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B0635 – September 3, 2006 – Matt 25:14-30 – The Parable Of The Talents

Matthew 25:14 For just as a man leaving on a journey called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

Matthew 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability, and he left on a journey.

Matthew 25:16 Immediately, the one having received five talents went and invested them and gained another five.

Matthew 25:17 In the same way, the one of two gained another two.

Matthew 25:18 But the one having received one went away dug a hole in the ground and covered his master's money.

Matthew 25:19 Now, after much time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

Matthew 25:20 And the one having received five talents came and presented another five talents, saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I gained another five talents."

Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:22 And the one of two talents came and said, "Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I gained another two talents."

Matthew 25:23 His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:24 And the one who received (PerfectAPart) one talent came and said, "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,

Matthew 25:25 and being afraid I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! You have yours.

Matthew 25:26 But his master replied and said to him, "Evil and lazy slave, you perceived (PluperfectAI) that I reap where I did not sow and I gather where I did not scatter;

Matthew 25:27 Thus, you ought to have (ImpAI) put my money in the banks, and when I came I would have received mine with interest.

Matthew 25:28 Therefore, take away the talent from him and give (2PAAImp) it to the one having the ten talents

Matthew 25:29 For to the one having, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but the one not having, even what he has will be taken away from him.

Matthew 25:30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness. There (in the outer darkness) will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There are three slaves and one master. The master gave the first slave 5 talents, the second slave 2 talents and the third slave 1 talent. The first two slaves doubled what they were given. The one who was given 5 finished with 10 and the one who was given 2 finished with 4. The third slave was given 1 and finished with 1. Now, the traditional interpretation, from the Calvinist point of view is that the first two slaves are genuine believers who will be rewarded and the last slave was merely a professing believer. They say that if he was really a believer he would have done something with the talent that was given to him. So, what we have is a comparison between two fruitful believers and an unbeliever. From the Arminian point of view the first two slaves are genuine believers who will be rewarded and the last slave was a genuine believer but lost his salvation. Ok. Now, both of these interpretations miss some of the most fundamental points of the parable.

1. The first thing that is missed is the context of Jesus' discourse. In Matt 24:37-43 Jesus warns about the suddenness of His second coming. Of course we are in a Tribulation context. Verse 39 is a key because it says that "they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away". Took all of who away? The Flood took all unbelievers away. So, in verse 40 "Then (in the Tribulation) there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left", obviously the one taken is like the one who was taken away by the Flood, he will be taken away during the Tribulation judgments, he's an unbeliever. And the one left is obviously the one left on the earth like Noah and his family, he'll be left on the earth after the Tribulation judgments, he's a genuine believer. Whether the believer was ready for Christ's coming or not is not dealt with here, simply the fact that he will be left on the earth when Christ returns. He may have been ready or may not have been, that remains to be seen and that's what the following parables deal with. So, when Jesus says in verse 44 "For this reason you also must be ready" He's talking about

those who have been left on earth, they genuinely believed during the Tribulation. Some genuine believers will be ready and some won't. So, from here all the way to the judgment of the Sheep/Goats in Matt 25:31-46 Jesus is dealing with genuine believers who are either ready or not ready, faithful or not faithful. But what is clear is that they are all genuine believers. And that is indicated by the words in verse 44 "For this reason you also..."

2. The second thing that is missed is the fact that in our parable of the talents all three of these individuals are slaves of the master. Verse 14 says they are "his own slaves" and this is no different than Jesus saying "my own sheep" hear My voice (John 10:27). Clearly they are all his slaves because they are all genuine believers.
3. The third thing that is missed is the fact that the master entrusted his possessions to all three slaves each according to his ability (25:14-15). Which of Christ's possessions does He entrust to unbelievers. None, He only entrusts His possessions to those who are genuine believers (e.g. Eph 4:7ff).
4. The fourth thing that is missed is the fact that what is being contrasted is faithfulness with unfaithfulness and not whether one was really a genuine believer or not.

