

# The Christian Arsenal

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## Parables 09 The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25: 14-30

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### 1.) The Parable-

a.) The Master goes into a far country- Before leaving for an extended period of time, the master in this parable entrusts his possessions of great value to his servants. Rich land owners would frequently go on long journeys and leave their servants in charge of their possessions. The riches that the master left with the servants did not belong to them. They belonged to the master. Of course this wealthy Master represents the Lord Jesus Christ in this parable and his extended absence is the time period between his ascension into heaven and his return.

b.) The resources entrusted to his servants- A talent was a measure of weight of about 75 pounds but it was also a measure of money in either gold or silver. The talents that are mentioned in this parable are a monetary measure of silver. The Greek word in vs. 18 is "argyria" which literally means silver money [1]. It takes 6000 denarii to equal a talent of silver. A denarius was what an ordinary laborer would earn for a days work which means that it would take over 19 years, working 6 days a week, for the average person to earn a talent of silver.

The number of talents that each servant received was according to his ability. Two of the servants made good use of the master's resources by using them in the most effective way that they were able to, but one servant simply chose to protect the portion that had been entrusted to him by burying it in the ground.

c.) The Master's Return- The master's return was after a long period of time. The first two servants knew that their master would be pleased with their report on how they had handled his resources. The master offers the same commendation to both servants for their faithfulness. He then rewards the first two servants with rewards in proportion to the riches they had been entrusted with as well as an invitation to share in his happiness. The test of their service was not how much they earned but that they actively sought to increase their master's riches to the best of their abilities.

The third servant hid the talent in the ground where it would be safe. Jesus may have been illustrating this servant's attempt to keep what didn't belong to him and use it for himself. By burying the talent he would have been the only one besides the master who even knew it existed. A servant like this might even hope that the master wouldn't return for one reason or another because then the master's goods would be his alone.

### 2.) The Context-

a.) The Immediate Context – (Matthew 25:1-13) The parable of the talents follows the parable of the ten virgins without any break between them. Both parables describe what the kingdom of heaven is like and portray a certain aspect of those who are awaiting the master's return.

- The parable of the ten virgins describes two classes of people who profess to be anticipating the return of the bridegroom. During the bridegroom's long absence all of them slept. This shows that outwardly there wasn't anything that would distinguish them from one another.
- Some commentators see the oil as representing the Holy Spirit since oil is used for anointing and we are anointed by the Holy Spirit. This would hold true since the wise virgins represent the truly regenerated because "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9) so only a true believer would have the Holy Spirit. This imagery might seem to break down when the foolish virgins asked if they

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could buy some oil from the wise virgins because the Spirit of God can't be bought with money. But the response of the wise virgins in turning away the foolish virgins may be teaching that a saving relationship with God can only take place through personal appropriation. One person cannot establish a relationship with God for someone else.

- By taking both of these parables together we see that the parable of the ten virgins emphasize the need to be prepared for the Lord's return while the parable of the talents shows the need to be productive while He's away in anticipation of his return. To say it another way, the first parable shows us the need to be watching and the second one stresses the need to be working.
- b.) The Extended Context- (Matthew 24:1-25:46) This dialogue that Jesus was having with his disciples begins in Matthew 24:1 when the disciples pointed out the magnificent buildings in the temple complex to Jesus. To their surprise, Jesus told them that the whole temple complex was going to be torn down, stone by stone. In response to this the disciples asked Jesus three questions. **First**, "when will this happen?", **second**, "what will be the sign of your coming?", and **third**, "what will be the sign of the end of the age?"
- Vs. 4-30 Jesus tells his disciples about all of the troubles that will befall the nation of Israel beginning with the destruction of the temple and concluding with the great tribulation.
  - Vs. 31-35 He then tells them the parable of the fig tree in response to the disciples request for the sign of his coming. Just as the new growth on a fig tree is an indication that summer is right around the corner, all of the events of the tribulation that Jesus described is the sign that his return is about to take place.
  - Vs. 36-41 No one knows when Jesus' return will take place but it will happen suddenly just like the flood in Noah's day overtook everybody, even though they had been warned.
  - Vs. 42-44 Just as a thief doesn't announce his arrival and his victims are caught off guard, Jesus' return will take some people by surprise. Jesus warned us that we should be prepared. Although we may not be expecting a thief to visit us, most people take the necessary preparations in light of the possibility that one could come at any moment.
  - Vs. 45-51 Jesus then tells the parable of the faithful and wise servant. A faithful servant will be in charge of all of his master's resources. But if that servant doesn't think his master will return and hold him accountable, then his belief will be demonstrated in his behavior. Jesus again stresses the uncertainty of the time of his return and the necessity of being ready at any moment.
  - 25:1 Jesus begins the parable of the ten virgins with "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like...". He also begins the parable of the talents in vs. 14 with "Again, it will be like..." These are two more kingdom parables that describe how different people who profess allegiance to the King will respond during the kingdom age. At this point it is important to be reminded of our definition of the kingdom of heaven. **The kingdom of heaven is the sphere of Christian profession where the sovereignty and authority of Christ is acknowledged by people during this church age.**

### 3.) Interpretation #1- "Diligence is rewarded; Negligence is punished"

- a.) We are told in vs. 15 that each servant was given something from the master according to his own ability. In the same way God has given every believer different spiritual gifts (1Corinthians 12:4-7) (1 Peter 4:10).
- b.) This interpretation would stress that we should try to determine what spiritual gift we have received so that we can use it in the most effective way possible.
- c.) We can also use the natural abilities that we have like musical and artistic abilities for God as well as our financial resources.

This parable has been used by some preachers to motivate people to use the spiritual gifts that they have received from God when they became a Christian. There is a major problem with this interpretation though. If this is what Jesus was telling his disciples, then Christians would receive eternal rewards for using these gifts and go to hell for not using them. The

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bible is clear that we can only become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ and not as a result of our works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Once we become God's children we are sealed with His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) and God will not lose anybody that comes to Him (John 6:39).

#### 4.) **Interpretation #2-** "How true disciples respond to the Master"

- a.) These parables show the contrast between those who say that they are aware of the Lords return and those who are eagerly anticipating his return. The riches that were entrusted to each servant might be best understood as everything the Lord has entrusted us with including the gospel itself. Paul said that we have this treasure (the gospel) in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7)
- b.) The servant who buried the talent showed that he didn't have a personal relationship with the master because of the excuses he gave. The insults about the master's character (vs.24, being a hard man, and reaping where he didn't sow) indicate that he did not know the master or anything about the forgiveness that the master was capable of offering. He did not know the master and hadn't placed his faith in him.
- c.) The Master knows each of his servant's abilities and entrusts each one with his resources in direct proportion to their abilities. God doesn't overburden us with responsibilities that we are not equipped to handle. He simply requires obedience in the tasks that we have been given because he has also given us the desire to do them (Philippians 2:13) as well as the ability.

#### 5.) **Application-**

- a.) Matthew 6:19-21 People who know the Master will have a different perspective regarding the possessions they have been entrusted with and will use them to lay up treasures in heaven.
- b.) Luke 16:10 The more faithful we are in the riches of heaven, the more God will entrust us with.

[1] The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol.2, pg. 80