

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Talents

XXVIII. The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30

A. The Central Point of the Parable

God has given specific opportunities to people during the tribulation time just prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Their use of these opportunities determine the award they will receive at the revelation of Christ.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The Man

Matthew 25:14 introduces us to the main character of this parable, a man. This particular man was going to travel into a far country. Since he would not be able to manage his estate while he was gone, he delivered part of it to some of his servants who were to manage it for him.

2. The Servants

We are introduced to his servants in Matthew 24:14. We are not told specifically what position these servants held nor what their abilities were. We are only told that their abilities differed. This is one of the main areas in which this parable differs from the Parable of the Pounds mentioned in Luke 19. In that parable each of the servants were given the same amount of money with no reference made to their differing abilities.

3. The Talents

The word translated "talent" is the Greek word *talanta*. It was not a unit of money but a unit of weight. The actual value, then, would depend on the specific metal. Since the word translated "money" in verse 27 is the root word for "silver", we can assume that the talents were silver. Since one talent is equivalent to 125 pounds or 1,800 ounces, the value, assuming silver at \$10.00 per ounce, would be \$18,000 per talent.

Note in this parable that the man gave a different number of talents to each of the servants. The reason for this is given in verse 15 where it states "to every man according to his several ability." In other words, each man received an amount that was reflective of his abilities.

Another interesting note is that the word translated "traded" in verse 16 is different than the word "occupy" or "trading" in Luke 19. The word used here is *ergasomai* which has the idea of "work". It is a much more intensive verb than *pragmateuomai*.

4. The Reckoning

Verses 19 to 30 give us a description of the reckoning. When the lord returned he called in each of the servants to see how well they had done with the money he gave them.

The reckoning depicted in this parable differs in several ways from the Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19. Note the following:

Parable of the Talents	Parable of the Pounds
The first two servants each made a profit of 100%.	The first servant made a profit of 1000%, the second 500%.
The third servant put the talent in the ground	The third servant put the talent in a napkin.
The specific reward is not mentioned. The first two servants were told to “enter into the joy of the Lord.”	The reward for faithful service was rulership over cities.
The third servant loses his talent of money and his life.	The third servant loses his pound but no mention is made of further penalty.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

None

D. Interpretation of the Parable

In order to interpret this parable correctly, it is essential to understand the context in which it was given.

Matthew 24 and 25 form what is called Jesus' Olivet Discourse. This sermon was delivered to the disciples in answer to their two-fold question as record in Matthew 24:3, “when shall these things be?”, and “what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?”

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS PASSAGE, MATTHEW 24 AND 25, DESCRIBE EVENTS DURING THE TRIBULATION TIME IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING CHRIST'S SECOND COMING TO ESTABLISH THE KINGDOM. IN NO WAY DOES THIS PASSAGE REFER TO THE CHURCH. If the above statement is not understood at the outset, it is impossible to correctly interpret any passage in the Olivet Discourse.

The Parable of the Talents is the sixth illustration Christ uses to teach his disciples about the necessity of preparedness. Since his coming will be at an unexpected time, it is essential that any true believer be ready at all times, so that they will be ready at the right time.

The five preceding illustrations depicting the unexpected return of Christ are:

- Matthew 24:32-35 - The Parable of the Fig Tree
- Matthew 24:36-42 - Noah and the Flood
- Matthew 24:43-44 - an unexpected robbery
- Matthew 24:45-51 - a prepared servant
- Matthew 25:1-13 - the Parable of the Ten Virgins

Note that each of these illustrations depict a different aspect of the unexpectedness of Christ's coming:

The Parable of the Fig Tree indicates its nearness when the signs appear.

Noah and the Flood depict the fact that most men will miss the signs of Christ's coming and be suddenly judged just like the world was in the time of Noah.

The unexpected robbery depicts the coming of Christ as being something that a man thinks is possible, but something for which he never prepares himself.

