

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #45 ~ Matthew 25:14-30 ~ Three servants given talents ~ Scripture

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To 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. ¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The 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. ²⁵So 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? ²⁷Well 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. ²⁹For 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. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Parable #45 ~ Matthew 25:14-30 ~ Three servants given talents ~ Questions

1. What are your five best traits or greatest attributes?
2. In Verse 25:14, the word “it” refers to the kingdom of heaven. To what did Jesus liken it in this parable?
3. On what basis did the master decide to give different amounts of money to each of the three servants? What was a talent worth? How did the word “talent” come to mean an ability, skill, or aptitude?
4. We looked at a similar parable (#37) of the servants and minas in Luke 19:12-27 a few weeks ago. What are the similarities and the differences?
5. There are four important elements in this parable: time, money, work, and profit. That seems pretty worldly. What can we say about each element?
6. The master says three things to reward each of the first two servants. They are:
7. What is the main characteristic of the third servant that differentiates him from the first two?
8. What was the third servant’s excuse for not investing his talent? How did the master respond to his explanation? (25:24-28)
9. What was the ultimate outcome of the third servant?
10. God rejoices in his servants making a profit. What does a *profit* mean to God?
11. Is it important to God how much talent you have? (2 Corinthians 8:10-12)
12. Where are you able to invest your talents (money and abilities)? What people can benefit most from the talents you have?
13. Can you summarize this parable *as to what it means to you today* in a sentence or two?

Parable #45 ~ Matthew 25:14-30 ~ Servants given talents ~ Leader's Notes

1. What are your five best traits or greatest attributes?
2. In Verse 25:14, the word "it" refers to the kingdom of heaven. To what did Jesus liken it in this parable?
3. On what basis did the master decide to give different amounts of money to each of the three servants? What was a talent worth? How did the word "talent" come to mean an ability, skill, or aptitude?

The talents were apportioned to them on the basis of their abilities. There is no agreement among Biblical scholars as to the worth of a talent. It is a unit of weight and can be applied to precious metals, in the Bible, silver or gold. There is not even agreement on its modern weight: a Greek talent weighs 57 pounds, Roman 71 lbs, Babylonian 67 lbs, and Egyptian 60 lbs. Some sources say a common New Testament talent weighs 75.6 lbs, others say 130 lbs. Let's go with 75. Now if that's gold, at the Feb 2016 value of gold (about \$1200/ounce), that makes a talent worth \$1.44 million. But 50 years ago when the world was on the gold standard, an ounce of gold was worth \$35/ounce, so a talent was worth only \$42,336.

Your head spinning yet? If the parable was referring to a talent of silver, then it's worth only \$18,616 today or 50 years ago, with silver at 35 cents an ounce, a talent would have been worth a mere \$423. Okay, let's forget about silver; most of the Bible references are to talents of gold (Exodus 25:39, 2 Samuel 12:30, 1 Kings 9:14, 9:18, 9:28, 10:10, 10:14, 1 Chronicles 20:2) and far fewer refer to talents of silver (Exodus 38:25, 2 Kings 5:22).

Still other Biblical scholars have related the value of the talent to the mina (60 minas per talent) and a mina seems to have been worth about 3 months wages for an agricultural or manual laborer. Based on that, we can say a talent is worth about 15 years pay for a common laborer, i.e., a substantial amount of money. And note, in Jesus' times, the word "talent" referred to money and not a talent (aptitude, ability, skill) or spiritual gift, although that may well be the parallel for us today.

The word "talent" is derived from the Greek word *talanton*, which means "balance, sum, weight." So, in fact, the basic root of the word talent as used today to denote the capacity of achievement, success, or ability was originally a unit of weight or money for the payment for goods and services in the ancient world.

4. We looked at a similar parable (#37) of the servants and minas in Luke 19:12-27 a few weeks ago. What are the similarities and the differences?

The similarities between this parable in Matthew 25 (talents) and the parable in Luke's Gospel (minas) are easily seen:

- * Man goes to another country, stays a long time, and then returns.
- * Man gives resources to servants, expecting them to make a profit in his absence.
- * First two servants are faithful; they are praised by their master and are given greater authority.
- * Third servant hides what was entrusted to him.
- * Third servant seeks to excuse himself by accusing his master of being harsh.
- * Third servant claims that he was afraid of his master.
- * Third servant does not make a profit for his master.
- * First two servants are commended and are rewarded (go to heaven); the third is condemned and punished (goes to hell).
- * Master tells unfaithful servant that he should have put the money in the bank.
- * Money that was given to the third (unfaithful) servant is taken away and given to the faithful servant who gained the most for his master.

