

God's Economy (Mat. 25:14-30)

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Context

1. **The context of Matthew 24-25: Jesus is responding to questions posed by the disciples (Matthew 24:3) concerning events yet future to their day.**
 - The destruction of the Jewish temple.
 - The sign of his coming.
 - And of the end of the age.

2. **Remarks are associated with His Second Coming in Judgment at the end of this age.**
 1. The general characteristics of the end of the age.
 2. Specific signs of the end of the age.
 3. Warnings to be prepared at His return.

3. **The Warnings**
 1. As in the days of Noah → concerning the unprepared are taken in judgment (Mat. 24:37-44).
 2. Faithful and evil servant → concerning servants which grow comfortable with the culture wind up opposing the faithful servants and are judged (Mat. 24:45-51).
 3. Wise and foolish virgins → concerning religiously active persons who are not truly born of the Spirit will be shut out from the wedding feast which follows upon His return (Mat. 25:1-13).
 4. Parable of the Talents → today's passage which concerns the stewardship of servants while their lord is absent (Mat. 25:14-30).

Today's passage (Mathew 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, 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. 'Therefore 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.'¹

- Luke 19:11-24 contains a similar teaching of Jesus which was given on another occasion from which I'll be drawing upon.
 - Concerning monetary stewardship by ten servants (rather than three).
 - Monetary values are in minas rather than talents.⁵

Consider the following questions:

1. Why is their lord leaving?
2. What are the servants entrusted with?
3. What are the servants to do in his absence?
4. How do the servants perform?
5. How do their rewards differ?
6. What are we to learn from this passage?

Why is their lord leaving?

1. **“a man traveling to a far country” (Mat. 15:14)**
2. **Similar passage in Luke, a “nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12).**
3. **The context of Matthew 25 - Jesus has predicted His departure**
 - “You will not see me again until . . .” (Mat. 23:39)
 - “What will be the sign of Your coming . . .” (Mat. 24:3)

What are the servants entrusted with?

1. **Stewardship of their lord's resources in his absence: they themselves don't own the money entrusted into their care.**
2. **Gifts of differing value to manage on his behalf.**

3. His absence constitutes a test of their stewardship.

What are the servants to do in his absence?

1. In Luke's passage, they are given specific instructions which are only implied in Matthew's passage: "Do business until I come" (Luke 19:13).
2. "Business" is **πραγματεύομαι** [*pragmateuomai*] from which we get the English word "pragmatic."
3. The term is used within Luke's parable to denote practical business activity related to the handling of money.
 - Not just preservation of what they were given, but *production: growing the funds*.

How do the servants perform?

1. While doing business, what was their ROI?

- Dramatically different returns on their investments.
- Matthew: 5 → 10 (doubled = 100% gain), 2 → 4 (doubled = 100% gain), 1 → 1 (no change = 0%)!
- Luke: 1 → 10 (ten times = 1000%), 1 → 5 (five times = 500%), 1 → 1 (no change, = 0%)!
- Amount of growth differed by their ability and gifting.
- Amount of growth is not the issue: *any* growth over *no* growth!

2. What causes one servant to be unproductive?

A. Fear of loss.

- Dug in the ground and hid his lord's money (Mat. 25:18).
- Mina squirreled away in a handkerchief (Luke 19:20).

B. Fear concerning how the lord would respond if funds were lost.

- "I knew you to be a hard man . . . and I was afraid" (Mat. 14:25).
- "I feared you because you were an austere man" (Luke 19:21).

C. His view of the lord: primarily through a lens of potential punishment.

I. A *hard* man (Matthew)

Σκληρός [*Sklēros*]: violent (Jas. 3:4), harsh, hard, cruel (Jude 1:15), demanding, difficult (Mt. 25:24; Jn 6:60; Acts 26:14)

II. An *austere* man (Luke)

Ἀυστηρός [*Austēros*]: exacting, severe, hard.

D. Knew that growth was expected, but paralyzed from investing by fear.

- “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed” (Mat. 25:24).
- “You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sew” (Luke 19:21).

E. Not just fearful: wicked disobedient

- Luke’s parable describes him as “wicked” (Luke 19:22).
- Matthew’s parable describes him as both “wicked and lazy” (Mat. 25:26).
- Prefaces his report of the results with an excuse: he already knows he has disobeyed.
 - Wicked: he knew what the lord expected, but would not do it.
 - His already skewed view of the lord as primarily a hard man is amplified due to fear about his known disobedience.
- Attributes his lack of performance to the personal traits of the lord.
 - Wicked: he blamed God for his own failure.

F. Hiding rather than trading - possibly a scheme to claim the money as his own in the event the lord failed to return?

How do their rewards differ?

1. Productive servants

A. Matthew’s passage: both productive servants are made “ruler over many things” (Mat. 25:21,23).

B. Luke’s passage: the productive servants are made ruler over *cities*, the number of cities varying by their productivity (Luke 19:17-18).

C. Their faithful stewardship in smaller things translated into being entrusted with much greater things.

D. This is a consistent biblical theme: the little things DO matter!

- How we respond in the smaller things are a truer test of our character than the big, highly visible things.
- Small things provide a more reliable indicator of our true motivation.
- The idea that the personal life of a public figure is irrelevant is foreign to the Bible.
- Character starts at the very core: do we honor God at the most intimate, unseen level?

E. The works of the productive servants testify to their inner qualities of

reliability and obedience.