The prepared and unprepared servant indicate that some will know Christ is coming, but because of the delay will become slothful and hence unprepared.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins depict the coming of Christ as separating the prepared from the unprepared. The prepared will enter the Kingdom with Christ and his bride, the unprepared will be locked out.

Finally the Parable of the Talents depicts the fact that some will have taken advantage of the opportunities granted them by God whereas others will neglect those opportunities. Those who neglect the opportunities during the tribulation time will be denied entrance into the Kingdom.

1. The Man

From the above contextual setting, it should be obvious that the man refers to Christ himself. If that is not evident, note the following reasons:

- Jesus "went away" in a sense during the Church Age.
- Christ will judge the faithfulness of each person prior to the commencement of the Millennial Kingdom. Those who pass the judgment will enter the Kingdom, those who fail will be cast into hell.
- Christ will condemn those who waste their opportunity for salvation.
- No other identification makes sense given the context of the parable.

2. The Servants

The servants represent true and false believers. Some think that the servants only represent true believers, however, this poses a problem when examining the third servant. (We will look at this in greater detail when we get to the reckoning).

- Just as each of the servants received a different amount of money, so each person during the tribulation will receive a different degree of revelation about God.
- Each of the two faithful servants exactly doubled their money. They took advantage of the opportunity God gave them.
- Each of these servants were called to give an account of their activities when the man returned just as each person alive at Christ's second coming will give an account of themselves. (see Matthew 25:31-46)

Note the following about the third servant:

- He was unduly afraid of the man. The construct of verses 24-26 give the idea that the man was searching for an excuse for his unfaithfulness.
- In verse 23 the above point is made even clearer by the fact that he could have deposited his money with the bankers. This would entail little, if any, risk and would have at least provided some return.
- If his comments regarding the man were true, it should have prompted him to be even more diligent with his money. The knowledge that a man will stand before God and give an account of himself ought to prompt him to more faithfulness, not less.
- Because of his sloth, the money that he had was taken away and given to the most faithful servant. Implied in this is that each of the men were allowed to keep the money they had gained.

In verse 26 we find one of the moral laws of God. Simply put, it teaches that whenever we turn from the truth, what little truth we had will be taken away. On the other hand, when we respond to the truth, we will be given more. Romans 1:18-32 elaborates on this principle to show that all men are guilty before God. When men reject the light, no matter how dim, God is not obligated to give them more. Conversely, when a man responds to the light, dim as it may be, God will give more light.

3. The Talents

The talents refer to the opportunities God gives each man during the tribulation time.

One major difference between God's evaluation of men and our evaluation of men is that God judges the heart whereas we judge results.

The above principle is found in the story of the Widow's Mite found in Luke 21:1-4. Jesus told his disciples that the two mites given by the widow were more precious in God's sight than the large sums of money given by the wealthy.

Some understanding of what in particular these talents may refer to can be found in Matthew 25:35-36:

- Feeding the hungry
- Giving water to the thirsty
- Taking in strangers
- Clothing the naked
- Visiting the sick
- Visiting the imprisoned

The above activities will be even more dangerous during the tribulation when association with Christians or Jews can result in death or imprisonment.

4. The Reckoning

The reckoning referred to here is the judgment of the living Jews at the end of the tribulation. The reason for this identification is that the context of Matthew 25 demands it.

Note the following general facts regarding this judgment:

- Entrance to the Kingdom is predicated on the righteous acts done during the tribulation which are in turn reflective of a redeemed heart.
- Those who do not take advantage of the opportunities given them will be denied entrance into the Kingdom.

The identification of the third servant as being an unbeliever is based on the following facts:

- He is not invited to enter into the joy of his lord.
- He is to be cast into outer darkness. This is used often by Christ to refer to the fate of the lost.
- It best fits the context of Matthew 25:31-46.

E. Application of the Parable

God will give men opportunities during the tribulation for service to him. The way a man takes advantage of these opportunities will determine whether he is allowed to enter the Kingdom or not.