



PROPER 28 ARTICLE NO. 2005.924
Gospel Mt 25:14-15,

Parable of the Talents - Do Good Works

Matthew 25:14, 15 Matthew 25:19-29



*F*or the kingdom of heaven (it) is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them **his goods**.

15 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.

19 After a long time **the lord** of those servants **cometh**, and **reckoneth** with them.

20 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.

21 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**.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, 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.

24 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:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 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:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

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."

Much of this tract is commentary - don't take it as Gospel. It is here to encourage meditation and study. Use your gift of discernment, to find the truth.

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Do Good Works

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Usually verse 30 is not read in Church, probably because it sounds so Draconian. Some commentators believe that verse 30 was added to the passage by some later scribes, and is inappropriate for the sense of this passage.)

Compare also a similar parable Luke 19:11-27

"11 And as they heard these things, he **added** and spake a **parable**, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and **because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.**"

Note: Jesus is talking only to his disciples.

Matthew 24:1

"1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple."

Then he told them several parables - all about being prepared, and doing good works. At this time in the formation of the church (AD 70+) the delay of the return of the Lord was a big worry to the brethren. As you can also read from Paul's letters, he had to reassure the brethren that they were not to be alarmed about the delay (see Proper 28 epistle, 1 Th 5:1-10). Matthew and Luke both tell this parable with slight differences - number of talents to each etc.

So, here is a parable that warns about the delay to be expected and the work that has to be done, while the brethren wait for the Lord's return.

Some Metaphors in this parable

his goods = his property, his church.

Talents = gifts of the Holy Spirit

straightway = He left immediately after he gave his servants the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost).

reckoneth = counted the results.

enter thou into the joy of thy lord. = perhaps the joyful marriage feast at the end times.

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Additional Comments

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I interpret this parable as a prophecy by Jesus of the performance of His Apostles in the early days of the Church missionary work. Jesus entrusted his Apostles with various jobs in his kingdom of heaven. At Pentecost the Holy Ghost descended on the Apostles and they were each given gifts to enable the missionary work they were called to do .. To some were given more gifts than others according to their natural capabilities and God's will. To some the gifts of wisdom, to others the gifts of knowledge, faith, healing, teaching, prophecy, tongues etc.

To Peter, James (the less), Andrew, and John, were given the most gifts (He gave five talents).

And with these gifts Peter started the church in Antioch and Rome, James managed the church in Jerusalem, Andrew preached in Scythia, Asia minor, Macedonia and Greece. John became Bishop of Ephesus, wrote the Gospel and Epistles, and cared for Mary.

Matthew 13:23

*"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an **hundredfold**, some **sixty**, some **thirty**."*

So these Apostles did well with their gifts. And God was pleased.

To Matthew, Bartholomew, Thomas, Jude, and James (the Great), were given fewer gifts (He gave two talents.)

Matthew was claimed as an Apostle by Ethiopia.

Bartholomew claimed as Apostle by Macedonia, Arabia and Armenia

Thomas claimed as an Apostle by Persia and India.

James (the Great) supported the Jerusalem Church until AD 44 when he was beheaded by Herod.

Jude may have written the Epistle under his name.

Matthew 13:23

*"..., some **thirty**."*

So these Apostles did well with their more limited gifts also. And God was pleased.

Additional Comments

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To, Philip, Simon, Matthias, was given only one gift (He gave one talent.)

Philip got married and had four daughters, and was buried in Hierapolis. His third daughter "lived in the Holy Spirit" - Eusebius *The Church History*, [so perhaps the others were not converted?] The other two Apostles are mysteries .. Could these three have been the *unprofitable servants* who, though they had faith in the Lord and **knew his commandments**, did few works and so have disappeared from history .

At the final judgment, the nine good and faithful Apostles will be given jobs of **ruling**^A over many, and the other three perhaps passed over^C . They were given a big job - though the Lord called it *small* compared to what was planned after the judgment, and I suppose a lot more had been expected of them. Perhaps this verse is appropriate?

Matthew 13:22

"22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

You could interpret this parable also as a judgment of those who have faith but exhibit no works .

