

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 25:14-30

Verses 14-18

So, a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability. Then he left. Immediately, the one who had received five talents, traded with them and gained five more. In the same way, the one with two gained two more. But the one who received one went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's silver.

Jesus continued his discourse on the end-times begun in 24:4. He addressed the situation the church would be in and how it should respond to his final coming.

The parable is quite simple. Just as the servants or slaves received the master's possessions, so does the Lord Jesus **entrust his possessions** to the church. It would seem that the master gave responsibility for **all that he owned** *υπάρχοντα* to his servants. It was an act of trust, hence **he entrusted** *παρέδωκεν* his possessions to them.

The talent, a direct transliteration of the Greek, was a weight of either silver or gold coins, the equivalent of 600 denarii, about \$150,000 in today's terms. Each servant received an amount **according to his own ability**, referred to by Paul when discussing spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6). The owner of the business was fair, not expecting more from each servant than he or she was able to do.

Immediately the first servant gets to work, trading, buying and selling goods so that he double his master's money. The second did the same. The third, however, **hid the owner's money in the ground**. He did no more work from that point on. Whereas the previous two servants acted with alacrity and conscientiously worked each day, this last servant did not care about the master's commission to him but could forget about it altogether.

Verses 19-23

After a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. The one who received five talents came forward and presented five more talents saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look at this, I have gained five more talents." His master spoke to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were diligent with a few things; I shall put you in charge of many things. Come and enter into the joy of your lord." The one having received two talents said, "Sir, you entrusted to me two talents. See, I have gained two more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were diligent with a few things; I shall put you in charge of many things. Come and enter into the joy of your lord."

After a long time (5) indicates the indefinite nature of the master's journey and return. Jesus often reminded his disciple of this (24:36,42,50; 25:13). It seems a little word but the verb **came** indicated that the master unexpectedly appeared to the servants.

The first two servants explained what was entrusted to them by the master so that the sums properly add up, after all, the owner of the business had come to them **to settle accounts**. They spoke with clear consciences and could proudly present the results of their hard work trading with the bags of money they were entrusted with. Each say, **look at this, I have gained ... more talents**.

To settle accounts, the master did not use a manager. He himself did this task. It was a personal act for one thing and for another he had handed over the wealth he had and left it behind for the servants to manage. Therefore, **he spoke** to them. He had brought them into his own business and the things that were essential to his operations. The way he addressed them has a finality about it, a verdict on their performance. Again, the likeness to Christ's final judgement is obvious.

Entry into **the master's joy** is conditional, which is understandable in a situation of business results. It is a parable about final judgement and so the master's response reflected this: **Well done, good and faithful servant. You were diligent with a few things; I shall put you in charge of many things.** The talents were obviously not the extent of the owner's assets. Having been **diligent** and trustworthy, the servants were promoted and given charge of numerous properties and investments. The owner considered the immense amounts of money to be **few things**! But the extra responsibilities were not the chief honour bestowed on the servants. The praise was significant because it expressed the warmth and the increased openness of the owner towards his servants. **Well done, good and faithful servant** expresses a high commendation from the lord. To put to use the large amounts of money was a test in the end. It was a test of their perseverance, talents and skills, and creativity. Above all, a test of their fidelity, which the master was particularly interested in. The relationship and feelings of the servants were the things that the master was more interested in, more than the actual achievements. The results were good but the integrity and the love of the servants towards their boss were the crucial things.

Come and enter into the joy of your lord cements the master's feelings towards his servants so that the circle is complete: it began with the lord trusting his servants with his precious wealth, then the servants responding to that trust by their own goodness and faithfulness, and finally, the boss's open-hearted response to them. For **the joy of their lord** is now way beyond a typical reward for good work carried out. Was this a rejoicing over the servants or the general happiness the master has and displays in his inner sanctum, perhaps the bosom of his own family and home? It would seem to be the latter for the initial commendation was for being good and faithful and being trustworthy with a few things. There followed another level of reward: **the joy of their lord.**

Verses 24

But the servant who had received one talent said, "Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering what you did not scatter. Being afraid, I went out and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you still have what is yours." His master said in reply to him, "Wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reaped where I did not sow and gathered where I did not scatter so you should have deposited my silver with the bankers and when I came I would have received it back with interest. Therefore, take from him and give it to the one having ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given and in abundance. But concerning the one who does not have, what he has will be taken from him. And throw this worthless servant into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."