Finally, we should say that what leads many interpreters to conclude that the third slave is not really a slave is a theology of perseverance, that a genuine believer will inevitably be faithful to the end. If he's not then he obviously wasn't a believer to begin with (Calvinism) or he lost his salvation (Arminianism). Either way, both these theologies claim that saving faith perseveres to the end of one's life. The Calvinist argues that such perseverance depends upon God, the Arminian argues that such perseverance depends upon man. Obviously, since the third slave was not faithful to the end then both of these theologies claim that, in the end he was not a genuine believer and will go to hell. The problem with this is the fact that the NT commands us to persevere. If it is inevitable that all believers will persevere to the end then commands to persevere to the end are superfluous! (e.g. Luke 8:15; Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18; 1 Tim 4:16; 1 Tim 6:11; Tit 2:2; Jam 1:12; 2 Pt 1:5-6). In other words, if a genuine believer's perseverance is a foregone conclusion then why command him to persevere? Further, Calvinists and Arminian's point out the master's harsh treatment of the third slave described in verse 30 (outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth). This supposedly seals the case. I will deal with this harsh description in a moment; suffice it to say now that these phrases are vivid pictures of common forms of emotion expressed by Semitic peoples. For Westerners the descriptions of weeping and gnashing of teeth stretch far beyond the normal emotions that come with loss, but for Semitic peoples this is the norm.

So, I'm going to argue, because of the context beginning in 24:44, the fact that they are all slaves of the master, and the fact that the master gave them his possessions that the parable of the talents deals exclusively with three genuine believers. Each parable beginning with the faithful vs unfaithful steward, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and the parable of the talents contrasts believers who are faithful with believers who are unfaithful and what the results will be at Christ's Second Coming. Obviously these parables deal with Tribulation saints but the same truths are applicable to the Church saints. So, all these individuals in the parables will enter the kingdom but not all will inherit the kingdom. Only those who are faithful will both enter and inherit.

Starting in verse 14. **For just as a man leaving on a journey called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.** The word **For** indicates that he is going to continue along the lines of the prior parable of the ten virgins, five foolish and five wise. This parable concluded with the words in verse 13 "Be on the alert then for you do not know the day nor hour", which refers to the Second Coming. In that parable you had ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom. All ten had lamps, all ten had oil, all ten were virgins, and all ten were expecting his arrival. However, not all were ready for his arrival! Only five had brought additional oil just in case the bridegroom delayed his coming. When he did delay five of them ran out of oil just before his arrival. So, they tried to bum some off the other five. But the five who were ready told them to go buy some from the dealers. Obviously you can't buy salvation. This has nothing to do with salvation. This has to do with being ready with good deeds. So, these five are saved, but they are not ready. They have not prepared beforehand for his arrival and now there are consequences. So, they left to buy oil and while they were gone the bridegroom came and the five who were ready went in to the wedding feast (i.e. marriage supper) but the other five missed it. When they came back after getting their oil and tried to enter the marriage supper, the Lord said, "I don't know you." This word "know" means "honor". It does not mean they were unbelievers but that they were believers who were not ready and therefore not honored guests. It is a false presupposition to say that all genuine believers will enter the wedding feast of the Lamb. Only the honored guests will enter; that is, the faithful servants of the Lamb who prepared beforehand by living as faithful servants, persevering to the end (Rev 13:10). Now, this brings us to our parable and the context is, again, the wedding feast or marriage supper and how only faithful slaves will enter the marriage supper in the kingdom. So, the **For** in verse 14 harkens us back to understand that our passage wants to give another example of faithful versus unfaithful believers and how faithful believers will enter the marriage supper of the Lamb and unfaithful believer's will not.

Matthew 25:14 For just as a man leaving on a journey called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. The important thing in verse 14 is that the master called **his own slaves** to him and **entrusted his possessions to them**. If language means anything at all then undoubtedly these refer to genuine believers who Christ gave possessions. That is, when a person has faith alone in Christ alone He gives them certain gifts and spiritual capacity to use faithfully in the Christian life. Paul called himself a "slave" in several passages (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Tit 1:1). James called himself a "slave" of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Js 1:1). Jude called himself a "slave" of Jesus Christ (Jude 1:1). Moses was called a "slave" of God (Rev 15:3). We are supposed to be slaves of righteousness and not slaves of sin (Rom 6:16-23). That's what this parable is all about, faithful servant-hood to the Master vs unfaithful service to the Master.

