



# The Parable of the Talents: Will You Use What God Has Given?

Christ is preparing a people for His coming reign on earth. You have an opportunity to sign on and be a part. But that includes doing your part. What will you choose?

by Darris McNeely

**J**esus Christ never intended to establish the Kingdom of God at His first coming. He clearly told His disciples He was giving them the mission of taking the gospel message to the world (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). He compared His followers to servants of a great householder entrusted with fabulous wealth to manage into even greater wealth in his absence.

The Church, made up of Christ's followers, holds the invaluable truth of the coming Kingdom and preaches it to the world, anticipating the day Christ returns. Then will come an accounting. Where will you find yourself on that day?

### Three parables of stewardship

On three occasions Jesus used variations of a parable of a master leaving his servants to take care of his business in his absence. The first was when He was approaching Jerusalem before His death. The crowds were thinking He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel immediately. Instead, He spoke a parable of a man going into a far country and leaving his servants a sum of money with the

instruction "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:11-13).

Again, in His prophecy of future events on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told two similar parables to emphasize that the Kingdom was not coming in that moment but that there was work to be done in preparation. Here, in Matthew 24-25, the picture of the servants being left with responsibility is set within the prophecies of the end of the age and highlights the fact that the delay would test the unity and love of the disciples.

In the first parable here, second of the three we've noted, an evil servant would lose sight of his duty and abuse fellow disciples until stopped at the unexpected return of the master (Matthew 24:45-51).

The third version of this parable comes at the end of the same discourse in Matthew 25. In it, Jesus shows the great truth that Christian discipleship carries the responsibility to work in faith and righteousness, anticipating a reward based on what he or she does with God's calling to His truth and the gift of His Holy Spirit and other blessings.

Today, Christ is preparing for His return in glory to

rule the earth. It's what He's been doing since the moment He ascended from the disciples and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem where they would receive power to continue to carry out the work He began in His ministry. When they asked if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel, He responded: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

This was a big job. But the disciples of Jesus have been and still are given what they need to carry out the tasks they've been called to. Will we make use of what God has bestowed on us? Let's look at that last-mentioned parable, told from the Mount of Olives in Matthew 25:14-30, and understand what a disciple is to be doing now, in anticipation of Christ's return.

### **God bestows talents with an expectation of increase**

Christ begins by saying: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey" (verses 14-15).

What do the talents represent? The master here has entrusted his goods, his estate, to the care of servants. The talents are a large sum of money, each equivalent to around \$1.5 million by today's values, a large share of the entire estate. Consider it like 50 years of work for a laborer. Each servant had corresponding ability to handle his sum with an expectation of a respectable return. The sense is that the servants immediately went to work. The master then leaves, expecting those servants to produce an increase or profit with what he's entrusted to them.

Spiritually we might liken this to spiritual gifts given by God to His disciples to be used with the natural talents we have. God entrusts us with His Holy Spirit. He expects us to produce the fruit of the Spirit and to take on the divine nature while growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, serving God and the needs of others. This is done over many years.

"Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money" (verses 17-18).

The first two servants double what is given them. They were diligent, immediately going to work to please their master. They were driven by the size of their job, knowing success or failure depended on them. And they were further motivated by respect for their master coupled with a deep love of who he was and the aim of his wealth—

what he desired to produce.

The third servant, however, took a different approach. He went and buried the money in the ground. This kept the money safe, but it prevented any increase. He showed a certain respect for the share of the master's estate, but not the proper respect in using it as his master intended it to be used. He failed to understand the nature and character of the master, one who desired increase, and likewise failed to carry out his instructions.

### **A calling to account**

"After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

"He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (verses 19-23).

The two who made use of and increased what their master had invested in them understood the benevolent nature of their master. They not only were moved to hold the amount in trust, but they knew the master desired to see productive increase of his estate. The more wealth, the more to share, the better the community. Growing wealth spreads to and benefits others. They share in the productive increase of goods and services. These two servants understood the basic desire of the master to see many others benefit from the fruit of labor.

The mention of joy indicates the divine nature of the whole enterprise. These two servants understood what they were called to do. They worked with a godly fear and love of their master and a commitment to please him.

This is in stark contrast to the third servant. "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours'" (verses 24-25).

This third servant did not understand or appreciate the nature of his master. His excuse was that he feared what he claimed was his master's harsh approach in expecting more than he'd handed out, motivating the man to just hold on to what he had. But this was a huge amount of money. By burying the talent in the ground, he was protecting his share, yet perhaps not even that carefully. And he was not growing it. It did no one any good.

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While he was able to dig it up and return it at the time of accounting, there was nevertheless considerable loss due to missed potential over time.

What he failed to do was to love and appreciate his master and the work his master desired from him of putting to use what he'd been given. His words betray a distant and distorted view of his master. This servant could not enter the "joy" of the lord because there was no joy in his life, no eagerness to please his master.

The master's response should warn us: "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

"So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verses 29-30).

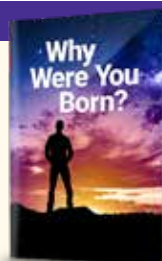
### Which example will you follow?

This parable speaks to the divine purpose of God's calling to His followers of this age. God is preparing—preparing a people, and preparing a Kingdom.

Faithful servants will use the gift of the Spirit given by God to develop righteous character. Indeed, they will use the many blessings and abilities God has given them to grow in joyfully serving Him and helping others. Disciples who possess and reflect that divine nature will be the instruments Jesus Christ uses to reign with Him at His return (Revelation 20:4, 6). Those who understand that today's life is a preparation for the age to come will use the talents and abilities given by God and be prepared for the day when His reign on earth begins.

Do you see yourself in this parable? Have you accepted God's calling? Through repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, have you received God's gift of the Holy Spirit? Has God given you the means and talents to serve Him and others?

This parable shows us the reason God calls and sets apart a people to Him. It is to prepare them to reign with Him on His throne in the age to come and help bring God's blessings to all mankind! **BT**



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