

KINGDOM.

LESSON 43

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] EZEKIEL 2, 18, 33 and 34
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Ezekiel 2, 18, 33 and 34). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN ROMANS] (16) ROMANS 12:16
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Review two by two.

(16) Romans 12:16. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE TALENTS
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**“The parable of the talents” in Matthew 25:14-30 is a parable about
REWARDS IN GOD’S KINGDOM.**

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

A certain man who entrusted his property to his servants. He gave to each of three servants a different amount of talents. “A talent” is a measure of weight, but also a unit of money with different values in different periods of time. During the time of Jesus, *the Attic talent* amounted to no less than six thousand denarii, and one denarius was the accepted daily wage of a soldier or labourer. This meant that an ordinary worker would have to work about twenty years to earn one talent! This man was a very rich businessman and wanted his money to multiply in his absence.

The man gave to each servant according to his ability. This man was a wise person. Because he knew that his servants did not have the same business skills, he gave to one five, to another two and to a third one talent. Remember, one talent is not a small amount! It represented twenty years of wages!

The two servants put their money to work. The first and second servant put their money to work and doubled the amount of their money. The story does not have to tell how they did this. However, the implication is that they did this only by honest means!

The third servant hid his master's money. He neglected his assigned task! Because houses could easily be broken into, treasures were usually buried somewhere outside in the ground (Matthew 6:19; 13:44). This servant did not neglect his task because he felt inferior when he compared his amount with that of the other two. He neglected his task because of unjustified suspicion against his master and because he was lazy!

There is a time of settling of accounts. At his return, the master settled accounts with his servants.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Matthew 24:1 - 25:13.

In Matthew 24, Jesus taught about the sign of his second coming and the end of this age. No one knows about the hour and day when this would happen (Matthew 24:36). Therefore every Christian should keep watch, be well prepared and live soberly as if Christ could come any moment (Matthew 24:42,45-46). This is the setting for the three following parables: the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants, the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents.

Whenever Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is *like* ...” he wants to teach what happens during the reign of God now on earth and what will certainly happen when the reign of God in its final phase is unfolded at the second coming of Jesus Christ. On the final judgement day, events described in the parables will certainly have taken place. This means that people living today are also included in the events described in the parables! Each parable of Jesus Christ has a message for you and me *today!!!* What took place between this man and his servants in the parable of the talents illustrates what takes place between Jesus Christ and all people in history. Just as the master settled accounts with each servant at his return, so Jesus Christ will settle accounts with each person in history at his second coming.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 25:14-30.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is given in Matthew 25:28-30.

It concerns the kingdom of God here on earth and particularly what will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ.. At his second coming, Jesus Christ will settle accounts with all people.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The kingdom of God (Matthew 25:1,14). The kingdom of God is more than the visible Church, the Body of Christ or the world-wide community of professing Christians.

• **Definition of the kingdom of God.** The kingdom of God is more than the visible Church, the Body of Christ or the world-wide community of professing Christians.

Psalm 24:1. In general the kingdom of God is the kingship or sovereign rule or reign of God in heaven over all people and everything from eternity to eternity (Psalm 145:13; 146:10; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Timothy 6:16).

Matthew 28:18. In particular the kingdom of God is the sovereign rule or reign of God on earth through Jesus Christ (John 13:3; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16).

Revelation 1:5-6. The kingdom of God is *based* on the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ during his first coming (Matthew 21:39,42-43; 28:18; Acts 2:36) and the application of that work in believers through the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Luke 17:20-21. The kingdom of God is the sovereign rule or reign of Jesus Christ that is *recognised* in the hearts of believers and *operative* in their lives (Matthew 6:10,33; 25:34-40).

• **The kingdom of God results in four visible areas:**

- Mark 10:25-26. The kingship of God is manifested in the believer’s salvation from beginning to end: his election in eternity (Ephesians 1:4-5), his rebirth in time (John 3:3-8), the transformation of his life (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) and the resurrection of his body at Christ’s second coming (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). This God-given salvation includes all the spiritual and material blessings for the soul and the body, which result when God’s sovereign kingship is recognised and obeyed (Ephesians 1:3).

- Matthew 16:18-19. The kingship of God is manifested in the constitution of all believers as God’s one Church on earth (Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10). The Church is the community of people in whose hearts and lives God’s sovereign kingship is recognised and obeyed.