2. Unproductive, fearful servant

A. In both parables: that which was entrusted to the wicked servant is given to the most productive servant.

B. This is God's economy.

I. "To everyone who has, more will be given" (Mat. 25:29 cf. Luke 19:26).

II. "From him who does not have, even that he has will be taken away" (Mat. 25:29 cf. Luke 19:26).

III. The Christian walk: compared to climbing a greased pole.

C. Destiny

I. Cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat. 25:30).

II. Here is proof positive that the unproductive servant did not truly know his lord.

III. His destiny is . . .

- . . . a destiny shared with the foolish virgins who were shut out to which the Lord responded, "I do not know you" (Mat. 25:12).
- . . . a destiny shared with the wicked servant who beat his fellow servants who was cut and two and appointed a portion with the hypocrites (Mat. 24:51).
- . . . a destiny shared with those Jesus comes upon as a thief which are taken in judgment and given to the birds (Mat. 24:39-41 cf. Luke 17:37; Job 39:27-30).
- . . . a destiny shared with all those who may appear to be among His servants but are characterized by disobedience and lawlessness.
- "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Mat. 7:21-23)

What are we to learn from this passage?

1. The Context

- A. **The overall context of the passage is primarily written to believers in the time period closely preceding the second coming in judgment.**
- B. ***However*, the departure of the lord (if taken to be similar to the king in Luke 19) takes place at the ascension.**
- C. **Therefore, I believe this particular parable is especially applicable for the entire age in which the Lord remains gone to a far country.**

2. **Where do we stand?**

- Are we truly among His servants — or are we just involved in religious activities such that we look like a servant?
- Do we view God primarily through the lens of fear? Or is our fear and respect for the Lord balanced with love, joy, and gratitude?
- Do we know Him? Are we confident He knows us — that we have been born of His Spirit?
- Is what we think to be our “Christian walk” actually characterized by disobedience and laziness?
 - Do we chafe against clear biblical teachings?
 - When we fail, is our first response to rationalize our action? Or are we quick to repent and get back on track?

3. **What are we, His servants, entrusted with? Spiritual Gifts!**

When writing to the church at Corinth, Paul states . . .

“. . . the manifestation of the Spirit is given to **each one** for the profit of all . . . [which goes on to say that] . . . one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to **each one** individually **as He wills**” (1Cor. [12:7-11](#)).

- A. **Each believer is given at least one spiritual gift.**
- B. **Gifts are in accord with God's will — like the different monetary amounts given to the faithful servants in the parable.**
- C. **The servants are given different gifts in relation to their God-given abilities.**
 - I. **“To each according to his own ability” (Mat. [25:15](#)).**
 - II. **Their lord understood this. Each servant's responsibilities differed.**
 - III. **Each servant was only accountable to meet the expectations of the lord who accounted for their different capabilities.**
 - IV. **Different servants have different capacities.**
 - V. **Different servants have different personalities and natural abilities which**

are given from birth—even prior to their salvation.

- VI. **These natural abilities and propensities are enhanced and redirected at salvation for spiritual use.**
- VII. **We are not to compare one to another, but only look to our own service before the Lord based on gifting and abilities.**
- VIII. **Responsible for applying our particular gifts *to the best of our God-given ability.***

4. What are we, His servants, to do in his absence?

A. We are to “do business” until He comes!

B. This business is not the world’s business but the Father’s business.

- Jesus in the temple at age 12, “. . . He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"” (Luke 2:49)
- In the original Greek “about My Father’s business” could be translated as, “in these [things] of my Father” (Luke 2:49).
- Our business is “the things of the Father” which are found within Scripture.

C. Our business is not *preserving* the status quo, but *production*: spiritual growth.

I. We are to be the fourth type of seed as described in the parable of the sower which fell on good ground and yielded a crop (Mat. 13:8)

“He who received seed on the good ground is he who **hears the word and understands it**, who indeed **bears fruit** and produces: **some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty**” (Mat. 13:23b).

II. What does this parable of the sower reveal about the means of production?

The good ground is he who . . .

1. . . . hears the word (observation)
2. . . . understandings it (interpretation)
3. . . . bears fruit (application)

a. Notice that there are different rates of productivity, but all from what is considered good ground!

D. Does activity = spiritual fruitfulness?

- Christian productivity is not about being busy with our own plans and goals and running ahead of God.

- We are not to be like Martha to whom Jesus said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Lk 10:41–42).
- We are to be like her sister Mary who focused first and foremost on sitting at the feet of Jesus so as to *abide in the vine*.
- “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, **bears much fruit**; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)
- Spiritual fruitfulness, the return on investment in God’s economy, cannot be measured by the world’s standards: numbers, popularity, visibility, appearance. Otherwise, we should strive to be like Martha rather than abide like Mary.
- In closing, let us follow Peter’s simple advice: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

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Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Matthew 25:14-30
2. Ref-0008, “MANEH;MINA”
3. Ref-0008, “TALENT”
4. Ref-0185, “Metrology”
5. Both *mina* and *talent* are units of weight denoting monetary values which could be silver or gold. For silver: a mina denotes a worth of approximately \$750 dollars in our day. For gold: a mina denotes a worth of approximately \$11,000 dollars in our day. “When used in a monetary sense, the [maneh] of silver was worth about 6 pounds 17 shillings, or \$34 (in 1915); the gold [maneh] was equal to about 102 pounds 10 shillings, or \$510 (in 1915).”² See <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi> for a handy inflation calculator. A *talent* is a unit of weight equivalent to about 60 minas³ or about 100 pounds. “In the NT the talent occurs in a parable (Matt. 25:15) and as the estimate of a stone’s weight, “about one hundred pounds each” (Rev. 16:21, see marg.)”⁴.

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0008** Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979).
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).

Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.