

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part Eleven)

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Prior to Matthew 25, Jesus effectively warns us several times in parables that we must watch and be ready. In Matthew 25, Jesus continues His teaching on the Mount of Olives by adding three more parables that also warn us to watch and be ready. The first is the Parable of Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13); the second is the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30); and the third is the story of the separation of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Each parable makes its own points, but taken together they intensify and even broaden Jesus' warnings. Instead of speaking of people who are obviously saved or lost, such as those who perished in the Flood, or the wicked, careless servant, Jesus seems to speak of people who look like believers and who even think they are, but who will not be ready when He comes.

There are two good ways to consider the question: How do I know I am ready for Christ's return? (1) Am I serving Jesus Christ? (2) am I serving others because I love Him? The next two parables, the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, address these questions. The parables carry Jesus' warning to watch and be ready a step beyond the first story.

All three are parables of judgment, and each makes similar points. Thus, the cumulative effect is strong. Jesus is about to go to the cross. His disciples will see him no more, but He reminds them that the day is coming when He will return as Judge of all people, and that they must be ready before He returns, because judgment begins with the household of God.

Following the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus continues without a break in His teaching to His disciples. This continuity of thought makes the Parable of the Talents a fitting complement to the preceding Parable of the Virgins. Jesus is careful to balance His instruction by teaching another important requirement for His servants to fulfill prior to His return. He does not want His disciples to assume that the previous parable constituted His entire warning.

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus reveals the necessity of developing inward character. But in the Parable of the Talents, He combines that need, with the encouragement to manifest good works.

The virgins teach us the need to watch and be ready.

The talents teach us our responsibility to work until His return.

Jesus knew the human tendency to think that, because He was there in person, His disciples did not have to work, leading to laziness and freeloading as a person becomes dependent on the support of another. Thus, He urges His disciples, not only to be ready by watching for His return, but also to work diligently toward it.

The first parable portrays the virgins waiting for their Lord, which requires mental and spiritual preparation and watching, while the Parable of the Talents shows the servants of the Lord working for Him, which entails profitable activity.

Let us investigate the Parable of the Talents. We begin by reading it in its entirety.

Matthew 25:14-30 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.' Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, (if) you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The tone of the conversations in this parable is that of two good servants and one bad servant relating to the master in two distinctly different decisive ways. The faithful servants served well because they loved him and wanted to please him, while the wicked servant failed to serve well because he hated and resented his master. So, let us investigate it more deeply.

Matthew 25:14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them."

The wealthy man (referred to as "lord" by his servants) is "the Son of Man," Jesus Christ, who is referred to in the previous verse.

Matthew 25:13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

His journey into the far country parallels Christ's departure into heaven after His ascension. The servants stand for the twelve disciples and thus *all* the followers of Christ down through the ages, and the talents they receive represent the spiritual gifts Jesus passes on to His servants.

The absence of the lord from his home pictures the absence of Christ's visible presence on the earth, and his return is Jesus' promised return. The trading that the servants are expected to do during their master's absence suggests the faithful use of spiritual gifts and opportunities for service that Jesus' disciples are expected to practice.

On the master's return, he commends the servants, showing what will happen at Christ's return, when each Christian's service will be rewarded. The judgment on the one servant who failed in his trust is a warning against not using or misusing his gifts.

What exactly is a talent?

Matthew 25:15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

A talent was not a coin; it was a measure of weight; and so, its value obviously depended on whether the coinage involved was copper, silver, or gold. Jesus does not specify the kind of coinage in his story (the most common metal was silver), and so, it is impossible to calculate how valuable the talents were.

It is enough to say that each was a large amount. If a talent was six thousand denarii, it would have taken a worker 20 years to earn that much money, so we are talking here about hundreds of thousands of dollars at least.

The original Greek word for "talent" is *talantos*, which refers to quantity. Yet the amount is unimportant, and so is the fact that the parable is about money. Money is one thing God entrusts to us that we often misuse. (Not tithing a full ten percent is one example.) But the same is true of many other endowments. In a sense, anything by which we glorify God is 'a talent.' The point is that a talent from God is tremendously valuable.

As Jesus uses it, a talent is not something we possess, but which He possesses and loans to His servants. In the parable, all talents belonged to the lord, who entrusted them to his servants for use in trade, or we could say, in actions.

Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of God's church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all are talents. A talent represents the gift of the complete revelation of God as given in the Bible, including the knowledge of His plan of salvation and the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

The point of the story is that waiting for Christ's return and being ready for it are not passive matters. We must work faithfully and energetically for Him now. It also includes His spiritual gifts to the church, such as speaking and understanding languages, preaching, teaching, discernment, knowledge, and wisdom, among many others.

Matthew 25:16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

What we trade with while He is absent belongs to Him. Our God-given natural abilities are comparatively insignificant and of little spiritual value unless used to benefit others, but God has given us spiritual wealth to use to invest in supporting the work of God. These talents, then, are not a matter of things we own or of strengths we have, but are the result of the grace of God. They are provided for the glorification of God and for the church's benefit.

In Romans 11, Paul refers to the specific gifts given to the covenant people as part of that covenant relationship.

Romans 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Speaking of Israel, Paul says she will be saved because God never revokes His saving promises.

Gifts (the Greek word *charisma*) means things freely given by God; the word can be used to refer to different kinds of gifts.

Calling, here, refers to a calling to salvation. God knows the end from the beginning. He knows how it will all turn out.

Yet, despite what Israel did and has done in rebellion, He set an irrevocable love upon them that, thanks to His mercy and patience, will result in their repentance in the end.

Romans 2:3-4 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

The mercy and patience of God are constant. The displays of His goodness come in every form: in the sun and light; in the air and water; in food and clothing; in friends and family; in seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling; in peace and protection; and in the Word of God. In all these ways God is benevolent.

In I Corinthians 12, Paul refers to the various endowments, gifts, or graces that have been bestowed in different degrees on the members of the church—including the distinctions in graces, and in degrees of office and rank, which had been made in the Christian church in general.

I Corinthians 12:1-11 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another

discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

So, there are diversities of spiritual gifts which are given by way of and through God's Spirit.

The Difference

What is the difference between a talent and an ability? God's gifts accomplish much more through some people than they do through others, as is seen in how much the lord bestows on each servant. Every true servant of Christ receives the Holy Spirit, but different servants receive differing amounts of spiritual understanding from God.

We do not receive more from Him than we can understand and use. Because God's servants differ in aptitude, He accordingly bestows His gifts to each servant as He pleases.

I Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The lord knew the trading ability of his chosen servants, and he distributed his talents accordingly. Talent and ability are two different things. Talents are the spiritual gifts of the Master, while ability is power from our natural fitness and skill. A person may have great natural ability, yet no spiritual gifts.

Natural ability—one of God's physical gifts—is often necessary for the reception of spiritual gifts. This was no reflection on the third servant because he only received one talent; maybe he could not handle any more. Each servant of Christ receives for his service all that he needs and can use.

Romans 12:4-9 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to each of us, let us use them with diligence!

The Parable of the Talents teaches us several things:

- God gives people differing gifts.
- Work well done is rewarded with still more work to do.
- The person who uses his gifts will be given more, while the person who does not will lose even what he has.

If a person uses a gift, he is increasingly able to do more with it, and a person who does not try is punished. The only way to make a spiritual gift beneficial is to use it in the service of God and one another.

Since the Parable of the Talents is often confused with the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:12-26), it will help our understanding to compare them.

Both parables describe a rich man going to a distant country and entrusting a sum of money to his servants to invest for him.

In both, there is a promise that, when the traveler returns, he will deal with his servants according to the use they have made of that money. He promises to reward the faithful and punish the negligent. Here, it seems, the similarities end.

They contain important differences between them.

In the Talents, Jesus addresses His own disciples at the Mount of Olives, while in the Pounds, He speaks to a multitude at Jericho.

In the Talents, the servants differ from each other in the number of gifts they receive, which is according to personal ability. In the Pounds, the amount given is the same, but they differ in the diligence they display.

In the Talents, two servants use their talents equally, and their reward is therefore equal too. In the Pounds, the servants make different uses of the money and are therefore differently rewarded.

While both parables distinguish between the faithful and the faithless, as well as the reward for diligence and the punishment for lethargy, they show responsibility from different angles.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

"Bread" here is the end-product of the seed from which bread is made. The diligence of casting seed upon the fertile soil flooded by the early rains would be returned to the sower in autumn with the reward of a large increase.

Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

Rather than speculating about uncertainties, it is financially wiser to explore multiple avenues for making one's living and investing one's resources. This could involve giving part of it to several different areas, because such diversification and diligence gives protection against unforeseen disaster in one or two of the areas.

