

The Parable of the Talents

This is another kingdom of heaven parable, where Jesus is teaching something that, for Christians, is very important for us to know. A good rule to follow is, if He chooses to include something in His Book, no matter how strange it is or how difficult it is to understand, it must be of very great importance. Therefore, it is incumbent on each of us to seek an understanding of everything He says.

The first few times I read this I found nothing to grab on to as spiritually relevant. It is simply a story of a rich guy going on a trip and leaving three of his servants in the care of some of His wealth. When he gets back, two have doubled what he put in their trust, and the other buried what he was given in order to keep it safe, so he could return it to his master undiminished. He obviously feared the boss, and wasn't taking any chances. So what is the issue? As I first thought about it, it seemed to me that I would probably have done what the third guy did, keep his money safe so I could give it back without having lost any. But for that, he got sentenced to HELL! What's that all about? Without the assistance of our great Interpreter, the Holy Spirit, that's probably all that many people can get out of it, I suppose. But with Him, God's instructional message can be found loud and clear!

Let us first read the parable and then cast our Spirit- given net into its waters and see what precious truth we can bring up from under its surface.

The Parable of the Talents

14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

- 20 *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*
- 21 *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*
- 22 *He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*
- 23 *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*
- 24 *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed:*
- 25 *and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*
- 26 *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed:*
- 27 *thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*
- 28 *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*
- 29 *For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*
- 30 *And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

First, it is evident that Jesus is speaking of Himself as the man traveling into a far country. Jesus is referring to His ascension to heaven. He has entrusted His servants with His wealth until such times as He decides to return. He has entrusted some with more than He has with others, each in accordance with His for-knowledge of their capacity to deal with what is given. They all know that one day He will return and require an accounting from each of them.

In verses 16 and 17 He tells us that the first two “traded” with the talents and doubled the value of that which He had entrusted to them. “Trade” is the translation of the Greek word “ergazomal” which means, “to toil (as a task or occupation), to commit, do, labor for, trade, or work.” Because of verse 27 where Jesus speaks of receiving usury it may be concluded that this was probably the nature of the way in which each of them used what had been left for them. But obviously the meaning of the translated word “trade” is far

more inclusive and could have involved many kinds of wealth generating efforts. Furthermore, the word talent, in Hebrew, is defined as a unit of weight generally believed to be about 96 pounds when it is referring to silver money. I've read that the Babylonian talent was even heavier and that the Greek talent was 86 pounds. Generally, however, it is spoken of as a large unit of money being the equivalent of about 4000 shekels, the basic unit of Hebrew money, which was about two fifths of an ounce of silver. But the talent spoken of in the parable could have been 96 pounds of anything such as seeds to plant, or oil, or spices, etc. to trade. Therefore, in the context of earthly wealth, they could have been left almost anything where the value could have been increased through their labor and prudent management.

In using the word talent, with its potentially different meaning, as His choice of words, describing what He left them to manage, it could well be that the Holy Spirit is here engaging in a pun, as He frequently does in some of His messages. If it was intended to be a pun, it was a latent one intended to be revealed in these later times when English would become a nearly universal language of the Christian world. Talent, in English, of course, is best defined as a person's special ability. For us today, that is the essence of the parable, and how we, who are Christian, should apply it and learn from it. Christians are His servants in that He is our Lord as well as our Savior. Every servant of the Lord, every saved soul, has been given a special gift, that is, some talent or special ability which he or she is to use to the greater glory of God. The collective application of these abilities by all who are His, is what constitutes and makes dynamic, the living Body of Christ. That is why Christians are called the "Body of Christ." The Holy Spirit, through Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12 verses 1 through 27 lays out with great clarity this miraculous mystery, and how, as various members of the body of Christ, we each have a particular spiritual gift that is a special talent. Each member must use the gift, which is given to him or her to the best of their abilities, if the Body is to function properly. Failure by any "part" to function as assigned can cause the "body" to be diminished in its effectiveness, a condition obviously displeasing to the Father.

In the parable Jesus demonstrates the fact that He knows the ability of every individual, and assigns to each, responsibilities perfectly commensurate with their abilities at the time. To those who have a greater capacity to serve Him, He assigns greater responsibilities. Realizing the limitations of the three servants, He gave each according to his or her ability and potential to perform. The first two used their “talents” and doubled His investment, that is, were fruitful to His purpose while the third failed totally, in regards to the very reason for which the talent was entrusted to him.

He made two mistakes. The first was his failure to use his one talent. In burying his talent, he achieved absolutely nothing for his Master, and, therefore, violated the trust. Having neglected the opportunity, he was now to be deprived of it forever. His other mistake was his failure to really know and trust in his Master. Notice that he called his Master a hard man who reaped where he had not sown and gathered where he hadn't sowed. He was unable to see beyond his nose because he had not taken the time to really know all he could about his Master. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 4 Verse 37, 38, Jesus explains this very issue of reaping where others have sowed. Because his Master did not appear to physically sow what he harvested, or to thrash the wheat to separate the seed from the straw, he saw Him as one who simply derived His wealth from the efforts of others. He had no concept of his Master's abilities, or of His work, or of His character. This excuse for his slothfulness exposed not only his ignorance and deficiencies as a servant, but also his unwarranted fear and ignorance. All of this translated into a useless servant, and this is what sent him to the outer darkness. In his reprimand, the Master told him that, at the very least he should have gained something, even some interest (usury), from what he had been given. Today we equate usury with an excessive rate of interest. In Old Testament times usury meant interest, not necessarily excessive interest. Charging interest of other Hebrews was forbidden, but was allowed if the lending was to gentiles (Deuteronomy 23:20).