While the parable in Luke (minas) is similar to our parable in Matthew 25 (talents), there are some significant differences:

- * Parable in Luke is told when Jesus was near Jerusalem, before His triumphal entry; in Matthew, Jesus tells the parable in Jerusalem, some time later.
- * In Luke there are ten servants; in Matthew, there are only three.
- * In Luke, the man who went away is a nobleman who leaves to obtain a kingdom; in Matthew (talents), no such information is given.
- * In Luke, the master gives each servant the same amount of money (one mina); in Matthew, talents are given to the three servants *according to their ability*.
- * In Luke, the slaves are instructed to “do business” with the money; no such statement is found in Matthew (though we can rightly make this inference).
- * In Luke there is another group, in addition to the master’s servants – those who don’t want the man to become their king, and who send a message asking him not to return. In the end, these rebels (unbelievers, Jews?) are slaughtered.
- * In Luke, we are told that the reason for the parable was to correct the misconception that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately; no such reason is stated in Matthew.

5. There are four important elements in this parable: time, money, work, and profit. That seems pretty worldly. What can we say about each element?

Time has been a significant factor in Jesus’ teaching concerning His return at the end of the age, beginning in Matthew chapter 24. Jesus made it clear that His return would not be immediate, but would be only after much trouble and the passing of a considerable period of time. While there would be signs to discern the general “season” of His return, neither the day nor the hour would be known. Beyond this, His return would come at a time when it was not expected

Money. This parable tells us that both believers and unbelievers are entrusted with certain things, and that they must give account for their stewardship. Basically all men are accountable to God for how they use (or do not use) those resources which God has entrusted to them.

Work. Both the first and second servants immediately set to work with the master's money. It is not the money that goes to work, as such, but the worker. When the third servant's excuses are set aside, it becomes evident that this man is lazy – he didn't do any work.

Profit. Those who work with what they are entrusted, in order to make a profit for their master, are rewarded for their faithfulness. Those who are unfaithful lose not only their reward, but their stewardship. Interestingly, we find this same principle stated in connection with the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18). The soil which produces no grain (in other instances, no fruit, or no profit) is bad soil. Only the soil that produces a crop is "good" soil.

6. The master says three things to reward each of the first two servants. They are:

First, they receive their master's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Second, because they have proven themselves to be faithful with the few things entrusted to them, they are now given even greater responsibilities by their master.

Third, they are invited to "enter into the joy of your master," which would seem to be the salvation of lost sinners.

7. What is the main characteristic of the third servant that differentiates him from the first two?

In a word, the third slave is *lazy*, and thus useless, as opposed to being hard-working, and therefore useful. He does not "go to work" with his master's money, over a lengthy period of time, and thus make a profit. He does no work for a lengthy period of time and thus is useless.

8. What was the third servant's excuse for not investing his talent? How did the master respond to his explanation? (25:24-28)

9. What was the ultimate outcome of the third servant?

He was harshly chastised, the talent was taken from him, and he was thrown out "into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," a phrase meant to describe the horrible suffering experience of hell.

10. God rejoices in his servants making a profit. What does a *profit* mean to God?

If we were to make an equation of this parable, it would probably go like this:

Resources (talents) + Labor (work) + Time = Profit

Just as a businessman expects to make a profit, and is happy when his employees increase his wealth, so God expects a profit and rejoices in it. He has granted the time and the resources for men to make a profit for the kingdom of heaven, until He returns. The question for us to consider is this: Just how do we measure “spiritual profit”?

I think we could all agree that the salvation of lost souls is a profit for the kingdom. Thus, *evangelism* is one form of spiritual profit.

Ephesians 4:11-13 says ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Thus, we can safely conclude that *edification or spiritual growth* is also profitable for the kingdom of heaven.

God also asks us to “walk in his ways” and “obey his commands.” When Jesus was asked what command(ment) was the most important, he actually named two: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Most importantly, bringing glory to God is profitable. Let’s call this aspect of profit *exaltation*. “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

11. Is it important to God how much talent you have? (2 Corinthians 8:10-12)

It is not how much talent one has, but how one uses it that is important to God. It is not how many gifts that God gives to a person, it is what one does with them.

12. Where are you able to invest your talents (money and abilities)? What people can benefit most from the talents you have?

13. Can you summarize this parable *as to what it means to you today* in a sentence or two?

This parable insists that watchfulness must not lead to passivity, but to doing one’s God-given duties. Everyone has received gifts according to their ability and what they make of these gifts is what counts in the end. We must be learning,

growing, carrying out our responsibilities and developing the resources that God entrusts to us until He returns and settles accounts. As in the earlier parables, we see a progression in the theme of being prepared for Christ's return, with each parable having a different nuance in its lesson.

Some of the above commentary is by Bob Deffinbaugh of www.Bible.org.

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