

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-9-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then 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." ²¹ His 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." ²² And 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." ²³ His 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." ²⁴ Then 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; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." ²⁶ But 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? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For 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. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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

The "it" in v. 14 refers to the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the third in a series of three parables in Matthew 24-25. The first was the parable of the faithful or unfaithful slave (Matthew 24:45-51) in which Jesus explains that when a master goes away and leaves a servant (or slave) in charge, the conduct of the slave is important and the slave will either receive rewards or punishments based on their faithful or unfaithful service.

The second parable is the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, which we looked at last week (25:1-13). There, Jesus is allegorized not as a master, but as a bridegroom who is delayed in coming to his wedding banquet. Once again, the point seems to be that the conduct of those who await the bridegroom (the bridesmaids) makes a difference. Those who are vigilant and faithful will come in to the feast; those who fail to prepare adequately will find themselves left out in the cold without enough oil to get through the night.

Here, in this third parable, Jesus is once again allegorized as a master going away on a journey. The master entrusts his servants (slaves) with great wealth (a talent was equal to many years' wages—estimates vary from 2 years' to 20

years' worth of wages). Suffice it to say that 10 or 2 or even 1 talent would have been a substantial trust left by the master. The master entrusts the slaves not just with wealth, but with the master's business interests—they are to do what the master himself would do if he had been there. The "ability" mentioned is the Greek word *dunamis*, which is often translated as "power." It is the root word for our English word dynamite. This is referring to each slave's capacity to do work with the wealth entrusted. It could be physical power or ability, but the sense is that the master has a gut feeling of each slave's ability or power to carry out his work during his absence.

¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then 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." ²¹ His 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." ²² And 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." ²³ His 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." ²⁴ Then 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; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

Here a contrast is drawn between the two who "went off at once" to put their master's money to work and the one who buried the money instead. Keep in mind the expectation of the master here. What sort of person is the master? It depends on which slave you ask. The first two recognize the master as generous and seem eager to please the master and eager to put the money entrusted to them to work for the benefit of their master. The third slave, meanwhile, believes the master to be harsh and ruthless. The slave fears that if he loses the talent entrusted to him, he might face that master's wrath. But what do we know about this hypothetical master? His business depends on investment and returns on investment. He seems to be very openhanded in how he trusts those under him. He seems to reward both risk and, particularly, positive results from that risk.

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The master refers to the third slave in opposite terms from the first two—where they were good and faithful (here translated as trustworthy), the third slave is evil (wicked) and lazy (slothful; backward; hesitating; irksome). The gist of the master's comment here is "If my business consisted of keeping what I already had safe, I would have buried the talent myself and dug it up once I got back home! I entrusted it to you so that it could grow in value during my absence. The least you could have done was put the money in a safe, low-yield investment account. Even *that* would have earned *something* for me!"

²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For 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. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This saying about taking away from those who have nothing is not to discredit what Jesus has said elsewhere about helping those who have little or nothing. He is not promising complete annihilation for the poor and destitute by any means. Rather, he is explaining to his disciples that servants who prove to be lazy and untrustworthy with the business of the kingdom will never find themselves entrusted with true riches if they squander what little has been given to them to manage in the first place. The kingdom must grow and expand. Those who choose not to participate end up excluding themselves from sharing in the process. Salvation means not only that we are saved *from* sin and death, but also that we are saved *for* good works. Much has been entrusted to us and we are responsible to live wisely and faithfully.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. To which character(s) in the parable can you relate? Why do you think this is? Try to put yourself into the story in How does the meaning of the parable change?**
- 2. Which aspects of this passage trouble you the most? Which aspects of this parable give you comfort and hope?**
- 3. What implications do you think this passage had for the early church? What implications does this passage have for the church today?**