Matthew 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability, and he left on a journey. Okay, so the Lord is making a monetary comparison with the use of spiritual possessions. He gave one 5, one 2 and one 1. Notice, he gave to **each according to his own ability**. So, in other words, the master did not give the slaves more money than they had the ability to handle. Nor did he give them less than they could handle. He gave each one the amount of money he could handle. Now, this is the way the Lord Jesus Christ dispenses spiritual gifts to the Church. He gives to each a measure (Eph 4:7). He determines the measure of the gift(s) He gives each one of us and there's nothing you or I or anyone can do about the amount we receive. We just have to trust that He gives according to your own ability so that there's a nice fit between you and the amount of your gift(s). Now, it's obvious that some have a greater amount of gift than others. We think of big names like Billy Graham, John Calvin, Paul the apostle, John Walvoord, etc... We think, oh, these people have been given five or ten or twenty and it's so obvious that the Lord has gifted them. Then there are people who have 2 and it's less obvious and then we have those who are given 1. Now, the point of the parable is that 1 is the bottom of the barrel. There are many believers who have received only a very small portion and they might not be that apparent, that visible in the Church. They often think they're nobodies and that they can't do anything but this parable is meant to demonstrate that it's not the amount that is given to you originally by Christ that determines your reward. It's your faithfulness with what's given to you and I'll demonstrate that.

Matthew 25:16 Immediately, the one having received five talents went and invested them and gained another five. Okay, so he doubled his money.

Matthew 25:17 In the same way, the one of two gained another two. Okay, so he did the same thing. He also doubled his money.

Matthew 25:18 But the one having received one went away dug a hole in the ground and covered his master's money. Okay. He did nothing with it.

Matthew 25:19 Now, after much time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Okay, now it's time to see what you did with what I entrusted to you. Now, this day is coming for each believer. For these Tribulation saints their judgment will happen at the Second Coming. For those of the Church age it will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is not a judgment to see if you're in the family, you wouldn't be there if it was. Rather, this is a judgment where you're sitting down with the family. I mean, it's in the context of family. You know, when you are born into this world you are born into a family and nothing can change that you are a part of that family, it's biological. Now, when you were a little boy or girl did you ever get in trouble? Sure and so what happened? Did you sit down and discuss with Mom and Dad whether you were a part of the family or not, whether you were their son or daughter or not? No, that's a given. Rather, you discussed what you did and then Mom and Dad made a just judgment. Now, that's how the judgment seat of Christ works. There's going to be a complete review of everything you did as a child of God. Paul said, in Romans 14:10 "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." and Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment." Your whole Christian life will be reviewed. And here in our passage the master has returned and it's time to see what his servants did with the money he entrusted to them.

Matthew 25:20 And the one having received five talents came and presented another five talents, saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I gained another five talents."

Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:22 And the one of two talents came and said, "Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I gained another two talents."

Matthew 25:23 His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master."

Now, the important thing to notice is that both of these slaves doubled their money (5→10; 2→4). Both of these slaves received the exact same commendation from their master. Compare verse 21 with verse 23. **Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.**" Now, this indicates that even though one started with 5 and the other with 2 they get the same level of reward. And that only makes sense with a just master. Okay, so the issue is not what they started with but how faithful they were with what they were given. Since both were equally faithful then they receive equal commendation and equal reward. What is the reward for faithfulness over a few things? *First*, they will be **put in charge over many things**. That is, in the kingdom they will co-reign with the Messiah. He will **put them in charge over many things**. Entering the kingdom is conditioned on faith alone in Christ alone. Rulership in the kingdom is conditioned on faithful obedience with what God has given us. This also shows us that we should never measure the amount of spiritual gift we have been given with other people and say, "well, I just can't do what they can do. They're so spiritual and effective in their ministry, etc..." That's not the proper attitude because reward is not based on how big your ministry is or any of that. It's based on what you did with what you were given. In this case both guys doubled so both guys have the same level of reward. But that's not all they receive as reward. *Second*, they also receive entrance into **the joy of their master**. Contextually, this is entrance into the marriage supper and seating at the banquet table with the Lamb of God (cf 35:10, 14). At the marriage supper of the Lamb there will be happiness and laughter. Okay, this is very important to understand now because when we get to the third slave we're going to see a sharp contrast. In a minute we're going to compare what the master said to the first two slaves in verses 21 & 23 with what he says to the third slave in verse 26 and we're going to see that they are opposites at every point. So, this verse is all about their reward from the master for faithfulness with what he gave them. They will reign with the Messiah and they will enter the Messiah's supper and have a seat reserved at the banquet table. Now the third slave, who most think is an unbeliever but who is actually an unfaithful believer. He didn't do jack with what his master gave him.

