

Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #68

The Tragedy of Wasted Opportunity

Matt 25:14-30

Introduction:

1. Jesus repeatedly called on men to make the most of spiritual opportunities.
Joh 12:35 Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. 36 While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.
2. The tragedy of wasted opportunity is the theme of Jesus' parable of the talents
 - a. This is the second of two parables relating to the kingdom of heaven and man's readiness for Jesus' coming to establish the kingdom at His second coming (see [Matt. 25:1](#)).
 - b. The parable of the virgins focuses on readiness manifested in waiting, and this parable focuses on readiness manifested in working
 - c. The five virgins who had oil for their lamps represent believers who possess saving grace
 - d. The two faithful servants who invested their talents represent believers who exhibit the serving life.
3. Together the two parables depict the balance of believers' looking forward to His coming with anticipation while living in preparedness for His coming through faithful service.
4. Frequently one or the other of those precepts either is lost or overemphasized.
5. Although believers are to rejoice continually in the prospect of their Lord's coming again, they are not to sit back in idleness and do nothing.
 - a. Saving faith is serving faith.
 - b. It was perhaps because they thought the Lord was coming momentarily that some of the believers at Thessalonica fell into undisciplined, careless living and decided to do no work at all.
 - c. Consequently they became busybodies who did nothing productive and even disrupted the church.
 - d. Paul rebuked them severely
2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. "to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." He then admonished the whole church not to "grow weary of doing good"
6. Peter challenged mockers who had the opposite problem.
 - a. They were so convinced that the Lord would *not* come soon that they abandoned all moral restraint - ([2 Pet. 3:3-4](#)).
 - b. Peter reminded them that the people of Noah's day responded in the same way to Noah's prediction of the Flood, which came upon them suddenly and at a time they did not expect. In the same way, the apostle declared, Christ will appear suddenly in the end time, bringing the "judgment and destruction of ungodly men" ([vv. 5-7](#)).

I. The Responsibility We Have – vs 14-15

- The endowments for each servant were assigned by their master

A. The Cause for the Responsibility – “travelling”

14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

1. The leaving of the master caused the assigning of the endowments.
2. The leaving and absence of the master portray the leaving of Christ from the earth to go to a far country (heaven) for a time.

B. The Control of the Responsibility – “delivered unto them”

1. A wealthy person often would have special slaves who functioned as overseers of his household and managers of his business
 - a) *In some cases the slave might be better educated and more skilled than the master was*
 - b) *Joseph in the OT was a slave like this*
 - c) *Highly trusted slaves might have a virtual free hand in certain areas of responsibility even when the owner was at home*
2. The endowments were in complete control of the Master.
3. The endowments belonged to Him and He gave the care of them to whom He would.
4. God is the Sovereign of our call. God calls us

C. The Capacity in the Responsibility

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.

1. Talents always refer to weight of money
 - a) *The value of the amount depended on the metal that was being dispersed*
 - b) *A talent of gold was more valuable than a talent of silver*
 - c) *The value here is not important for the point that Jesus is making*
 - d) *There is common accountability for differing levels of responsibility based on individual ability*
2. The Master was the Sovereign in the calling, but there was a guide which the Master used in dispersing these endowments.
 - a) *It was "according to his [each servant] several ability."*
 - b) *God endows us with responsibilities which match our abilities.*
 - c) *He does not give us tasks to do which we cannot do.*
 - d) *God knows what we can/cannot do and assigns us tasks accordingly.*
3. Our responsibility is simply to do what He tells us to do, knowing that any assignment He gives us we can do.
4. Jesus only mentions three levels of responsibility but these are representative of a wide range of levels of responsibility
5. Even among the 12 there were levels of responsibility
 - a) *Peter, James and John were the inner circle*
 - b) *Peter was prominent in that group*
6. The issue in this parable is what each servant does with the talents afforded him

BYZ **Matthew 25:14** Ὅσπερ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἀποδημῶν ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους, καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ·

Going into another country (apodēmōn). About to go away from one's people (dēmos), on the point of going abroad. This word in ancient use in this sense. There is an ellipse here that has to be supplied,

BYZ **Matthew 25:15** καὶ ᾧ μὲν ἔδωκεν πέντε τάλαντα, ᾧ δὲ δύο, ᾧ δὲ ἓν, ἕκαστῳ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν· καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν εὐθέως.

According to his several ability (kata tēn idian dunamin). According to his own ability. Each had all that he was capable of handling. The use that one makes of his opportunities is the measure of his capacity for more. One talent represented a considerable amount of money at that time when a denarius was a day's wage

II. The Reaction We Have – vs 16-18

- Here we look at how the servants attended their assignment.