Ecclesiastes 11:3-6 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In

the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

Unforeseen events come from God; and the person who is always gazing on the uncertain future will neither begin nor complete any useful work. But bear in mind that times and circumstances, the powers of nature and the results to which they take us, are in the hand of God; and we must be both diligent and trustful.

Unequal Allocation

Let us analyze the unequal allocation of talents, how they are used and misused, and how the servants are rewarded. What can we learn from the unequal allocation of talents?

Matthew 25:15 “And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability.”

To a few chosen servants, God gives five talents to fulfill special needs in the church. These may be evangelists, pastors, or teachers, and their knowledge of spiritual truths along with their gift to preach carries great responsibility.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

As a result, God expects more of the teachers, than others less gifted in that area.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Luke 12:48 “But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

Perhaps most members of God's church have at least two talents. Some may be deacons with a natural desire to serve the church in physical ways. Maybe you are one of those who give opening and closing prayers or have a musical talent to help others offer up praise to God the Father and Jesus Christ. If you have a reasonably good voice, you should use it in the Feast choir and not waste God's gift. You may have a gift in organizing activities or in helping children or the elderly. As gifts, some of these are somewhat less notable than the more evident ones.

Romans 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

The servant with one talent demonstrates the potential sluggard in Christ's service.

Proverbs 6:6-11 Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer, or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers

her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

Yet those of us who have the least must also serve God with what we have been given, and if we serve Him faithfully with the little He has given, honor and reward will be ours.

We must support the church in less noticeable yet vital ways, such as in prayer, encouragement, contributions, and positive attitudes.

But how may the talents be misused?

Matthew 25:16-18 “Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.”

Since the servants did not know how long their master would be gone, they began trading without delay. The one with five talents increased his by 100%, as did the servant with two talents. In each case, their original assets were doubled. If the servant with one talent had just worked by trading with it, his reward would have been the same.

The motivation for service and producing good fruit should be love for the Master, a virtue the servant with one talent lacked. Sadly, he failed to trade with his talent and multiply it. Fearing the master's severity, he wrapped his lord's asset in something, and hid it in a hole in the earth.

Fear is a sad thing when a person dreads losing something valuable so much that he hoards it instead of putting it to good use. So, it is with a spiritual gift also. While his fellow-servants were actively trading their talents, the third servant was idle. He was neither actively obedient nor disobedient, but passively disobedient. He did not intend to hurt his master's property; he simply failed to improve it. He was lukewarm and useless. Like the foolish virgins suffering because they neglected to prepare, the third servant in this parable suffers because he did nothing with his talent. We must not hide our light under a basket.

Spiritual talents must be used in service to Christ for the glory of God—for the joy and honor of Him who is the Giver of every good gift.

I Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

The Rewards

How are the servants rewarded?

Matthew 25:19 “After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.”

The master never sets a time for his return, indicating he could return at any time. However, we know that his return does not occur before his servants have time to increase their talents.

Matthew 25:20-23 “So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'”

The first and second servants cheerfully relate their success in trading, giving their master his property with double interest. Both are rewarded the same, receiving the praise, "Well done!" Both receive the promise, "I will make you ruler." Both receive glory, "Enter into the joy of your lord." Though these two servants differ in the talents they receive, they are the same in obedience, diligence, and faithfulness to their master, and so receive the same reward.

You can almost feel their proper pride in the achievement. The master is equally delighted as He says, “Well done!” suggesting he saw his servant’s accomplishments as: “Excellent!” “Great!”

By contrast, we can hardly fail to hear the angry, self-justifying, accusing tone of the servant who hid the master’s talent in the earth.

Matthew 25:24-25 “Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and so went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, here you have what is yours.'

This accusation was not true. The master was not a hard man. He had been generous in giving his servants abundant wealth to work with. But this man hated him. We can hear his contempt as he resentfully throws his talent on the table. “Here is what belongs to you,” he says. It was returned exactly as the master had given it, not a bit more and no less.

In response, the master condemns him both for his wickedness and for being lazy; wicked because he accused his master unjustly, and lazy because he did not faithfully use what he was given to him.

Matthew 25:26-28 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.’”

