

(6) Matthew 25.14-30

The word 'servant' (v.14) links this parable with that of the 'wise' and 'evil' servants (24.45-51). The *latter* examines the faithfulness of Israel's **leadership** during the tribulation (24.45), whilst the *former* is concerned with the responsibility of *every* **disciple** within the nation (v.14). In both parables, **faithfulness** of **stewardship** is key. The servants were given 'talents' with which to *trade* in their master's absence. Upon his return, the lord judged the work of his servants as an evidence of their relationship (loyalty) to him. The application to our day is apparent. We all have the responsibility and opportunity to trade for the Master, seeking the enrichment of His honour and glory. Faithfulness in a *little* matter will prove fitness to be entrusted with *greater* matters in a coming day (v.23).

The *Parable of the Pounds* (Luke 19.11-27) appears to be similar and was given less than seven days earlier. It emphasises **common responsibility** to serve the nobleman in his absence (**all** received a pound). This parable corrected the misguided notion that the kingdom of God would soon appear. Instead, there would be a period of faithful service required in the Lord's absence. Likewise, the *Talents* emphasises labour in view of the Lord's absence, but on this occasion some servants are given **increased opportunity** according to their *ability* (capacity). Each faithful servant is given the same reward. The *Labourers in the Vineyard* (20.1-16) shows **divine equity** in the matter of reward. It will be righteous (just), gracious, and generous despite the length of service, or period of the age *in* which one labours.

The Distribution of the Master [vv.14-15]

v.14: The parable begins abruptly, literally 'for as', suggesting it shares the same introduction as the preceding parable (v.1). Thus, at this time (the end of the tribulation), the 'kingdom of heaven' could be *illustrated* by or *compared* to, the returning lord and the judgment of his servants. The 'man' is clearly one of some substance, having 'servants' and 'goods' which amounted to huge sums of money. He took His journey into a 'far country' (lit. 'away from people') – a picture of heaven, to which the Lord Jesus has gone having been rejected on earth. His 'own servants' (at least in name) represent Jewish disciples – those who profess allegiance to the Messiah and await His coming. Israel is commonly designated as 'my servant' in the OT, and responsible to represent the interests of Christ on earth during the tribulation (cf. Isaiah 44.1-2, 21). 'Servants' (*doulos*) could be common labourers or even teachers and highly skilled business experts. As such 'he delivered (entrusted) unto them his goods'. Their responsibility was to administer (and promote) his business (work) and interests in his absence. **v.15:** To each servant he gave varying amounts of 'talents'. A talent was a measure of weight, the value of which depended on the type of metal. It is possible these were talents of *silver* (v.18). The talent was the amount of weight a soldier could carry on his back, typically 75-100lbs (35-45kg). In today's money, a talent of silver would be worth in the region of £20-30k (if gold, then £1.5-2m). According to WE Vine, "In NT times the talent was not a weight of silver, but the Roman-Attic talent, comprising 6,000 denarii or drachmas." If so, a single talent was the equivalent of 15-16 years' worth of wages for a common labourer or foot soldier (cf. Matthew 20.2). The lord delivered varying amounts of talents to each of his servants according to their own 'ability' (capacity for business). The suggestion is that spiritual gift is in *proportion* to natural ability, though distinct from it. *MacArthur: "The owner knew his slaves intimately, and he entrusted each one only with the responsibility he reasonably could be expected to handle."*

The talents represent **truth** (light) entrusted to the professing disciples of Christ, in the form of the word of God and mysteries of the kingdom (cf. 13.12). The varying number of talents represents the capacity to apprehend and convey such truth. The application could widen to include *all* that God has given us to use for His glory – natural or spiritual.

The Diligence (and Indifference) of the Servants [vv.16-18]

v.16: The word 'straightway' (v.15) relates, not to the lord's departure, but the diligence of the servant. Immediately, conscious of his responsibility, the 'five talent' servant went to work 'trading' (to *work* or *labour*) with his master's resources. Anything profitable in Christian service will require hard work and perspiration. In due course he earned five *further* talents. When truth is used, it will increase and multiply (Acts 19.20). Through the servant's use of the truth, others can be helped to possess and enjoy it themselves. **v.17:** 'Likewise' suggests the second servant was just as diligent as the first. No doubt both servants were conscious of their responsibility in light of their master's return. **v.18:** But the 'one talent' servant was different. He 'dugged in the earth' (to hollow out) and 'hid' his lord's money (silver). Hiding valuables in the ground was a common practice in the ancient world where there were no safety deposit boxes (cf. 13.44)! This servant appears to have no interest in the growth and honour of the lord's work, or simply does not believe his master will ever return and hold him to account. Ironically, digging is hard work! Hence, this servant *worked* to keep from *work*. Sometimes the saints can go to great lengths to avoid their duty as the people of God. Perhaps he was ashamed to be associated with the work of his lord. This servant represents one who is privy to truth but unwilling

to *believe* or *retain* it in his mind, *use* it in his life or *share* it with others. It was buried beneath the cares, activities, and business of life. His interests were buried in the earth.

