made flesh”***. The ‘seed’ is the Lord Jesus. It is a knowledge of Him and His love that needs to be sown in all the ‘fields’ of this world. The Lord Jesus never leaves us. He leads us through His Holy Spirit living within us. This is what we will be called to account for. How have we followed His way and His leading?

So the parable of the talents is an expression of Jesus’ life. The truth is very simple. With such an investment, a significant yield is expected. In any context where the New Testament speaks of the return of the Lord Jesus, it brings up His own example by speaking of what I will call “the returns of a Christian”. We can’t talk about the return of the Lord Jesus until we talk about the returns of the Christian believer. What are our returns based on our investment?

The first two men clearly show us that the master was thrilled with their business report. But the silence and the rudeness of the third man to his master tell a different story. So what is the point? We must learn from the failure of the third man! Verses 24 and 25 show us the root of his failure. ***“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.’ ”***

The problem of this man is the problem of so many people, not only those who don’t know the Lord Jesus. It is a problem that affects many who are professed servants of the Lord Jesus. He is talking about people who are servants in the Kingdom. What is the root problem? The problem is that the third man had a wrong, insufficient view of his master’s character. Clearly, how you and I work for God will reflect what we truly believe He is like. How you and I live will reflect the reality of our convictions. Our priorities will reflect our true understanding of God’s purposes for our lives.

So our involvement in the life of our Christian community will reflect our understanding of what God really thinks about the church. There is an enormous tragedy resulting from wrong belief or weak belief. This results in unproductive spiritual living.

In our society today the most common view of God is that there is no God. Others see wars, troubles, famines, global warming etc. and have come to the conclusion that God is malevolent. This is often lived out in the communities in which we live and even in our churches. Those fears, uncertainties and anxieties lead to rebellion and the refusal to accept His grace. They lead to legalism and a lack of assurance so we resist His love and His forgiveness. So this third man was somewhat typical. He took the basic minimal approach to God. In essence he said, “I am present, but I don’t want to be productive.” He presents himself as narrow and mean towards God. He is critical and uninvolved.

I believe we should take seriously the response of the Lord Jesus in the story, ***“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.’ ”***

We believe in the grace of our God, but we also see the grief of God when it is spurned. This is the bottom line of the Lord Jesus’ dealings with us. We sometimes meet people who haven’t realised and accepted the grace of God. If there is one thing the Lord Jesus says breaks His heart, it is the person who says, “I can accept everything, but I cannot really believe and receive your acceptance of me”.

This is what the third man did. He hid his gift in the ground. This is a strong story because it is a message delivered in the context of troubled times. This third man is typical of those who only

find their righteousness in terms of what they do **not** do. They may appear to be purists, but they are not pure. They are legalistic, but they break the law of love. They see the mote in someone else's eye but miss the beam in their own!

The Christian life as presented by the Lord Jesus is neither no risk nor low-risk. The very nature of Biblical faith presents incredible risks and the ultimate risk-taker was the Lord Jesus. He was called the friend of sinners. He was once called the prince of demons. (Mt. 9:34, 12:24 and Mk. 3:22) He also lived daily with the charge of illegitimacy as well as ridicule and hate. He was the victim of a rigged trial and then He was murdered. Biblical goodness is simply finding out what pleases the Lord Jesus and acting on the basis of what pleases Him.

Another thing to notice about this third man is his righteousness in his own eyes. He doesn't for one moment allow that there is the possibility of another point of view. He was very quick with his explanations for his excuses – looking for justification, for insulation and for isolation. He failed to work and to be involved in the work of his master. He failed to bear fruit. So what does he do? He hides his talent. Remember that when Adam and Eve knew they had sinned, they hid themselves.

This third man didn't understand that his master had given him great spending power. This is just what the Lord Jesus has given us – spending power! We need to be spending the resources of the life of the Holy Spirit that have been given to us. We are being very foolish if we ignore the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to let Him loose in our lives and never to bury Him. To seek to bury the Holy Spirit in a hole is a great tragedy. There is also an implicit implication of idleness and mistrust in this third man.

So often we have good intentions, but there is no execution of these intentions for we lack discipline. We need to go to the head of the church and say, "Lord Jesus, what would you have me to do?" We should expect an answer! We will be judged by our faithfulness to what the Lord Jesus has told us to do just as this noble man gave out rewards on the basis of fulfilled responsibility – five talents – five cities.

You can't have the expectation of exercising Godly authority unless you have given evidence of your accountability. The Bible says there are no rewards unless you labour. The Bible has no concept of armchair leadership.

The Lord Jesus says, "**Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.**" (Rev. 22:12) Faking works in order to gain salvation will never succeed. The servants the Lord Jesus will acknowledge are those who have not delayed but got involved and been committed to the task He has assigned to them.

This is a parable about trade. What kind of trader am I? I will use the image of a stock broker. There are two things a good stockbroker needs to know – his clients and the commodities they are selling. Your client is not the church people. It is not even the watching non-Christian world. The Lord Jesus says in this parable that the client is **God's concern** – those who have not yet heard of His love for them. How are we using His love? How are we using His forgiveness? How are we sharing these things? How are we using the faith God has given us, His acceptance of us and the assurance of our salvation? What is our estimation of the worth of these things? Trust God's investment in you! And trust the investment you will make spiritually in others.

We are not talking about spirituality by a process of osmosis. We are talking about consistent joyful obedience that powerfully demonstrates the life of the Lord Jesus until He returns. So the word of the Lord to us is to keep a close account of our spiritual life. The longing of God's heart is that we should be passionately involved in seeing His Kingdom come throughout His world.