The master gives the talent to the one who has ten, on the principle that,

Matthew 25:29-30 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable [lazy] servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The master passes a serious judgment on the burier of the talent: condemnation for neglecting his trust. This servant's true character reveals itself in his reply. His flawed view of his master's

intentions leads him to excuse his own failure to the point of flagrant disrespect. To his idleness, he adds injustice, so his lord sees him as lazy and wicked.

We must avoid a “do nothing” Christianity, of course. To have done nothing is proof that we do not love Jesus Christ, do not belong to Him, and have no share in His Kingdom. We must always appreciate all of Christ's gifts.

II Corinthians 8:10-12 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

The true Christian's attitude is contentment with what he has, making the very best use of it. It is better to have a low position in God's service with faithfulness than a high position with unfaithfulness. Our limitation should be an incentive to spiritual and moral action and persistence.

In the end, what God commends and rewards is not brilliance, popularity, or cleverness, but faithfulness and obedience to Him regardless of human recognition or praise.

Lessons of Judgment

There are lessons of coming judgment in Matthew 25. The first clear lesson is that there will be a future day of reckoning for all people. That is so obvious both from this parable and from all the parables in Matthew 25 that it seems almost too simple to stress it. Yet it must be stressed because the world refuses to believe it. Jesus spoke of judgment being obvious. It was not even open to debate. But the world and even mainstream Christianity today considers God's judgment as the most irrational and least anticipated thing in the world.

What do most people think of when one speaks of dying? Most probably do not want to think about it at all, of course; they are not certain what, if anything, lies beyond death's door. If they do think about it, at the very least they think of a continuation of life as we know it in a physical sense. If not that, it must be something considerably better. Very few consider that it may be worse. If they do think about it, they cannot imagine the Almighty as a God of final judgment.

This is an evil world. All sins are not judged in this world, nor are all good deeds rewarded.

John 12:47-48 “And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”

If this is a moral universe, if it is created and ruled by a moral God, then there must be a reckoning hereafter in which those scales are balanced. Evil must be punished. Judgment is the most logical thing in the universe, and every story in Matthew 25 cries out that there will most certainly be a reckoning.

In the first case, it was when the bridegroom came and shut the door. The firstfruit virgins were judged worthy to be the Bride of Christ, the other virgins were not.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

In the second case, it was when,

Matthew 25:19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

In the third case, it is when,

Matthew 25:31-32 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

Judgment by Works

The second clear lesson of this Parable of the Talents is the emphasis on works, on a judgment by works. In the Parable of the Talents, judgment is based on the use or misuse of the talents. It is based on the care or neglect of those who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned. We must not forget at this point that in the earlier story the emphasis was on the readiness of the five wise virgins. Their readiness corresponds to the new birth and to faith.

Still, these stories round out the picture by showing what kind of faith is needed. It is not a dead faith. A dead faith saves no one.

In this teaching, Jesus is one with the apostle James, who said,

James 2:14-17 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James and Paul teach the same thing regarding judgment and works, Paul said in Romans 2,

Romans 2:7-10 . . . eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good.

These passages reveal the necessity of works following faith—if we are truly born from above. There is an unbreakable connection between what we believe and what we do. We believe the Word of God because we have been born from above, and those who have been born from above will always and inevitably begin to live out the superior moral life of Christ within them.

The new nature does not manifest itself fully all at once. But if we are justified, we will have it, and it will increasingly and inevitably express itself in faithful and loving service to our Master, Jesus Christ.

We are not justified by works. If we are trying to be justified by works, we are not Christians. But neither can we claim to be Christians if we do not have works.

There is an additional warning here. When Jesus spoke of the men who were given talents by their master and who used them either wisely or not at all, he said that one was given more than the other and that one was given less.

As you recall, one had five talents; he used them to gain five more. The second had two talents; he used those to gain two more. The last servant was given one. He was judged, but his judgment was not for having failed to gain as much as the two who had been given more. He was judged for failing to use what he had, for hiding his valuable talent in the ground.

We need to remember this parable when we find ourselves making comparisons between Christians. Paul puts this principle to the Church strongly and succinctly.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

It is true, as this story teaches, that the people of God work. They use the talents God has given them, but they do not all do so in the same way or to the same observable degree. Thus, although we know that God will judge the performance or nonperformance of those deeds, it is not our prerogative to do so. We are not all-knowing, as God is, and we are certainly not as wise as He is.

Who are we to say that someone else is insufficiently serving or even hiding his talent in the ground? He may not be doing what we are doing, but he may be doing something far greater, which only our own sin blinds us from observing.