- Matthew 25:34-40. The kingship of God is manifested in the good works of believers in every aspect of human society (their influence in intellectual, physical, emotional, social and spiritual areas like justice, mercy and love (Romans 14:17)).

- 1 Corinthians 1:24-26. And finally, the kingship of God is manifested in God's redeemed universe, which will be the new heaven and the new earth with all its glory in the future, the final realisation of God's work of salvation in the people he called (Matthew 25:34; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15).

• **The kingdom of God has five characteristics:**

- Matthew 12:28. The kingdom of God was particularly established at the first coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:43).
- John 18:36. The kingdom of God is in the present world, but not of the present world (Luke 17:21).
- Matthew 13:11-17. The kingdom of God is a revelation for believers and a riddle for unbelievers at the same time.
- Matthew 13:24-26,36-43. The kingdom of God has a present form on this earth and a future form on the new earth.
- Matthew 13:31-33. The kingdom of God begins small, grows and will finally pervade all (Daniel 2:34-35,44-45).

The journey of the man. Because the explanation or application of this parable particularly deals with God's kingdom at the end time when Jesus Christ will settle accounts with all people, the journey of the man represents the period before the second coming of Jesus Christ. Until the second coming of Jesus Christ, people must work with whatever God has entrusted to them. The intention of Jesus was to refute his disciples' belief that he was going to Jerusalem to set up a prosperous Jewish state (Acts 1:6). This parable undercuts their hope of a present kingdom on earth like that of other kingdoms in the world (John 18:36) and encourages them to wait and to work patiently with a view to the future kingdom of the new heaven and the new earth. Jesus warns Christians not to be lazy or idle, but encourages them to be eager, because they know that their labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The owner and the stewards of his possessions. The talents belonged to the master, and the servants were only stewards entrusted with the use of these talents and required to multiply their value. This is a relevant detail. Only the master is the owner and all the servants are stewards, responsible and accountable to their master!

The man gave to each according to his ability. The talent cannot represent a natural ability or a spiritual gift, because the master gives to each servant talents "according to their natural or spiritual ability" (Matthew 25:15)! "A talent" must therefore represent an opportunity to do business (work, assigned task, ministry, service) for the Lord. But these different amounts of opportunities to do business (work, assigned task, ministry, service) are definitely coupled to the different natural skills and spiritual gifts, which of course are also given to each person. This is a relevant detail. God gives different opportunities to do business (work, assigned task, ministry, service) to each person. But not even one talent is a small amount! It represents the wages for twenty years of hard work! ! Even if you get just one chance (opportunity) within the kingdom of God, it is worth very very much! Do not let such a chance pass you by! Even what God has entrusted to the least among people is significant in God's eyes!

The two servants put their money to work. What is important is not the number of talents, but what the servants did with what they had received! This is a relevant detail. On the final judgement day, the number of opportunities entrusted to each person will not matter, but each one's faithfulness and diligence in using what had been entrusted to him will be important!

The third servant hid his master's money. He neglected to make use of the opportunities the master gave him to do his assigned task (work, ministry, service)! He committed the sin of omission or neglect, that is, of not doing what his master commanded. This is a relevant detail. Not only the sins of doing things that God has forbidden will be punished, but also the sins of not doing the things that God has commanded will be punished! (Matthew 25:41-45; James 4:17)

The settling of accounts. The master settling accounts with his servants is a theme that often recurs in the parables. It is found in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23), the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:34), the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:19) and the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:15). Therefore, it is always the duty of a servant to keep in mind the day of his master's return when there will be a reckoning! This is a relevant detail.

The same rewards for different trusts. This is a relevant detail. Because both the first and the second servant had been faithful with their talents, the master put them both in charge of many things. Both had doubled what had been entrusted to them. Therefore both received the same reward. They both received the approval of their master and were invited to enter the joy (perfect presence) of the Lord. This represents the joyous festival in heaven.

The punishment for negligence. This is a relevant detail. The wicked and lazy servant was severely punished. Being thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, represents the agonies of hell.

The principle about reward and punishment. An important principle in God's kingdom is, "Whoever has, will be given more and he will have an abundance. And whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matthew 25:29; Luke 8:18; 19:26). This is relevant.

