

Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-15

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Defining Terms:

- slave
 - more like what we think of when we hear the word “servant”
 - not racially based, often entered into voluntarily
 - masters had to assume full responsibility for their servants’ welfare, offered security to servants who were often from very poor backgrounds
 - servants were the lowest people on the totem pole, obligated to obey their masters
 - but servants gained an important relationship, economic security, and a sense of self worth

- talent
 - literally a monetary unit, the biggest one, the greatest unit of accounting in Greek money
 - conservative estimate: a talent = over 15 years’ worth of earnings
 - generous estimate: a talent = a lifetime of wages
 - that’s just one talent!

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What do we learn about the man/master of the slaves in the above two verses?
 - wealthy, oddly trusting of the lowest people on the totem pole
2. Are there expectations for how the slaves are to use the property that has been entrusted to them?
 - entrusts wealth according to abilities, implies the expectation that those abilities be used
3. What kind of accountability measures are put in place to monitor how the slaves are using their master’s property?
 - none
4. How would you describe the master’s attitude toward his slaves, based on his actions?
 - generous and trusting

Matthew 25:16-18

¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What words are used to describe the response of the slaves with the five and two talents?
 - “went off at once” – immediate action

- “traded with them” – proactive, risk taking (what is required to take a risk?)
2. What words are used to describe the response of the slave with the single talent?
 - no immediate action
 - no risk taking (what does the lack of risk reveal?)

Matthew 25:19-23

¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What words does the master use to describe the first two slaves and their actions?
 - good and trustworthy
2. Which single adjective does the master repeat when he speaks to each slave?
 - trustworthy
3. Are there any parallels between verse 21 and verse 14 above?
 - the master entrusts, the slaves respond with trustworthiness
4. How would you describe the relationship that the master has with these two slaves?
 - a relationship with trust at its core
 - a relationship in which risks taken in good faith but which fail can be forgiven – hence, responsible risk-taking is empowered
5. What reward does the master give these two slaves?
 - more work and responsibility (“in charge of many things”)
 - the joy of the master

Matthew 25:24-25

²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What adjective does the third slave use to describe his master? Do you think this has any basis in what you have observed about the master up to this point in the parable? Do you think that this slave has correctly or incorrectly discerned the true character of the master?
 - harsh, the slave has misjudged the character of the master
2. If you were really afraid of your master, would you be so forthcoming as to make a character accusation against him, to his face?
3. What other reasons might have motivated this slave to hide his talent?
 - failure to understand the master’s good character leads to the lack of a joyful response
 - lack of mutual trust leads to an unwillingness to take risks, fear of punishment rather than trust in mercy

- laziness
4. According to the third slave, whose fault is it that the talent didn't multiply?
 - the master's

Matthew 25:26-30

²⁶But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?' ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What adjectives does the master use to describe the third slave? Why do you think he chooses these particular words?
 - wicked – a moral issue, not just a lack of hard work
 - lazy
2. Which words, used by the third slave in reference to the master, does the master repeat back to him, and which words does he leave out?
 - leaves out the word "harsh" – the master will not affirm that he is a harsh man
 - repeats the phrase "I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter" – the master does affirm that everything is his
 - the master owns everything, but that does not mean he is harsh – in fact, he is generous and trusting
3. Why do you think the master takes the one talent away from the third slave, the only one he had?
 - he was not trustworthy, you cannot trust someone with your stuff when they're not trustworthy
4. Why do "those who have" have what they have? Why do "those who have nothing" have nothing? Is it fair that the master widens that gap even further?
 - "those who have" are given their original "capital" by the master, then they respond with trustworthiness and multiply their master's wealth
 - "those who have nothing" are in that position because they didn't honor what they were once given
 - it is fair – the master is both merciful and just

Closing questions:

1. Who does the master represent? What does his departure represent? His return?
2. How do you now understand how we will be judged? Faith? Works?
3. Is this passage more about the quality of relationship, or about tasks?
4. How would you summarize, in just a sentence or two, this text's call upon our lives?