Remember what Paul said in Romans 14,

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

But I also need to qualify the qualification. The warning applies in our judgment of other people, whom we are not fit to judge. But it does not apply to us in judging ourselves. On the contrary, we must be *rigorous* with ourselves. We must not imagine that our poor or nonexistent performance will be excused.

All Mouths Stopped

This brings us to the third clear lesson of the parable: the failure of all excuses before God. The man who was given one talent and hid it in the ground explained that he had not done more because he knew his master's nature too well.

Matthew 25:24-25 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

The servant did not actually know his master at all. The servant was only making an excuse. It was a foolish excuse, and it certainly did not fool his master.

But many people do the same today. They use perseverance as an excuse for being lazy. They “hang in there” despite their dislike of sitting in services, but never serve.

The master told the servant that if he was right about his character, he should have worked even harder. If the master was hard, the servant should have labored even more to produce a profit for him. The servant was wicked because of his unjustified slander, and he was lazy, which was the real reason for his zero-growth performance.

We must not allow ourselves to just ‘hang in there’ and wait for the end. We must see ourselves for what we are—servants who owe it to our Master to improve what He entrusts to us. Failure to do so, proves we cannot really be valuable disciples at all.

The foolish virgins failed by thinking their part was too easy; the wicked servant failed by thinking his part was too hard. You may be able to get away with giving excuses to other people—to your boss, your parents, your pastor. But do not think you can get away with giving excuses to God.

The apostle Paul wrote that in the day of God’s judgment there will not be a single excuse or objection about one’s guilt. It will be made perfectly clear to the wicked!

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Conclusion

Many will be surprised on the day of judgment, but it will not be pleasant. People will be thunderstruck, shaken, and distressed. The wicked servant thought he had done well. He must have been startled to hear the words,

Matthew 25:30 “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The spiritual meaning of the Parable of the Talents may be summed up in this way:

1. The servants of God are not all endowed with equal gifts and talents.
2. All, whatever their ability, are bound to use their talents in promoting God’s honor and glory.
3. By using their talents in a proper manner, they improve and strengthen them. By perfecting their use, they may be used more effectively.

4. The servants of God will be judged and rewarded according to the improvements they have made.
5. All sinners look on God as a hard master, and as unreasonable and tyrannical.
6. People will be judged not merely for "doing wrong, but for neglecting to do right." This is the sin of omission.
7. If the servant who kept the talent without injuring it, and who returned it to his master as he received it, was nevertheless judged, condemned, and cast away, what must those who abuse their talents expect? For example: a teacher who uses his talent to promote false doctrine or push his own humanly reasoned agenda.

Jesus is speaking of divisions, between the five wise and the five foolish virgins, between the faithful and wicked servants, and in the next parable between the sheep and the goats.

In the Parable of the Talents, the faithful are invited to share their master's happiness, while the wicked are cast "outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The fate of the wicked is darkness because it is a life without God, who is the source of all light. Outside: because it is without God who is the Creator and center of all things. In that darkness, there is no hope, no joy, no love, no laughter—no life.

Christ's judgment is a process, not a focus on condemning evildoers. The wicked are condemned for the wicked things they do throughout their lifetime, but the faithful are saved and rewarded for doing the good works assigned to them during their lives of suffering with Christ. The wicked will get only what they deserve.

I Peter 4:16-19 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

In the Old Testament, household of God (literally, "The house of God") refers to the Temple, but now God's people are His Temple. "Judgment begin[ning] with God's house," alludes to Ezekiel 9:1-6 and Malachi 3:1-4, where the Lord purifies His people.

"Scarcely saved" in verse 18, does not mean that the righteous just barely receive salvation. "Scarcely" (Greek, *molis*, "with difficulty") means that the righteous are saved amid suffering; our salvation is not easy and simple.

Judgment here is not disciplinary but purifying and cleansing. The suffering we endure as God's people refines us.

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

If the people of God need purifying, then surely the judgment of those who do not obey the Word of God will be much more severe. We suffer in accord with the will of God because He rules over everything that happens to us.

As the Sovereign Creator, God is also loving and faithful, therefore we should entrust our lives entirely to Him, just as Jesus did when He suffered. Such trust manifests itself in doing what is good. Use your new gifts and life in Christ to diligently work for Him now, so you may receive your eternal reward later.

But remember: “salvation” is a gift from God!