

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the talents** in Matthew 25:14-30. This is a parable concerning REWARDS IN GOD'S KINGDOM.

Please read Matthew 25:14-30 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each.

(S) Matthew 25:14-30 says, "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master, he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see I have gained two more.' His master replied, ' Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable.

(S) 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 period's 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.

(T) The man gave to each 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!

(S) 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!

(T) 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 in the ground (Mt 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!

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

(T) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of this parable?

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 (Mt 24:36). Therefore every Christian should keep watch, be well-prepared and live soberly as if Christ could come any moment (Mt 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! In the parable of the talents, what took place between this man and his servants when at the end of his journey he settled accounts with them, illustrates what will take place at the final judgement at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

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

The explanation or application of the parable is given in the story itself. It concerns the kingdom of heaven and particularly what will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The explanation or application is especially contained in Matthew 25:28-30. At his second coming, Jesus Christ will settle accounts with all people.

(S) POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.

Let us take turns to describe the details in this parable which are really essential or relevant:

What is the kingdom of God (Mt 25:1,14)? It is that entire complex of people and spheres in which Christ's rule is recognised. As such it is more than the visible Church, the body of professing Christians. It is the kingship, rule and sovereignty of God recognised in the hearts and operative in the lives of people (Lk 17:21; Mt 6:10,33). When God's sovereign kingship is recognised and obeyed, it has four results:

One. The complete salvation of believers from beginning to end. This includes all spiritual and material blessings for soul and body (Mk 10:25-26; Jn 3:3-8).

Two. The establishment of God's Church, which is the community of people in whose hearts and lives God's sovereign kingship is recognised and obeyed (Mt 16:18-19).

Three. The influence of Christians in all walks of life, like education, hospitals and caring for the poor.

Four. 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 (Mt 25:34).

(T) 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. Jesus' intention was to refute his disciples' belief that God's kingdom in its final form was already established and that he was going to Jerusalem to set up a prosperous state. This parable undercuts their hope of a present and fully realised kingdom on earth (Jn 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 Cor 15:58).

(S) The man gave to each according to his ability. The master gave different amounts of talents to different servants. This is a relevant detail. God gives different natural abilities, different spiritual gifts and different opportunities to different people. But not even *one talent* is a small amount! It represents the wages for twenty years of hard work! Even what God has entrusted to the least among people is significant in God's eyes!

(T) 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 judgement day, the number of abilities and 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!

(S) The third servant hid his master's money. He neglected his assigned task! 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! (Mt 25:41-45; Jn 4:17)

(T) 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 (Mt 18:23), the parable of the wicked tenants (Mt 21:34), the parable of the talents (Mt 25: 19) and the parable of the ten minas (Lk 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.

(S) The same rewards for different trusts. This is a relevant detail. Because both servants had been faithful with a few things, the master put them in charge of many things. Both had *doubled* what had been entrusted to them. Therefore both received *the same reward*. Entering the joy or happiness of the Lord represents the joyous festival in heaven.

(T) 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.

(S) The principle about reward and punishment. An important principle in God's kingdom is, "Whoever has, will be given more and he will have abundance. And whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." This is relevant.

One. This principle promises that faithfulness and diligence will be rewarded. It is only in the way of developing our God-given abilities and opportunities to serve God, God's kingdom and other people, that we become richer. This is certainly true with respect to spiritual matters: According to Mark 4:24-25, whoever reads and studies the word of God 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. Standing still in spiritual matters is impossible! A person either gains or loses, advances or declines! Every God-given blessing is again a guarantee of further blessings to come (Jn 1:16)! Whenever a person works with whatever has been entrusted to him, his abilities and opportunities never get lost, but instead multiply and grow stronger in influence.

Two. This principle warns that unfaithfulness and negligence will be punished. A Christian possesses abilities and gifts not for himself alone, but to be used in service and obedience. A Christian is not an isolated member of the Body of Christ. A member that contributes to growth of the human 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 abilities and opportunities are taken away from him.

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

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 abilities and opportunities. God will reward faithfulness and diligence, but he will also punish unfaithfulness and negligence!"

Servanthood is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom are faithful and diligent with respect to the abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to them. Every person receives his life-task from God in accordance with his abilities and opportunities. Whoever fulfils his life-task, whether great or small, will experience that his abilities and opportunities are being multiplied and he will be rewarded with greater responsibilities. Whoever neglects his task and leaves his abilities and opportunities unused, will experience that his abilities and opportunities decrease and he will finally lose even whatever had been entrusted to him.

(S) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.**

I want to compare the parable with 1 Corinthians 4:7. It 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 and at the second coming of Christ we will have to give an account of everything he has entrusted to our care.

According to Matthew 25:15, God, like the master in this parable, gave to each servant according to his ability! When he assigned tasks, he mercifully figured with each person's personality and capacity. However, by distributing his talents, he did sow and he did scatter. Therefore, he has all the right to reap and gather!

(T) I want to compare the parable with some passages that deal with excuses people often make. In 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. In Luke 13:26-27 some people will falsely claim that they had been associated with Christ on earth, had eaten with him and had listened to his teaching. But Christ will say to them that he did not know them. In Matthew 7:22-23, some people will falsely claim that they had done good works for Christ on earth. But Christ will say that he never

knew them. In 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. In 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.

(S) **POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parable.

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 good works that Christians do are based on God's grace!

In the parable of the talents, a master gave *a different amount of money* to each of three servants, but at his return he rewarded their work with *the same rewards*, when it was discovered that both had doubled what was entrusted to them. The parable teaches that God's rewards are not based on the servants' different degrees of success or results due to their different abilities. It teaches that God's rewards are based on the servants' faithfulness and diligence, no matter how many abilities and opportunities he has entrusted to each!

(T) **Christians must know what they should be like.** What is important is to serve God with the right attitude or spirit and to serve God faithfully and diligently. The genuine people of God's kingdom do not harbour *a work-for-rewards spirit*. They are simply faithful and diligent with respect to the abilities and opportunities God has entrusted to them.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the workers in the vineyard. As preparation, please read Matthew 21:33-46.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".