The Discernment of the Returning Lord [vv.19-23]

v.19: The lord returned after a 'long time' (cp. 24.48; 25.5) – a period of testing, for the flesh is not patient and easily restless (cf. Exodus 32.1). The Lord is hinting to His disciples that His return will not be as soon as they believe it to be – there is the interregnum of the church age (cf. Luke 19.11)! On his return, the lord *settled accounts* ('reckoned') with his servants, a commercial phrase meaning to balance the books. The lord determined the extent to which each had fulfilled their duty and the remuneration due. **v.20:** The verbs translated 'came' and 'brought' (to present a sacrifice) use the prefix *pros* in Greek, suggesting *movement towards*. This implies the servant's presentation was oriented towards pleasing his master. Though he has gained 'five talents more' there is no hint of pride or self-congratulation. He has only done what he should have done (Luke 17.10). **v.21:** The servant receives the commendation of his lord, 'well done'. This translates a two-letter Greek word (*eu*) which means 'to do well' – it is a mark of approval. He has proved to be a 'good' (*agathos*, upright, of good character and disposition) and 'faithful' (steadfast in affection and allegiance) servant. Good character is essential to good performance in one's service for Christ. Note. Where it was a question of the household, *wisdom* was needed (cf. 24.45-47). In trading with truth outside the house, *goodness* was a necessity, i.e. blameless character. The servant had proved himself in a 'few things' – what the master regarded as comparatively small responsibility. Thus, he would be made ruler over 'many things', a reference to even greater future responsibility (in terms of position in the millennial kingdom, cf. Luke 19.12-19). The 'joy of thy lord' may refer to participation in the celebration feast for the master's return (as 25.10) or sharing in his *personal joy* of a job well done (cf. Psalm 45.7; Hebrews 1.9). **v.22:** The *two-talent* servant uses the same language as the first and receives the *same* commendation (**v.23**). The lord's principle of judgment is not *how much* the servant has accrued, but *how faithful* he has been in his work. Each servant had been equally diligent. Criticism is reserved for those who expend no effort in their labour for the lord. If God's people would simply do what they *could*, the work of the assembly would greatly prosper (Mark 14.8).

The Discipline of the Slothful Servant [vv.24-30]

v.24: The one-talent servant proves he has no *proper* or *intimate* knowledge of his master by maligning his character, "Sir, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed" (NET). The word 'hard' means *harsh* or *severe*. He explains his judgement with two agricultural metaphors – did not his master take the harvest from the fields of others for himself and gather seed that he himself had not 'scattered' (or winnowed)? He suggests his master is greedy, selfish and dishonest. **v.25:** Consequently, the servant returned the single talent, being 'afraid' of failure and losing his master's investment. Yet his actions betrayed his heart. He clearly had no affection for his lord and so no interest in honouring his master by labouring for him. **v.26:** His character is revealed as being 'wicked' (evil) and 'slothful' (slow, tardy and lazy). **v.27:** If this was the servant's perception of his master, then he should have been all the keener to produce a return on his master's endowment. At the very least, he had a moral obligation to deposit his master's money with the 'exchangers' (those that sit at 'tables'). As well as exchanging currencies (for a fee), they also dealt with loans and deposits. Even the ancient Roman Empire had a banking system that offered a return of 6% interest on deposits. These men knew the value of talents and were able to trade with the capital to expand its potential return. Thus, there are those who should seek to build and expand upon truth they have received by seeking help from others. We should all seek out opportunity to listen to those who teach the word of God. It will, in turn, expand our own understanding and ability to communicate truth.

v.28: The 'wicked' servant has proved to be a failure. His talent is removed and given to the servant which had ten – it would be safe in his hands! It seems this first servant had retained *all ten* talents (original deposit *plus* profit). **v.29:** The Lord describes the principle he has illustrated in the parable. The first servant was given *five* talents and traded to earn *five* more. He had accomplished much for his master, and thus was given *another* talent (abundance)! But the wicked servant had accomplished nothing ('hath not'), thus his talent was *removed*. This is the 'use it or lose it' principle. In terms of **service**, those who *use* opportunities to honour their Lord will be afforded *more* (especially in the kingdom). Those who fail to use their privilege will lose it for eternity – and even entrance to the kingdom itself. In terms of **truth** (cf. 13.12), those who *use* it (seek to understand, appropriate and practice) will be afforded yet further revelation (Mark 4.24-25; Luke 8.18). But those who *refuse* truth, what little light they had will be removed (cf. 13.13-15).

v.30: Finally, the 'evil' servant is characterised as 'unprofitable' (injurious). Failing to use what God has entrusted to us is grievous sin (even harmful). Consequently, the servant was 'cast' into 'outer darkness' where there is 'weeping' and 'gnashing of teeth'. These phrases graphically describe the final condition of unbelievers (cf. 13.42, 50). The *first* is descriptive of a place where the presence (light) of God is absent. The *latter* describes the inconsolable *grief* (sorrow) and *anguish* (pain) of those assigned to a place of eternal judgment. For this 'evil' servant there will be no access to the joy of the messianic banquet (v.23).