

# THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Jon Macon

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus teaches one of his most well-known parables, the parable of the talents. In the parable, Jesus says, "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. 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" (Matt 25:14-15). The parable concentrates on these three servants. The fact that they are the man's "own servants" reveals that this parable, like the parable of the ten virgins before it, is speaking about different types of *Christians*. Christ emphasizes this further by saying that this is what "the kingdom of heaven" (i.e. the church, Matt 16:18-19) is like.

## Differences among us

An important lesson we learn at the outset of this parable is that the Lord has not made us all exactly the same, nor does he give us all the same level or responsibilities or the same opportunities in serving him. It *is* true that all men have the opportunity to be saved (Isa 45:22; Matt 11:28-30; Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:3-4; Titus 2:11; Rev 3:20; 22:17) and God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35; Rom 2:11; 1 Pet 1:17). But none of us are the same. God has made us all differently (1 Cor 4:7). We all have different personalities (as any parent who has more than one child readily knows). God has given each of us different gifts or abilities (Rom 12:4-8). As the human body is made up of different parts with different abilities and functions, so also the Lord's church is made up of members who have different abilities that are necessary for the proper functioning of the spiritual body of Christ (1 Cor 12:14-27). God also gives different opportunities to each of His servants. For example, Christian women are prohibited from speaking in the assemblies (1 Cor 14:34-35) and from teaching men or having authority in the church (1 Tim 2:11-15). But they are no less valuable to God, and have the same promise of salvation as Christian men do (Gal 3:27-29). As another example, not every Christian man has the opportunity to serve as an elder or deacon in the church. Both of those offices require a man to have children (1 Tim 3:1-5,12; Titus 1:5-6). God is the one who gives children (Psa 127:3-5; Jas 1:17), but He does not give children to every man. Therefore, some men never have the opportunity to serve as an elder or a deacon like other men have. But, again, all Christian men have the same promise and hope of eternal life. Some brethren have opportunities to do good works with their money that other brethren with less do not have (1 Tim 6:17-19). (But wealthier brethren also have more temptations, Matt 19:23-26; 1 Tim 6:9-10.) God, as the Creator, certainly has the right to make what He desires and in the manner that He desires (Matt 20:15). No one can rightly accuse God of being unfair by giving each other person different talents and opportunities (Ezek 18:25,29; 33:17). Romans 9:20 states: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? *Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*" Another factor in

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this equation is that our own actions can have a bearing upon the opportunities the Lord may (or may not) give to us in the future to serve Him. The more we seek, the more we will find (Psa 119:99-100; Matt 7:7-8). The parable of the talents teaches that *“unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has”* (Matt 25:29). Actions do have consequences, good or bad.

## **Reward for faithfulness**

The servant who was given five talents “traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord’s money” (Matt 25:16-18). Eventually, their lord returned and judged his servants (Matt 25:19). The five talent man brought his five more talents (Matt 25:20), and his lord said, “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” (Matt 25:21). The two talent man brought his other two (Matt 25:22), and his lord repeated the words he had spoken to the first servant (Matt 25:23). The one talent man explained that he had been afraid and had hidden his talent in the ground (Matt 25:24-25). His lord condemned him for being a “wicked and slothful servant” (Matt 25:26-27), and took his talent away from him and gave it to the man with ten talents (Matt 25:28). He said, “For unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has” (Matt 25:29). The one talent man (now “no talent” man), the “unprofitable servant,” was cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 25:30). The parable of the talents teaches us some important lessons about God’s judgment. First, God judges every man according to his works (Matt 7:21; Rom 2:5-11; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 5:9; Jas 1:22-25; 1 John 2:17; Rev 20:12-13; 22:12). Each servant was judged by what he himself had done with what his lord had given him. None of us possess a single thing that was not given to us, ultimately by God (1 Cor 4:7). Therefore, we are all mere stewards of whatever God puts into our hands, including our lives, time, money, talents, opportunities, etc. Thus, the Lord says, *“As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Pet 4:10). Our job is to use all that God gives us to serve the Lord and accomplish His purposes as good stewards. The Lord says, *“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”* (1 Cor 4:2). Luke 16:10 says, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” Like these men in the parable of the talents, we will be held accountable for what kind of steward we have been. Only “good and faithful” servants will enter the joys of the Lord in heaven (Matt 25:21,23).