**Matthew 25:24 And the one who received (PerfectAPart) one talent came and said, "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,
Matthew 25:25 and being afraid I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! You have yours.**

Matthew 25:26 But his master replied and said to him, "Evil and lazy slave, you perceived (PluperfectAI) that I reap where I did not sow and I gather where I did not scatter.

Matthew 25:27 Thus, you ought to have (ImpAI) put my money in the banks, and when I came I would have received mine with interest.

Matthew 25:28 Therefore, take away the talent from him and give (2PAAImp) it to the one having the ten talents.

This is very easy; the third slave did nothing with what his master gave him. When his master returned he simply returned what he was originally given. Now, notice that this is the slave who received the least originally, he had only 1. I think that is significant. I think the Lord knew that believers who have very little spiritual gift often feel so inadequate they just don't do anything in the church. They feel someone else is better equipped and someone else could do a better job and I can't have any effect on the lives of others so they just don't do anything. They go and hide their spiritual gift because they feel so inadequate compared to a select group of other believers who are in the spotlight. And when the master returns they aren't going to have anything to give Him except what He originally gave them. Now, that may be you and I suggest that the reason the Lord chose the slave who had 1 talent to be the one who buried it and not the one who had five or ten is because it's the tendency of those who have a small amount of gift to do this. So, this is a warning against doing this. The Lord has clearly indicated that reward is not based on the amount of spiritual gift you receive but how faithful you are with what you received. It's obvious that if the slave who had been given 1 talent had doubled it he too would have heard the words **"Well done, good and faithful slave. You were (imperfect) faithful over a few things, I will put you in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master."** However, instead he hid it and heard the words **Evil and lazy slave** rather than good and faithful slave. Now, notice, the master still considers him his slave. The issue is not whether he's a genuine slave or not, the issue is what kind of a slave is he? The parallel Jesus is making in the parable is that it's not the issue of whether this slave represents a believer or unbeliever but what kind of believer is he? Is he a faithful believer or an unfaithful one? And the answer is obvious and so there is a stinging rebuke. **"you perceived (PluperfectAI) that I reap where I did not sow and I gather where I did not scatter; Matthew 25:27 Thus, you ought to have (ImpAI) put my money in the banks, and when I came I would have received mine with interest."** You knew you were supposed to be faithful with what I gave you and you weren't. If you had just put it in the bank you would have made some interest. Of course, the parallel is that the believer is supposed to be faithful with the gifts and calling God has given his life. If he is there will be some reward. If he's not there will be a stinging rebuke and loss

of reward which is described in **Matthew 25:28 Therefore, take away the talent from him and give (2PAAImp) it to the one having the ten talents.** This is loss. There will be loss at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:15). There will be shame at the judgment seat of Christ (1 John 2:28). This slave had the opportunity to co-reign with Christ, to be put in charge in the kingdom, but as it is he will not co-reign with Christ. He will enter the kingdom but he will not inherit the kingdom. **Matthew 25:29 For to the one having, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but the one not having, even what he has will be taken away from him.** Okay. Why is what he had taken away and given to another. Obviously this is loss of reward and we find that in the reward passage in 1 Cor 3 believers at the judgment seat of Christ will “suffer loss”. This believer is suffering loss. See, apparently, God gave each of us a capacity so that we would use it not so we would be lazy. If you don’t use it then the potential rule you would have had in the kingdom must be given to someone else. Some believer’s will go into the kingdom empty-handed. This is described by the words of Paul in 1 Cor 3:15, “If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” So, this is forfeiture of potential reward which will be given to some other believer who was faithful. The issue is not salvation or entrance into the kingdom but reward in the kingdom, co-rulership with Christ.

