

The Parables of Jesus #38
The Parable of the Talents
(Mt 25:14-30)
Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Tonight, I have quite a surprise for you

1. I want to announce to you that Jesus, though he has been away for quite some time, will return tomorrow
2. I want you to take a piece of paper and quickly list all the things you have done for him -- ways you have served him
3. We will collect these, have them sorted alphebetically and ready to turn in immediately upon his arrival
4. Of course, much will depend on what you are able to list on your paper

B. Well, we all know that's a made up kind of thing -- right?

1. You don't really need to make a list
2. Jesus isn't really coming tomorrow
3. Or???

C. I suppose the real question relates to how prepared you are

1. Being prepared has to do with what kind of servant you've been
2. Do you think the Lord is pleased with the service you've given?

D. That's the concern of the Parable of the Talents that we'll study tonight

1. Mt 25:14-30
2. Are you at all concerned about the Master's return?

I. BACKGROUND TO THE PARABLE

A. The parable of the talents is told in the context of several warnings to the Jewish people

1. The warnings have to do with the judgment of God against Israel
2. These are very serious words

B. Note the following:

1. Mt 24:1 f -- Warning: the temple to be destroyed
2. Mt 24:4 f -- Warning: deceivers and false prophets will abound
3. Mt 24:15 f -- Warning: destruction, tribulation, death is coming
4. Mt 24:34 f -- Warning: it will happen to “this generation”
5. Mt 24:44 f -- Warning: be ready!
6. Mt 25:1-13 -- Warning: be ready! in story form

C. Reading the text you cannot ignore the insistent warnings to be ready

1. Ready for the judgment of God
2. Ready to respond
3. Ready to answer
4. Ready to receive God’s judgment

II. THE PARABLE

A. It is a story about the kingdom of heaven

1. We know that because of Mt 25:14 -- The kingdom of heaven is like...
2. The kingdom is not like “a man”
3. The kingdom is like “a man....” -- it’s the whole story that’s important

B. First, the man takes a trip

1. He plans to go away to a far country
 - a. evidently a long trip that involves being away for quite a while
 - b. therefore he must turn over his business/household to his servants

2. He calls the servants in and puts his goods (possessions, wealth, property) into their care
 - a. he gave them different amounts, according to their ability (ability = DUNAMIS; power)
 - b. 5 talents, 2 talents, and 1 talent (a talent of gold = 200lbs; 5T= @5 million \$; 2T=@2 million \$; 1T= @1 million \$)
 - b. he did not expect more than was reasonable

C. While the man was away, the servants responded to his charge

1. The one given 5 talents, doubled the money to 10
2. The one given 2 talents, doubled the money to 4
3. The one given 1 talent, dug a hole and buried it

D. Some time later, the man returned to settle accounts with his servants

1. The 5 talent servant came and reported what he had done
 - a. the man was obviously pleased -- “well done”
 - b. he identified him as a “good and faithful servant”
 - c. he rewarded his faithfulness over a few things by promising to give him even more things to rule over (a promotion?)
 - d. he invited him to enter into a celebration with him (ie. the joy of your Lord)
2. The 2 talent servant came and reported what he had done
 - a. the conversation with servant is exactly the same as with the 5 talent servant
 - b. it demonstrates the fact that the man was pleased because both servants had been faithful according to their abilities, not in any sense of competition with one another
 - c. this man, too, was rewarded and invited to celebrate
3. The 1 talent servant came and reported what he had done
 - a. instead of a positive report (or a negative one for that matter) this man came immediately making excuses
 - 1) you’re a hard man -- reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed
 - 2) I was afraid so I hid the talent in the ground -- but I still have it and can return exactly what you gave me
 - b. but the man knew something the servant couldn’t admit -- truth
 - 1) he was wicked and lazy
 - 2) he had power to be successful within his own ability (and that’s all the man expected)
 - 3) instead he had failed completely

4. The man expected at least a minimum effort
 - a. invest it and let it draw interest
 - b. the problem was not the degree of success, but the fact that this servant had not served according to his ability

E. So, the man does something very logical

1. Take the 1 talent and give it to the 10 talent servant
 - a. he begins immediately to fulfill his promise to the 10 talent slave
 - b. that man deserved to be trusted with more
2. Jesus stated a spiritual principle that the kingdom operates by
 - a. Matt 25:29 -- 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. (NKJ)
 - b. if you won't use what you have, it will go to somebody else

F. Then there is quite a leap at the very end of the story

1. It's as if Jesus took a shortcut to the punchline -- 25:30 doesn't flow with the rest of the story (it's evidently an application)
2. Matt 25:30 -- And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (NKJ)

III. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. The first lesson comes in the form of a question -- would you be ready for your Master's return?

1. The Lord has entrusted us with various responsibilities
2. There is something very clear from this story
 - a. he only gave you what you could handle
 - b. but he does expect you to handle it
3. You are in competition with no other servant
 - a. when the Lord returns what will you have to show for your efforts?
 - b. or will he decide you've been a wicked, lazy slave?

B. Another lesson is the fact that the Lord will return

1. A frequent topic of the parables is judgment and this one is told in the context of severe warnings to the Jews
2. Complacency regarding the Lord's return is a sure way to fail

C. The story underscores the many admonitions to faithfulness and warnings against unfaithfulness

1. Matt 7:24-27 -- Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (NKJ)
2. Luke 21:34-36 -- But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. (NKJ)

D. It gives us an idea about the kind of servant that fails the Lord

1. In Jesus' words, the servant was both wicked and lazy
 - a. wicked -- bad at the core; corrupted in the center of one's being
 - b. lazy -- sluggish or slothful; one who doesn't move
2. We might also note some other things common to such people
 - a. they do not seem to be aware of their abilities (the man saw the slave as at least capable of handling 1 talent, but the slave didn't believe it about himself)
 - b. they have no vision, no dream, no goal
 - c. they have no sense of responsibility to produce
 - d. they dread being called upon to serve, expecting failure
 - e. they operate out of false security, thinking the Master will excuse them and understand their failure
 - f. they expect others to serve, work, put forth the effort, but they they do not expect it of themselves

E. One important lesson we must not forget is that the 1 talent servant was condemned

1. He lost that which had been entrusted to him
2. He was cast out (sure sounds a lot like hell)
3. There was no reward, no celebration in which to partake
4. Can it be any clearer that God is displeased with such people?

CONCLUSION

A. OK, time to collect your papers!

1. You ready for the Lord to return?
2. Are you faithfully serving him?
3. Are you using the abilities he blessed you with?
4. Do you look forward with positive anticipation his return and the settling of accounts with you?

B. If any of those are answered negatively, it's time to get busy

1. If you're a 1 talent servant, there's no shame in that -- just be faithful with the 1 talent
2. If you have greater abilities, go to it -- rejoice in all the ways God is using you to serve Him

C. Invitation