A. The Diligence

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

- The first two of the three servants involved here were diligent with their endowments of their master's substances.
 - Perspiration in the diligence - "Traded."
 - The word translated "traded" means "to work, labor, do work"
 - The stewardship of their endowments required hard work.
 - If you want to accomplish anything for the Lord, you will have to work no matter how great your endowment.
 - Profit - "Made them other five talents... gained other two."
 - The one with 5 talents was eager to serve his master and he immediately went to work
 - There is more here than just investing the talent and watching it grow – there is more work than that
 - He used to full advantage all the resources that the master had given him and gained 5 more
 - The servant with 2 talents had less to work with
 - He performed just as faithfully as the first servant
 - He doubled his master's money
 - The diligence of these two servants was great enough to double the endowments.
 - These two servants were good stewards of their endowments.

B. The Delinquency

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

- The third servant did not perform well at all.
 - Energy in the delinquency – "Digged in the earth."
 - Digging requires effort.
 - Hiding valuables in the ground was common in Bible times – no banks / safe deposit boxes
 - Strange as it may seem, delinquency in the Lord's work requires effort.
 - If folk would put forth as much effort to do right as they do to do wrong, they would do much better in life.
 - Hiding valuables in the ground is not a sensible way to do business and earn a profit
 - Embarrassment in the delinquency - "Hid his lord's money."
 - The servant was ashamed to show his endowments or let his faith be seen.
 - Such folk want to be secret disciples, but secret disciples do not honor God and do not do much for God.

III. The Reckoning We Face – vs 19-27

- The day of reckoning eventually came when the servants would have to report on the stewardship of their endowments.

A. The Return in the Reckoning – vs 19

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

- The return of the master means a reckoning for the servants.
- The return of the master was "after a long time."
- This was a real test for the servants.
 - The flesh has a tendency to become unruly during long waiting periods spiritually.
 - As an example, the Israelites misbehaved (they worshiped the golden calf and behaved very sinfully—[Exodus 32:1-7](#)) when they lost patience waiting for Moses to come down out of the mount where he was conversing with God.

BYZ **Matthew 25:16** Πορευθεῖς δὲ ὁ τὰ πέντε τάλαντα λαβὼν εἰργάσατο ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἄλλα πέντε τάλαντα.

He worked (ērgasato), did business, traded with them. "The virgins wait, the servants work" (Vincent).

BYZ **Matthew 25:17** Ὡσαύτως καὶ ὁ τὰ δύο ἐκέρδησεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἄλλα δύο.

BYZ **Matthew 25:18** Ὁ δὲ τὸ ἐν λαβὼν ἀπελθὼν ὥρυσεν ἐν τῇ γῆ, καὶ ἀπέκρυψεν τὸ ἀργύριον τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ.

BYZ **Matthew 25:19** Μετὰ δὲ χρόνον πολὺν ἔρχεται ὁ κύριος τῶν δούλων ἐκείνων, καὶ συναίρει μετ' αὐτῶν λόγον.

Maketh a reckoning (sunairei logon). As in Matthew 18:23. Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, p. 117) gives two papyri quotations with this very business idiom and one Nubian ostracon with it. The ancient Greek writers do not show it.

B. The Reporting in the Reckoning – vs 20, 22, 24

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. 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. 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:

- All the servants had to give a report.
 - We will all have to answer to God – Rom 14:12
1. Report of Faithfulness
 - a) *In It were Dividends*
 - (1) One gained five the other gained two – vs 20,22
 - (2) They both doubled their endowments
 - b) *In It was Deference*
 - (1) "thou deliveredst unto me"- vs20
 - (2) They both acknowledged that their endowments were gifts from the master.
 2. Report of Failure
 - a) *In it was Disobedience – vs 24-25*
 - (1) "I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth" ([Matt 25:24,25](#))
 - (2) He disobeyed / hid the talent instead of trading it and doing business with it
 - b) *The Report was Defaming*
 - (1) "reaping where thou hast not sown" ([Matthew 25:24](#))
 - (2) This servant unjustly criticized the master as being hard, unfair, and cruel (saying he was afraid implied the master was cruel).
 - (3) The failing servant would blame the master for his failure.
 - (4) Many folk blame God for their failures, but in so doing they only confess their disobedience.

C. The Rewards for the Reckoning – vs 21, 23

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. 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.

