

The Talents

Stewardship and Responsibility · Parables of Jesus

This parable, delivered during Christ's final week before crucifixion as part of His Olivet Discourse concerning His return and the kingdom's consummation, addresses accountability for spiritual gifts and opportunities entrusted to believers during His absence. A man traveling into a far country called his servants and delivered unto them his goods: to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one—'to every man according to his several ability' (Matthew 25:15). The distribution was sovereign yet proportionate, recognizing differing capacities while expecting faithful stewardship from all.

Note: A talent (Greek talanton) represented approximately 6,000 denarii—roughly twenty years' wages for a common laborer, making even one talent a substantial sum. The amounts entrusted were not trivial but represented significant responsibility. The parable's structure parallels Christ's ascension (the journey to a far country), the church age (the time of stewardship), and His return (the reckoning). Similar themes appear in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), though with important distinctions.

The servant receiving five talents 'went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents'—doubling his master's investment through diligent labor. Likewise, the servant with two talents gained two more. But the servant receiving one talent 'went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money,' taking no risk, making no effort, producing no return. After a long time—emphasizing the extended period between Christ's ascension and return—the lord of those servants returned and reckoned with them.

The five-talent servant reported his gain. The lord's commendation was identical for both faithful servants, regardless of the differing amounts: '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' (Matthew 25:21, 23). Reward was proportionate not to the quantity entrusted but to faithfulness in stewardship. The servant's entrance into his lord's joy signifies participation in messianic kingdom blessings and eternal fellowship.

The one-talent servant approached with accusation rather than confession: 'Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent' (Matthew 25:24-25). His words reveal a wicked heart: he attributed harshness to his master, blamed fear rather than accepting responsibility, and presented inaction as if it were prudent caution. The lord condemned him out of his own mouth: 'Thou wicked and slothful servant'—wicked because he maligned his master's character, slothful because he failed to exercise even minimal diligence. 'Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury' (Matthew 25:27). Even the least effort would have been acceptable; complete neglect was inexcusable. The talent was taken from him and given to the ten-talent servant, and the unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth—language indicating eternal judgment for false professors who received opportunity but produced no fruit.

Key Verses

Matthew 25:14-15

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling 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.

Matthew 25:20-21

And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, 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.

Matthew 25:24-25

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

Matthew 25:26-28

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

Matthew 25:29

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

1 Corinthians 4:2

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.