The essence of this parable message may be summarized as follows:

1. All of Jesus' servants, that means all who are Christians, are given talents (spiritual gifts), which they are expected to use.
2. He provides these talents on the basis of His foreknowledge in accordance with each individual's capacity to use them.
3. We are held accountable only for what we have been given, not what we do not have. (2Corinthians 8:12).
4. He expects each person to use to the best of his or her ability what is given to him or her. It is slothful to fail to act energetically in these matters.
5. Those who use their talent wisely in accordance with His will are generously rewarded.
6. Those who fail to use what is given to them loose even that which they have. Today's secular axiom "use it or loose it" might be said to have its origin right here in God's Word.
7. Some who pose as God's faithful servants are really not. Notice in verse 14, Jesus refers to all three as His own servants. This includes the one who obviously was not one of the redeemed. Our omniscient Lord, of course, knew this from the beginning. Remember, this is a parable not specific to real life situation. The third servant's role is described here as a means of delivering a very specific message. It tells us that all of God's servants are not necessarily God's fruitful or redeemed. Some profess the Christian faith but do not possess it. They appear to walk the Christian walk but they are not on the same path that is the one, which leads to the narrow gate. Remember Judas. He was an Apostle, the highest order of Jesus' servants, for over 3 years. He went the way of the third servant in this parable.
8. Verse 29 expresses not only here, but in other references regarding Jesus' teaching, a very important principal. Those who have the willingness to serve and to use their God given talents, more of these will be given to them. Those who fail to use what has been given to them will loose what little they have. God will take it from them. The justice of all of this will be understood when we each face the

mercy seat in the heavenly kingdom. Most of us will probably be surprised at how much, or how little of our applied talents were of value to our Lord. Their value will be judged by what was in the heart and what motivated the use of these talents.

I believe that there is at least one more important truth to be extracted from this parable, if taken in the broadest context of Scripture. As mentioned above, it was tragic that the third servant failed to use his talent. If he had stopped there instead of imputing his Master's Character and purpose, thus demonstrating his lack of love, obedience and faithfulness, one might have assumed that he was a repentant believer, but one who was merely lazy, fearful and ignorant of his responsibility in the matter. In that case, assuming that his heart was right, he would have been simply rebuked, and perhaps his life shortened, but he wouldn't have been denied salvation. But then the Parable would not have contained the specific message it was intended to provide.

If we are His, He expects each of us to fulfill the purpose for which He gave us our talents, our spiritual gifts, and we all do have them! If we fail to do this, of what good are we to Him here as His servants? NONE! Furthermore, recognizing these gifts, and applying them to glorify Him daily, can be powerful evidence of a repentant and obedient heart, which can also be the evidence of a redeemed soul. On the other hand, lack of this, that is, the lack of good use of our God given talents can be evidence to the contrary. It behooves each of us to examine ourselves frequently to be certain that ours is a genuine Christian life, which personifies His purpose for each of us.

POST SCRIPT:

Two years after having written this, and just before it was to be woven into "Christian Musings," I have come to realize that this parable may have nothing to do with salvation. Most, including myself, when studying it conclude that it must be telling us that the third servant was unsaved, because it says that he was cast into the lake of fire in the outer darkness, but that isn't quite what it says. It only speaks of an outer darkness, and because the only context we have in our minds is that place where one would find ghenna, that is the eternal lake of fire, we conclude that is where he was sent. But further

and more careful study can lead to a different conclusion. Had I'd been faithful to my concern as expressed in the second paragraph of this study, and in how I'm usually led to examine the key words in their original language, a better interpretation might have followed even back then. The word "darkness" can be translated as "obscurity." Obscurity is where there is a lack of light, a vagueness, a lack of clarity. The word "outer" means simply, "out doors, or outside." From this we could conclude that where he was to spend eternity was not among the enlightened, not in the clear presence of God. Because hell or the lake of fire are not mentioned, it seems that we should not add it to what is written. Had the translators written "cast the unprofitable servant outside and into the dark place, or into obscurity" we would not as easily choose to believe that the servant was sent to the eternal place of damnation. Furthermore, Scripture is very clear on the fact that only Antichrist and his false prophet are to be cast directly into the lake of fire. All other lost souls remain in shoel until the end of the millennium. Therefore, might we not conclude that the servant will reside in some remote place here on earth during the millennium, and later in another remote obscure and dimly lighted place outside the gates of the New Jerusalem? (Revelation 21)

My personal belief now is that this parable is more likely about rewards associated with how well we serve our Lord during our short stay here on earth. Those of us who are saved, that is justified have our ticket to an eternal life in a heavenly place, but all places, positions, or levels of service in the kingdom are not the same. Those who serve Him best here with our "talents" will be the nearest to Him, and live brightly in His glorious light. Those who receive justification and do nothing with it (bury it like the servant in the parable) will be somewhere far out somewhere in a heavenly place, but not where there is much of God's glorious light or presence. Isn't this the more likely message Jesus is giving us rather than what I originally wrote?

I believe the same is true regarding the man who went to the wedding feast improperly dressed as described in Matthew 22:13. Here Jesus may be offering another example of a justified soul who chose to simply "coast to heaven." During his life, he failed to exhibit the expression or works of gratitude that would have "clothed him" in the pure white

linen attire needed in order to attend the wedding feast of the Lamb. There will be great and eternal regrets in heaven for those who fail to live fruitfully during their Christian lives. This condition is expressed in the “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” If this isn’t your idea of heaven, then get to work (yes, work). Pray that the Holy Spirit leads you to reveal God’s purpose for you, to show you your particular “talent” or “talents”, and to thus guide you to become an obedient and fruitful servant. Those who do this, will earn, (yes earn) a place on the new earth, close to God, rather than somewhere out in “Regretsville.”