

7. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Some estimate that a gold talent in today's dollars is worth \$660,000. The parable of the talents does not make clear as to whether it means a gold or silver talent. Either a gold or silver talent would be a large sum of money. God has richly blessed us all – even those of us with just one talent.

Our English word *talent* derives its meaning directly from this parable by the Lord. According to the Miriam Webster Dictionary, our word comes from the Middle English, from Old English *talente*, from Latin *talenta*, plural of *talentum* unit of weight or money, from Greek *talanton* pan of a scale, weight; from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. In the sense of the parable, it was a unit of value equal to the value of a talent of gold or silver.

The Lord forever cast the meaning of a talent to be the natural endowments of a person. Separate from this parable, the meaning as relates to money has not survived. The parable of the talent is a perfect example of how a known objective reality can convey and illuminate an unknown spiritual reality.

God Gives Gifts to All His People

Matt 25:14-18. 14"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 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.

In the parable, the Lord gives the servants different gifts of money. In interpretation, the gifts must be something other than money, since a figure compares two things essentially unlike one another. The talents here are the enabling gifts of the kingdom of heaven with their attendant responsibilities. From the beginning of the Lord's ministry, he had described these gifts, common in degrees to all Christians – most notably in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Matt 5:3-10 give us these spiritual talents, which were to become the currency of the kingdom of heaven: the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Peter shows how the nurturing of these talents allows Christians to be partakers of the divine nature:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 2 Peter 1:3-9

All the Christian's gifts come from the Lord and without him there is no starting place. One cannot use what one does not have. Just as the master in the parable, God, the Father, gives us our gifts. James wrote in James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." In Eph 1:3-4, Paul, said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

We as servants of God in His kingdom must set about to use the talents that he has given us. We will each one have to seize the opportunity to serve him or bury the talent that he gave us.

All Christians Have an Opportunity to Use Their Talents

Matt 26:16-18 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one

talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Each of the servants made a choice as how to use their talents. Some of us, as they did, will use the gifts of the Lord and bring growth and profit to the kingdom. Some, as they, will hide our talents, shrinking back, afraid to move forward. Notice that the gifts differed in amounts, but the expectation was only in relation to the gift given and not to the gifts given to others. That we are to serve according to the gifts given and the opportunity given is the principle at work in the parable of the talents. In Galatians 6:10, Paul affirmed the principle: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

On a varying array of fronts, the New Testament reiterates this principle as it works in the lives of Christians. We are universally gifted but with our own gifts. Paul writes 1 Cor 7:7, "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift; another has that. In 2 Cor 9:6-7, the principle applies to giving of the prosperity provided each one of us by God: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." For Timothy in 1 Tim 4:14, it was a matter of his using the spiritual gift, which came with the laying on of hands, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." Whatever the gift, Christians must use it to serve others. 1 Peter 4:9-11, Peter wrote, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Just as in the parable, the servants were to serve the interest of the master, so too must we serve our God's interest. What a wonderful blessing that we can administer God's grace in its various forms.

The Rewards and Punishments of the Master Depend on How One Uses the Talent Given

Matt 25:19-28; *"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 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.'*

21 *"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!'*

22 *"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'*

23 *"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!'*

24 *"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. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'*

26 *"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? 27 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.'*

28 *"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 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. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

The reward of the faithful servants is certain, coming for the faithful use of the talents given. The punishment of the lazy servant was just as certain. Modern ideas that there will be no real punishment wilt in the face of the master's strong language. It is interesting to note that Rev 21:8 places the cowardly right along with the murders and sexually immoral in Rev 21:8: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." The American Standard Version uses the word *fearful* for the word *cowardly* in the NIV. The fate here is the same as that for the one who buries God-given talents and gifts.

Conclusion

God gives us gifts and talents to use for him in this present world. Our eternal reward or punishment depends on how we use these gifts. What is at risk is the greatest gift of all, which is our share of the master's happiness. Rev 22:17 sublimely states our reward as the free gift of the water of life:

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Study Questions

1. What did the master expect of each servant? _____
2. Why are the gifts in different amounts? _____
3. What does a faithful servant do with his gifts? _____
4. What does an unfaithful servant do with his gifts? _____
5. How will the Lord reward the faithful servant? _____
6. How will the Lord reward the unfaithful servant? _____
7. What is the greatest gift of all? _____