- **In the first place, this principle promises that faithfulness and diligence will be rewarded.** It is only in the way of making use of and developing our God-given opportunities to do our assigned task (work, ministry, service) for God, God's kingdom and other people, that we become more rich (Luke 10:29-37; Galatians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). This is certainly true with respect to spiritual matters. Standing still in spiritual matters is impossible! A person advances or retreats; gains or loses; increases or declines! Every God-given blessing is again a guarantee of further blessings to come (John 1:16)! Whenever a person works with whatever has been entrusted to him, his opportunities never get lost, but instead multiply and grow stronger in influence.

According to Mark 4:24-25, whoever reads and studies the Word of God (the Bible), will receive more and more of its blessings! And according to Matthew 13:11-12 and Mark 4:13, whoever opens his heart and receives God's Word, will produce a crop - thirty, sixty and even hundred times more than he received.

According to Matthew 7:7-8, whoever prays, will receive answers to his prayers, and according to James 4:2-3, whoever does not pray also does not receive.

According to Proverbs 11:24 and Luke 6:46, whoever gives will receive more, but whoever withholds loses even what he has.

And according to Matthew 25:29, whoever makes use of his God-given opportunities will have abundant opportunities, but opportunities that are neglected are taken away.

- **In the second place, this principle warns that unfaithfulness and negligence will be punished.** Being a Christian means that you have been given opportunities, not for enhancing yourself, but for serving the Master and the Master's kingdom. A Christian is not an isolated member of the Body of Christ (the Church). A member that contributes to growth of the Body grows with the Body, but a member that contributes nothing dies!

Whenever a person neglects to work with what has been entrusted to him, his opportunities are taken away from him. "Because you have neglected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law, I also will ignore your children" (Hosea 4:6). "The Stone the builders rejected, has become the Capstone ... Therefore the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (Matthew 8:12; 21:42-43)!"

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (the central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 teaches about "rewards in God's kingdom".

The main message of the parable is the following. "People must be faithful in using their God-given opportunities (chances) according to their natural skills and spiritual gifts. God will reward faithfulness and diligence, but he will punish unfaithfulness and negligence!"

Faithfulness is one of the fundamental characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom are faithful and diligent with respect to the opportunities God has entrusted to them. Whoever fulfills his life-task and responsibilities, whether great or small, will experience that his opportunities are being multiplied and he will be rewarded with more opportunities and greater responsibilities. Whoever neglects his task and leaves his opportunities unused, will experience that his opportunities decrease and he will finally lose even whatever had been entrusted to him.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach compare to what the parable of the talents teaches?

(1) Stewardship of our possessions in the present time.

Read Genesis 39:2-6; Luke 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,7; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; 1 Peter 4:10.

1 Corinthians 4:7 says, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" The Bible teaches that everything we possess is owned by God and has been entrusted by God to us. We are only stewards of God's property. At the second coming of Christ, we will have to give an account of everything he has entrusted to our care.

(2) Stewardship is only possible before the second coming.

Read Matthew 24:9-14; 25:5,19; 28:118-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3; 2 Peter 3:4-9; Revelation 20:1-3,7-11.

How long a time would lapse before Jesus Christ returns at his second coming? Jesus Christ knew from the beginning that a relative long time would lapse before his second coming. Many historic events had to take place before the second coming of Christ. He still had to die and be resurrected from the dead; ascend into heaven and pour out the Holy Spirit. Then the gospel had to be proclaimed in all the creation and the Holy Spirit had to regenerate and transform uncountable people in all the nations before the second coming. Disciples of Jesus Christ had to be made in all the

nations. The bridegroom will take a long time in coming. “The long time” before the master returned is therefore a relevant detail in the Bible.

(3) Accountability of one’s stewardship at the final judgement.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 25:19,35-45; Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:13.

What will happen to each person at the final judgement? Each person will have to give an account of everything he has thought, said or done in his life! He even has to give an account of what he has neglected to think, say and do! The final judgement will be according to his works (Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10): what he did with what had been entrusted to him. God will judge his works in accordance with the knowledge he had of his will (Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10) and in accordance with how he made use of the opportunities God gave him (Matthew 25:14-30).

(4) God will reap where he has sown.

Read Exodus 5:7-9; 1 Kings 12:11; Matthew 25:15.