James 2:20,26

"20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

"26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. "

^B Matthew 24:45-47

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods."

Luke 19:17

"17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities."

^C cast into outer darkness is what it says in line 30, but this sounds a bit drastic for these three - but only the Lord knows.

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The gaining of talents, I think means that God will give additional graces upon request as long as we have made good use of the gifts that we already have. We can petition God for additional grace to build up our gifts, to do specific jobs on His behalf. As each gift is put to good use, we petition for another, and so on, until we have all the gifts and graces we can use. God has promised that those with the most gifts will get more, and those with the least will have them taken away.

Mat 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."

Luke 19:26

"26 For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

Paraphrase - it might mean this:

Unto everyone which hath (belief) shall be given (Grace upon grace) and from him that hath not (any longer, his belief), even that (Grace) he hath shall be taken away from him."

This implies that if you lose your belief in God, all the graces you enjoyed would vanish. That makes sense, doesn't it. The Grace you get could depend on the strength of your love for God. {Graces are particular characteristics that are added to enhance specific gifts e.g. the Gift might be teaching, to which are added the graces of patience, and meekness (slow to anger) }.

Could it be that the man with the one talent, who had it taken away, was suffering from unbelief? Is this what happened to the three *unprofitable* Apostles? Is the reason that they wrote no Epistles, and established no churches, due to their loss of faith when Christ did not immediately return, as he promised?

I think there may be some truth to this.

Let's have a look at the references to those who received only one talent.

24 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:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 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:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

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."

{30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."}

Let me paraphrase what might have been meant by verses. 24 through 30.

I was afraid for my soul, so I kept away from others who might criticize me for believing in you because; if I lost my faith, I knew you would not forgive me. I knew you depended on others to spread the gospel, and that you would gather and harvest the souls at the end. I have kept my faith that you had given me, see! I am still yours, Lord. Aren't you glad?

You should have offered yourself to the other Apostles who would have made you work for Me. Yet, you neither spread the gospel nor brought Me any converts. Your "belief" is unbelief, for you no longer exhibit faith. You are therefore condemned for your laziness, and cast into outer darkness.

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Now, remember that these commands are for those who are to be missionaries and wandering prophets, with no home and no family life, and who are beset with enemies and persecution, hounded by the authorities and eventually some would be killed for their teaching.

These verses may not be meant for us mortals. But there is a message for us in here, and that is we must make use of the gifts given to us by God, and that we should pray for additional grace to obey His commandments, and do whatever good works are suggested to us by the Holy Spirit. (see Proper 25 for a list of good works - Disciple Virtues).

In the early Christian communities, which were small groups of disciples who stayed together in one building (an early monastery?), the disciples did not follow the rules of wandering prophets and missionaries, instead they followed the rule of the community. The teachings were those of Jesus, but applied to a different way of life than the Apostles. The earliest record we have of this type of Christian lifestyle is from "The Didache".

"The Didache" or "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" might have been the first Christian book ever written. The original dates from AD 50. It is an instruction manual for the training of converts, and is purported to have been written by some of the Apostles. The manual covers Baptism procedures, Eucharist, eating, discipline, etc. The manual has been mentioned by some of the Church Fathers, and was at one time considered by some as important as the other scriptures. Recently (2003) Didache has been translated into English and is accompanied by a 900 page commentary. If you want to see how the early Christians lived in their small communities, and what the 'Apostles' taught the converts, this is the book to read.

Amori Christi et Ecclesiae -
Glen C. Miller OSV

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The early Christian communities eventually became the churches in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus etc. The converts were taught by the Apostles.

- Peter started the church in Antioch and Rome,
- James managed the church in Jerusalem, Andrew preached in Scythia, Asia minor, Macedonia and Greece. John became Bishop of Ephesus.
- Matthew started churches in Ethiopia.
- Bartholomew in Macedonia, Arabia and Armenia
- Thomas started churches in Persia and India.
- James (the Great) supported the Jerusalem Church
- Paul started the churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, etc.