Lastly, the difficult words in **Matthew 25:30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness. There (in the outer darkness) will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Throw out the worthless slave.** You might note that he’s still considered a slave of the master, just a worthless one. There’s no loss of salvation in view here or lack of salvation. The only question is where is he being thrown? Since the context has to do with the wedding feast then he’s being thrown out of the wedding banquet, out of the marriage supper of the Lamb. He’s already in the kingdom, but in that kingdom there will be those who, by faithful service are rewarded with entrance into the wedding banquet and there will be those who are thrown out. A parallel to this is found in the parable of Matt 22:1-14. See, apparently, in order to get into the wedding banquet you have to have wedding clothes. Now, we find in Rev 19:8 that the wedding clothes are the righteous deeds of the saints. So, the wedding clothes are not the imputed righteousness of Christ. If they were then justification would be by deeds. But they are obviously clothes that were given as reward for good deeds so that in the kingdom they could enter the wedding banquet and the joy of their Master. So, in contrast to entering the joy of their master, the unfaithful slaves will be in the **outer darkness**. Now, this phrase is used three times in the Bible and all three times it refers to genuine believers being excluded from the wedding feast (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). In the ancient world if a slave was unfaithful to his master on the night of a banquet the master would throw the slave outside the house

into the darkness. So, while everyone else enjoyed the light of the banquet table the slave had to remain outside in darkness. That's what Jesus is talking about. He's not talking about loss of salvation but loss of joy experienced at the master's banquet table. **There**, that is, outside in the darkness, there **will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Now, this phrase is used seven times in the NT (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). Three times it refers to people in hell and the text is very explicit (Matt 13:42, 50; Lk. 13:28). This leads some people to conclude that this slave is an unbeliever and will be in hell. However, words are given meaning by their context and you should not commit the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer. That means you should never take the meaning of a word or phrase in one context and import it into another context. Words have meaning only in context. Four times this phrase refers to unfaithful believers in the kingdom (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). You say, I thought there wouldn't be any more crying or mourning or pain once we get resurrection bodies. The Bible never makes that promise. The Bible only promises that there will be no more tears in the New Heavens and New Earth *after* the kingdom (Rev 21:4). So, this is a description of the profound regret that genuine believers who were unfaithful with what was given them will experience *during* the kingdom. The Master, Jesus Christ will have shown them clearly the capacity He graciously gave them and because of their laziness they will experience the opposite of joy which is **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Now, this may sound a little harsh but for the ancient and modern Semitic peoples this is how they express their sadness and regret. I mean, even today, in the land of Israel, in Jerusalem there is a wall which many call "The Wailing Wall" and there is much wailing that takes place there. It should not surprise us that these descriptions are used of genuine believers when we realize that after all that Christ did for us and after all that Christ gave us in terms of spiritual gifts and capacity to change the world for Him, after all that we hide it away and say "Here Lord, take what is yours". Is God not just like the master in this parable? Will He not deal justly with His slaves? Surely He is just in every respect and that means justice will be met at the judgment seat of Christ.

Do you want to hear the words "Well done, good and faithful slave"? Do you want to be given co-rulership with Christ in His kingdom? Do you want to enter the wedding feast and see a chair reserved with your name on it at the banquet table? Or do you want to be outside and not enjoying a seat near the Master. The choice is yours to be faithful with the spiritual gifts and capacity God has given you. It doesn't matter how much God gave you but how faithful you are with what He gave you. Whatever you do, do not go and bury it, but share it and live it.

The first two slaves have boldness at the judgment seat of Christ.
The last slave has shame at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 Cor 3

The first two slaves are rewarded

The last slave suffers loss

The first two slaves enter the wedding feast where they experience the joy of their master
The last slave is cast outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth

The first two slaves are put in charge of much in the kingdom
The last slave's potential rule is given to a faithful slave

All slaves of the Master enter the kingdom but they do not all inherit the kingdom

All slaves enter the kingdom but they do not all enter the marriage supper of the Lamb

A similar story is told in Matthew 22:1-14.

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