What the wicked and lazy servant said about God, namely, that God harvests where he has not sown is not true!

Two passages deal with the question of reaping where one has not sowed and both are historical references to wicked people. According to Exodus 5:7-9, Pharaoh tried to reap where he did not sow. Without giving the Israelites straw, he demanded that they make as many bricks as before. According to 1 Kings 12:11, king Rehoboam tried to reap where he did not sow. He said to the people of Judah, “My father scourged you with whips. I will scourge you with scorpions.”

However, God is not like the wicked Pharaoh or the wicked king Rehoboam. God does not harvest where he has not sown! But he will certainly harvest where he has sown! He will certainly hold us accountable for the things he has entrusted to us. According to Matthew 25:15, God, like the master in this parable, gives to each human being talents (opportunities) according to his natural and spiritual abilities! When he assigns tasks, he mercifully figures with each person’s personality and capacity (ability). However, he sows by distributing his talents! By distributing his talents, he sows (scatters)! Therefore it is just that he also reaps!

(5) Human excuses not to be a steward of talents.

Read Matthew 7:15-23; 22:5; 25:21,23,44-45; Luke 13:26-27; 14:18-20.

Which kind of excuses do wicked and lazy people make? People often make all kinds of excuses to God.

According to Matthew 25:24-25, the wicked servant did not neglect his task because he felt inferior, but because he was suspicious! He blamed his master of being harsh and unreasonable. Likewise, many people blame God for their own sins and neglect of their duties.

According to Luke 13:26-27, some people will falsely claim that they have been associated with Christ on earth, that they had eaten with him and had listened to his teaching. But Christ will say to them that he did not know them, that is, that he has no personal relationship or fellowship with them.

Matthew 7:15-20 speaks of the relationship of Christian disciples towards false Christian prophets and teachers in their midst. Eventually the evil influence of these false Christians will become very clear!

Matthew 7:21 speaks of the relationship of Christian disciples towards nominal Christians in their midst. While nominal Christians confess Christ with their lips, genuine Christians actually do the will of God.

Matthew 7:22-23 speaks about the relationship of Christian disciples towards false Christian miracle makers in their midst. Although they preach Christ and are able to perform miracles, they have not been called (and consequently justified, saved) by Christ. They probably perform their religion in association with demonic powers.

According to Matthew 25:44-45, some people will say that they had never seen Christ in need of their help when they were on earth. But Christ will say that whatever they had not done to other Christians, they had also not done to him.

According to Matthew 22:5, some people will say that they do not have time for the things of God, and that they are too busy with their business or work on earth.

And according to Luke 14:18-20, people will make all kinds of excuses not to respond to Christ’s call to salvation. One will say that he just bought a field and must go and see it. Another will say that he just bought five yoke of oxen and must go and try them out. Still another person will say that he just got married and therefore cannot come.

Thus, wicked and lazy people will make all kinds of excuses not to follow, worship or serve Christ.

(6) The rewards for faithful stewardship.

Read Matthew 25:21,23; 2 Timothy 4:8.

How will the faithful and diligent servants be rewarded? Their present responsibilities, executed faithfully and diligently on earth, will be far exceeded in importance by their future responsibilities in the new heaven and new earth. Besides that, they will share in God’s joy and the joy of other Christians in the life hereafter!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parable of the talents? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people must know what God is like.

God will graciously reward each Christian at the final judgement.

However, all these rewards are given, not because Christians deserve them or have earned them, but because everything is based on God's love and grace. According to Ephesians 2:10, even the works which Christians do, are based on God's grace!

(2) Christians must know what they should be like.

What is important is to serve God faithfully and diligently:

The genuine people of God's kingdom are faithful and diligent with respect to the abilities and the opportunities, which God has entrusted to them. God does not reward success or results as such, but faithfulness and diligence. See also supplement 15: "the parable of the ten minas".

(3) An important principle.

An important principle in God's kingdom is "Whoever has, will be given more and he will have an abundance. And whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matthew 25:29).

- By neglecting to put to use what God has entrusted to us, we will lose everything that was originally entrusted to us.
- But by putting to use what God has entrusted to us, we will grow in spiritual riches!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to *pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.

Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study "the talents" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Ezekiel 36, 37, 38 and 39** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. **(17) Romans 12:17.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **Romans 14:1-23.** Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.