

The Parables of Jesus

Lesson 8

Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30

This parable is possibly one of the most powerful, graphic teachings of Jesus. No one escapes the message so it can't be ignored. Let's jump in and see what we can learn.

Setting for the Parable

Jesus shared the parable of the talents in the middle of His Mount of Olives sermon but it was told only to His disciples. This parable has a close but not identical story found in Luke 19...the parable of the ten talents.

Both these parables are strong teaching by Jesus. The details are different but the message is the same. Diligent, faithful service to God will be rewarded but selfish, lazy negligence will not.

This parable can be confusing if we don't first understand what a talent is. An ancient talent is best described as a measure of money. The Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary gives this definition, "The talent was the largest unit of silver, shaped in slabs, pellets or rings, with approximately the value of one ox."

One talent had the value of 6000 denarii and one denarius was equivalent to one day of wages for the common worker. So, doing the math, a single talent was worth nearly 20 years of wages to the common worker during the time of Jesus.

Jesus used this valuable monetary measure to graphically represent the valuable physical and spiritual gifts that God gives His people. In this parable a monetary talent represents a personal talent.

In our day, a talent refers to intelligence, skills and abilities that a person possesses. For clarification and spiritual application, a talent refers to your physical abilities and spiritual gifts. This parable demands that we use all of these wisely and for His glory.

Telling of the Parable

The parable of the talents begins by introducing a rich man who is preparing for a long trip. This man represents Jesus and the long trip represents the length of time between His ascension to heaven and His return at the rapture.

The man called his three servants together and divided his valuable talents among them in proportion to their abilities. The man entrusted these gifts to his servants while he was gone. The first servant of the rich man received five talents, the second servant received two talents and the third servant received one talent. Keep in mind from our earlier discussion that these are all huge sums of money.

The first servant immediately invested all five talents. Investing can be risky but this servant realized he had this one chance to please his master. Time passed and his investments were bearing fruit. Of course some investments didn't pay off, but some did okay, while others made small fortunes. The overall returns on his investments were tremendous.

Jesus now discusses the second servant. The rich man only gave this servant what he could handle. This servant could only manage to deal with two talents and that is perfectly fine...we are not all the same. He made wise use of these two talents and in the end he had doubled his master's savings.

The story now turns to the third servant. He had a good set of personal gifts and abilities and the rich man trusted him with a sizable amount of money...a talent. Unlike the first two servants however, he was afraid to do anything that would risk the rich man's money so he went and hid the talent.

Time passes and eventually the master returns. The servants were called and it was time to settle their account with their master. The first and second servants happily showed the rich master that they had doubled the amount of money he had entrusted to them. The master is pleased and tells them, "Well done good and faithful servants."

The third servant then comes before the master. He has seen the response of the rich man toward the other two servants but he has nothing to give back to the master besides the original talent he was given. He says to his master, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

The master is angry with the third servant and orders that the talent be taken from him and given to the first servant. The master explains his actions by saying, "Those who use their talents well will be given even more, so they will have an abundance. Those who waste their talents by doing nothing will lose what they are given."

Meaning of the Parable

The parable of the talents...like all parables...has the listener in mind. We've already seen that the master represents Jesus and it's clear that the servants represent you and me as Christians.

We have been blessed by God with many incredible resources. Things such as our mind, heart, and soul, plus an entire lifetime to develop those things; personal talents and abilities, tasks to accomplish, and material blessings. All of these are gifts from Him.

Based on the parable of the talents, we will stand before Him to answer for our use of all these blessings. The life that will be judged by God will be judged based on the planned, faithful, diligent, focused use of the talents He entrusted to us.

It's important to note that Jesus does expect more from those who have been given more. According to Luke 12:48, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

The third servant...being given much less...wouldn't have been expected to return a great deal. If only the servant had attempted something and shown some effort and a few results his Master would have been pleased with him. It's foolish to ignore God's blessings.

Has your personal life increased in the knowledge of God through Bible study and practice? Has your prayer life become and remained warm and active? Do we witness to others about the love of God and message of the cross? Do we give of our time, tithe and talents to serve Him?

Get This!

Jesus used this parable to reveal what it takes for us to stand before Him and hear, "Well done good and faithful servant." It's time for us to stand up and ask ourselves this question, "What have I done for God's glory, for His kingdom with my life and my gifts?"