These communities were groups of believers and apprentices to the Apostles and other 'Teachers' over many years. The missionaries (Apostles and The Seventy), brought new converts to the communities, and these were trained by 'Teachers' (mature mentors). The converts didn't leave the home of the community, except to work in the local village to make salable merchandise with which to support the brethren. New arrivals were expected to sell all that they owned, and distribute the proceeds among the 'men' (which I take to include the villagers, as well as the community of believers).

In all things there was the expectation of the immediate return of Christ, and His reign in the Kingdom of God, so there were no plans for long term viability of the community - no marriages, no children. They were just to be prepared for the sudden arrival of the Lord. There was an expectation that they would be among the chosen to live in the Kingdom, and that others may be destroyed who were outside the Christian communities.



Recommended Books

			ISBN
The Holy Bible 1611 Version	Bible	Hendrickson	1-56563-162-5
The Didache - Ancient Christian	Kleist, James	The Newman Press	0-8091-0247-1
The Didache, Faith Hope and Life of	Milavec, Aaron	The Newman Press	0-8091-0537-3
Eusebius the Church History	Maier, Paul L.	Kregel	0-8254-3328-2

Within these communities, gifts and graces were used to enhance the relationship among the brethren. They slept in dorms, shared the Eucharist every day, worked together and prayed together - much like the Dominican monks would be doing much later.

During the persecutions under Domitian (AD 81-96) and later under Diocletian (c. AD 290), these communities, which were an easy target, were driven out of existence, the members tortured, some to death, the houses destroyed, and all scriptures burned. No trace of these communities survives.

The Episcopal Churches in the USA are struggling to maintain a membership of 2.3 million. Over the last ten years there was an annual loss of 37,882 members. Babies exceed deaths by 25,412 each year. So, the average membership is in decline at a rate of 12,470/year^A. Today the Anglican church in the USA represents only 0.8% of all Christians in the USA.

Dare we suggest the poor use of God's gifts **by the lay members** is a contributing factor?

^A Encyclopedia Britannica Almanac 2004 - statistics from yr. 1900-2000 with projections through mid 2005.

Overall Christian growth in the USA is less than 1% annually^A. Most of this growth is from children entering the Church, especially amongst Catholics who have more than 66 million members, and a new member increase of 650,000 a year (of which 97% are from births)^A. There was an overall increase in the number of Christians due to natural birth of 2.5 million, and a membership loss to non-religious and non-Christian religions of 291,000 (annually). [Many of the marginal religions such as Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists have outstripped the ECUSA churches in membership by a factor of 2 or 3 times.]

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Making use of the 'talents' that God gave us

If the Kingdom of God is already established on the planet Earth, which I believe to be true, why are we not all within its care and protection? Is it that we have not made good use of the 'talents' Christ has given us, and that some of us are in 'darkness' even today - that is outside the Kingdom of God?

Can we call ourselves Christians and not be doing the good works that Christ requires of his 'children'? (see Proper 25)

For many Christians (and I have heard this from a lot of people) the saving grace of Christ (justification) was complete upon their baptism, and there is no more to do - they are therefore, on the list for heaven. They argue that good works is not a requirement. That Paul said such a thing in Romans (they misunderstand Paul). And they are in any case sinners to the core and nothing they can do will do them any good. But Christ will save them anyway.

But in the Apostolic traditions, since the second century, justification has always been a two step process (Articles XI - homily on justification: Cranmer and the Bishops of the Church of England c.1540). Initial justification is given by God's grace upon belief in the creeds, acceptance of Baptism and Confirmation. We hope to be finally justified, but we understand that there is no guarantee of this (BCP 1990 p339 "heirs through hope" and Article XVII).

Final justification takes place at the judgment, after works are weighed in the balance; when we are hopefully judged "a good and faithful servant" and receive from God the "wedding garments"^A. (I write this as a layman from research I have done, you should trust your Bishop and your Vicar to guide you on these points).

^A See Proper 23 "The Last Marriage"

So - to be called “good and faithful” servants we must all make much better use of the gifts that we have been given.

Make a list of the gifts that you have, and the graces you have been given (see the list in Proper 25), and then write down what you have done with these gifts to bring God into the lives of your family and friends, brethren and neighbors.

