

Matthew

Bible Study

Parable of the Talents Matthew 25:14—30

This parable continues Jesus' teaching concerning the end times and is in answer to the questions the Disciples asked in Matthew 24:2. Having taught them the events of the Tribulation and warned them that they will need to be watching for the signs of His coming Jesus now gives them a little glimpse into what their future holds if they remain faithful. There is a very similar parable found in Luke 19:11—27 that was spoken just before Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days earlier than Matthew's account. Some of the details are different but the same message is being presented.

Synopsis

A man is preparing to go on a journey and gives his servants instructions about what they should do while he is gone. The first servant gets five talents (a large sum of money equaling approximately 15 years of wages), the second servant gets two talents and the last servant receives one talent. Each was given according to their ability.

After a long while the master returns and asks each servant to give an accounting of how wisely they used the money entrusted to them. The first servant invested the money and received an additional five talents. The second servant also doubled what was given him. The third servant feared the master and hid his talent. He was condemned as a lazy servant who misused the master's goods and was thrown out into outer darkness.

Characters

Jesus Christ is represented as the Master while the servants represent Israel. Jesus came to minister only to the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Everything Jesus did revolved around God's dispensational plan for Israel including the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom with Jesus Christ ruling from Jerusalem. As in the parable, Jesus Christ was to leave Israel (at the ascension) and would be gone for an extended period of time (John 13:1—3; 14:3; 16:5, 10, 17, 28). He will be going to heaven to receive the Kingdom from the Father (John 18:36). This is the Millennial Kingdom that will be set up at the end of the seven-year Tribulation. During the Tribulation there is a symbolic opening of the seven seals. When the seventh seal is opened the title deed to the universe is once more in Christ's hands having been in Satan's control since the fall. Adam was given domain of creation but lost it to Satan when he ate of the forbidden fruit. We know Satan was in control of the kingdoms because at Jesus' temptation in the wilderness Satan offered the kingdoms of the earth to Jesus (Matthew 4:8—9). Once all the seals are broken, creation reverts to its rightful owner. This is another reason to understand that the seals of Revelation give an overview of the entire seven-year Tribulation.

The Servants

As pointed out in previous lessons God calls Israel His servant (Isaiah 41:8; 44:21). Israel was created to be a servant to God on this earth. They were to be a nation of priests connecting mankind to God (Exodus 19:6) (A prophet connects God to mankind). It was through Israel that God revealed Himself. They were given the Law, the temple service and all the promises. Any nation that wanted to come to God would have to do so through Israel as exemplified by Ruth (Ruth 1:16). In contrast to these servants, the Church, the Body of Christ, is never called God's servant. Paul does call himself a bond-servant (Romans 1:1) but that's a position he puts himself in. This would narrow the servants in the parable to be representative of Israel, not the Church.

Those who confuse these servants to be representative of the Church will also completely miss the intended meaning of this parable. First, they mistakenly assume these servants were all saved since they represent the church. They also see the talents to represent abilities that were given then by the Lord. Those who don't

properly use their talents will be condemned while those who use their gifts properly will be rewarded. Others use this parable to condemn exploitation and wasteful excess by evil profiteers. The evil master's greed is exposed by the third servant who refused to play along with this display of avarice. Obviously some of these interpretations were not arrived at with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation

In context, Jesus is expanding on His teaching of the forthcoming Kingdom. It is through these parables that the Disciples will gain much knowledge and be encouraged to get through the Tribulation. These parables are in answer to the Disciples' questions about the end times. They must be interpreted in light of the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom. Although the talents are most often understood to be gifts or abilities given by God us to be used for His glory I believe this parable is not about Christians in this age nor about using our abilities to serve God.

First, the Master distributes the talents just before He is about to leave. This would certainly apply to the events happening while Jesus was on earth but not for today in this Church age. Jesus was looking ahead to His death, burial and resurrection. Before leaving this earth he is seen as giving the Disciples these "talents." He is also distributing the talents according to what each man can handle. He is not giving many talents to people who can only handle a few and He is not giving a few to those who can handle many. Each person in the parable can take the talents given them and increase them according to their abilities. They will also be rewarded according to their ability to increase their talents (bearing fruit).

It seems that the talents represent the Word of God. As Jesus went throughout Israel He disseminated His Word to them, specifically the Gospel of the Kingdom. Those who were assigned much were responsible for bearing much fruit while those who received few were responsible to bear an equivalent amount of fruit. The one servant who buried his talent can be compared to the one who hid his light under a bushel basket (Matthew 5:13—16). Israel was commissioned to be a light to the world and act as salt, seasoning the Word of God making it appetizing. Those who did this were the ones faithful in speaking forth the Word of God. They were bearing fruit because they were connected to the vine, Jesus Christ. The one who failed to bear fruit was not connected to the vine (John 15:1—6) and was therefore condemned to eternal damnation.

This parable goes along with the parable of the seed in Matthew 13 and has to do with planting seed and bearing fruit. Jesus told this parable to hide its true meaning from unbelievers (verse 10). In this parable the seed represented God's Word. The explanation was given only to believers while unbelievers would remain clueless. Jesus explains that whoever has, more will be given in abundance while those who don't, it will be taken away from him. This is what happened with the man who buried his talent. It was taken away from him and given to someone who had much already (See also Mark 4:21—29).

The Luke 19 version

This parable was spoken because according to verse 11 the crowd thought the Kingdom would suddenly appear as Jesus made his way to the temple in Jerusalem. He begins explaining that the nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom and then return. Christ needed to go back to heaven before He could return to set up the Kingdom. Before leaving this nobleman gave 10 servants one mina each and were directed to do business. Israel was given the mina before Jesus left and they were to bear fruit. At His return each servant had to give an account of what he did with the money. Israel will give an account at the Second Coming showing Christ how they used what He gave them. The first servant increased his mina 10-fold and was given 10 cities to rule while another increased his five-fold and given five cities. Only the servant who hid his mina, bearing no fruit, was condemned for not doing as commanded.

These parables emphasize the need for Israel to be faithful in handling the Word of God and faithful in bearing fruit. Only believers will be able to bear fruit acceptable to God since bearing fruit is something only God can do (Matthew 7:15—20).

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com