- The rewards were for the two servants who gave a good report
1. Performance for the rewards - "Well done."
 - a) *The good servants made a profit for the Master.*
 - b) *The attitude of the servant as well as the accomplishment was being rewarded*
 2. Persistency for the rewards - "Faithful."
 - a) *This was the praise for the servant's character, for his character had much to do with his performance.*
 - b) *Though one servant produced more than the other, they were both said to be faithful.*
 - c) *Do what you can do—that is all God requires.*
 - d) *The woman was criticized by the disciples but not by Jesus.*
 3. Principle in the rewards - -"Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."
 - a) *Sometimes we want to shirk our duty because it is not very big or impressive.*
 - b) *But be faithful in the little and you will be rewarded.*
 - c) *Often those little matters reveal our character more than the big*
 4. Promotion in the rewards - "I will make thee ruler over many things."
 - a) *Promotion comes to the faithful, not to the fitful / flashy / famous*
 - b) *The reason that many are never promoted by God is that they are not faithful to God.*
 5. Pleasure in the rewards - "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord."
 - a) *The joy of the Lord comes to the obedient and faithful in the Lord.*
 - b) *If you are lacking spiritual joy, your poor performance may be the reason.*

20 Καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ τὰ πέντε τάλαντα λαβὼν προσήνεγκεν ἄλλα πέντε τάλαντα, λέγων, Κύριε, πέντε τάλαντά μοι παρέδωκας· ἴδε, ἄλλα πέντε τάλαντα ἐκέρδησα ἐπ' αὐτοῖς.

21 Ἐφη δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ, Εὖ, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ, ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω· εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου.

The joy of thy lord (tēn charin tou kuriou sou). The word chara or joy may refer to the feast on the master's return. So in Matthew 25:23.

22 Προσελθὼν δὲ καὶ ὁ τὰ δύο τάλαντα λαβὼν εἶπεν, Κύριε, δύο τάλαντά μοι παρέδωκας· ἴδε, ἄλλα δύο τάλαντα ἐκέρδησα ἐπ' αὐτοῖς.

23 Ἐφη αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ, Εὖ, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ, ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω· εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου.

24 Προσελθὼν δὲ καὶ ὁ τὸ ἓν τάλαντον εἰληφώς εἶπεν, Κύριε, ἔγνων σε ὅτι σκληρὸς εἶ ἄνθρωπος, θερίζων ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρας, καὶ συνάγων ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισας·

That had received the one talent (ho to talenton eilēphōs). Note the perfect active participle to emphasize the fact that he still had it. A hard man (sklēros). Harsh, stern, rough man, worse than austēros in Luke 19:21, grasping and ungenerous.

D. The Retribution after the Reckoning

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.

- The master had nothing good to say to the servant who did nothing with his endowment.

1. Perniciousness for the retribution - "*Thou wicked and slothful servant*"
 - a) *Though he did some digging, he was still slothful in God's work.*
 - b) *He would not work hard to make a profit like the other two servants did.*
 - c) *He was wicked in that he besmirched his master's character unjustly*
2. Protesting in the retribution
 - a) *This servant had protested about the character of the master as an excuse to do nothing.*
 - b) *But if he was afraid of his master, as he said he was, why did he not put the money where it would gain some interest?*
 - c) *The servant's criticism is exposed here as unjustified.*
3. Possessions in the retribution.

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

 - a) *The wicked servant lost the endowment given him.*
 - b) *He can't complain, for he hid it in the ground.*
 - c) *If you do not use your endowments, you will lose them.*
4. Punishment in the retribution

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

 - a) *The Punishment Includes Sightlessness - "darkness"*
 - (1) The membership of any church will include true believers and pretenders
 - (2) Every church has tares that, except to God, are indistinguishable from the wheat
 - (3) Means lack of sight, hell is terrible and not being able to see will make it so much worse
 - b) *The Punishment Includes Sadness - "weeping,"*
 - (1) This servant was not just unfaithful, but he was faithless
 - (2) Hell is not a happy place
 - c) *The Punishment Includes Severity - "gnashing of teeth"*
 - (1) Speaks of severe pain, anguish, torment.
 - (2) Hell is not comfortable.

BYZ **Matthew 25:26** Ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Πονηρὲ δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὲ, ἦδεις ὅτι θερίζω ὄπου οὐκ ἔσπειρα, καὶ συνάγω ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόπισα·
Thou wicked and slothful servant (ponēre doule kai oknēre). From ponos (work, annoyance, disturbance, evil) and okneō (to be slow, "poky," slothful).

BYZ **Matthew 25:27** ἔδει οὖν σε βαλεῖν τὸ ἀργύριόν μου τοῖς τραπεζίταις, καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐγὼ ἐκομισάμην ἂν τὸ ἐμὸν σὺν τόκῳ.

BYZ **Matthew 25:28** Ἄρατε οὖν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ τάλαντον, καὶ δότε τῷ ἔχοντι τὰ δέκα τάλαντα.

BYZ **Matthew 25:29** Τῷ γὰρ ἔχοντι παντὶ δοθήσεται, καὶ περισσευθήσεται· ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ μὴ ἔχοντος, καὶ ὃ ἔχει, ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

YZ **Matthew 25:30** Καὶ τὸν ἀχρεῖον δοῦλον ἐκβάλετε εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον. Ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.
The unprofitable (ton achreion). Useless (a privative and chreios, useful) and so unprofitable, injurious. Doing nothing is doing harm.