

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Got Talent?

Matthew 25:14-30

Written By

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In the early 1970s, a friend of mine celebrated the start-up of his new dental practice by purchasing \$10,000 worth of a new stock fund called Magellan. His goal? To only touch the money when he retired. By the time he closed the doors on his successful business that account now had close to \$100,000 in it. I'd say he made a wise, strategic financial investment.

Profit. That is what most people are looking for in life, and, as you might guess, it is the very thing God wants to see in our lives prior to His glorious arrival. Once you are saved, He desires for you to invest your life in spiritual ways which enhance and enlarge His kingdom in the here and now. All of this leads me, as a shepherd, to ask you some personal questions: How are you doing in your walk with God? Is your life a living, flesh and blood example of sound spiritual investing, or are you pretty much where you were ten, fifteen years ago? Here's another: Is your Christian walk really making a qualitative difference in your life, in your family, in your culture, and in ... well ... you fill in the rest.

I know Jesus is concerned about our spiritual bottom line because of what He said on the Mount of Olives toward the end of His earthly ministry. In parabolic, story-form, Jesus gave us the *Parable of the Talents* in chapter twenty-five, verses fourteen to thirty to definitely underscore the concept that our lives should accomplish much for Him prior to His glorious return to earth. As we read through and study these words, the central message can be summed up this way:

Strive To Be Spiritually Profitable, Not Unprofitable (Matt. 25:14-30)

A cursory reading of this parable easily reveals there are two types of Christ-followers: Those who parlay what God has entrusted to them into greater spiritual assets, and those who don't. Yes, I know the context speaks about Israel during the seven year Tribulation (Matthew 24). Yes, I know Jesus is telling them what their attitude should be prior to His Second Coming. In a word, they should, at that time, live in a state of spiritual readiness. As He taught in Matthew 24:44:

“For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.”

With the *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Jesus illustrated how some Jews will be prepared for His coming as the Bridegroom and others won't be (Matt. 25:1-13). Although the eschatological (end-time) message is primarily for them, its over-arching timeless principle still applies to us during the Age of Grace: *Be prepared for His revelation*. You don't want to be caught napping, as I said in our last study.

Moving to the *Parable of the Talents*, we ostensibly have the same timeless application. As before, we have a direct application to Israel in the Tribulation. While they are waiting for the Messiah to appear, they should be engaged in expanding His kingdom while the Anti-Christ lives and reigns on earth. Ostensibly, this shows us that light can overcome and overpower darkness even in the darkest of eschatological days. Surely, this principle is applicable in this age of grace as we, the Church, battle against the forces of evil. Yes, we are to stand for spiritual/moral truth, at all costs, in order to hold evil in check, and sometimes our greatest opportunity for accomplish God's purposes is realized when God's people exercise their Constitutional right to vote. Yes, voting for people, regardless of their political party, who espouse or give credence to Judeo-Christian values, is one major way we can evidence change as carnality seeks to move onward and downward. Are you doing your part in bringing light where there is darkness? You, then, are classified as we see in this particular parable as a profitable disciple of Jesus Christ.

Some people, however, who in this passage probably denote the spiritually lethargic and legalistic Pharisees, will choose to do nothing to benefit the Messiah's kingdom. The result will be tragic for them, but the truth still carries weight for us in this Age of Grace. Reward or forfeiture of millennial reward awaits those who work hard or hardly work for Christ prior to the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Paul spoke of the future judgment of saints in a variety of places (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), and each of these references is built on the premise of reward for service, a motif developed clearly by Jesus himself (Luke 19:16-19).

Keeping this theological background information in mind, let's grab a spade and dig into the rich soil of this wonderful passage. First, we shall encounter the saints who make Jesus proud.

Some Saints Are Profitable (Matt. 25:14-23)



Jesus describes them in memorable fashion:

“¹⁴ For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.”

“For it is” points back to the “kingdom of heaven” in verse 1. What is it like? What will it be like? It will be like a wealthy man who leaves his servants in charge of His vast estate while he takes an extended journey. No doubt, the meaning here references Jesus heading to heaven and entrusting His bountiful resources to us. So far, He has been gone for 2,000 years; however, as we learn from the parable, He is coming back. What will He be looking for when He asks to talk with you? His laser beam focus will be on whether you invested His resources wisely, and/or increased the size of His kingdom by your tireless, faithful efforts ... or not.

From verses 14 through 23, we can isolate three characteristics of worthy saints. Use them like a plumb line to see if your life needs a little straightening out.

First, *profitable saints see their resources*. What resource is in view here? A talent. What is a talent? Good question. In Jesus’ time it was a unit of weight measurement of either gold, silver or copper (Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*: 803).¹ Note the Lord gave each servant differing amounts of talents based upon their ability, stressing the fact He implicitly knows how they are wired. He gave them exactly what He knew they could handle given their personal strengths and weaknesses. Barclay takes this one step further with this cogent observation: “Men are not equal in talent, but men can be equal in effort” (William Barclay: *Matthew*: 323).

Now, assuming gold “bars” were left, then, in separate bags for each servant, we have here what a typical servant would make in sixteen years of service (www.bible.org, Hampton Keathley IV, *The Talent*: 1). Yes, you read that right. What does this tell you? It emphasizes that Jesus has showered amazing, costly resources down upon your life. Some have many, some have a little, but they are all priceless and plentiful. Question is do you see them?

- For some, He has entrusted large sums of money to you. And you thought you acquired them through your business acumen. Well, to a degree, but ultimately you have what you have because He has loaned them to you to do His bidding, not yours.
- For some, He has given the ability to teach children about Him.
- For some, He has given the ability to boldly share your faith and bring many people into His Kingdom.

¹ Walter Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988): 2138: *Talent*. Exodus 38:25, 26 makes it clear that the talent was equal to 3000 shekels, but it is unclear how many minas were in a talent. As a result, it is unknown whether 3000 represents 60 minas of 50 shekels each, or 50 minas of 60 shekels each. Whichever the case may be, excavated talents weigh from about 65 to 80 pounds. In the OT the talent is only used for precious metals, usually silver or gold (but cf. Ex 38:29, bronze). In 1 Kings 10:14 the annual tribute income of Solomon’s kingdom was 666 talents, which apparently was considered quite extravagant. David bequeathed 100,000 talents of gold and 1,000,000 talents of silver to Solomon for the building of the temple (1 Chr 22:14).

- For some, He has given the ability to lighten the load of others by your selfless spirit.
- For some, He has given the ability to write and expound His rich truths to the Church at large benefits.
- For all of us He has entrusted to us the duty of serving within His local church to mature saints and show the lost His love.

Yes, each of us possesses amazing resources we are supposed to be using to increase the size of His spiritual kingdom on earth. Profitable saints, wise saints realize what their resources are and where they came from. They humbly know these resources are on loan from God, and they are given with a distinct, divine purpose in mind.

I'd like to suggest that you who claim the name of Christ slow down long enough today to ask the Lord this one question: "Lord, enable me to see all of the resources you have placed in my life. Help me to identify each one of them." Why would you want to do this? Because it's the action of a profitable servant, and because of identification should lead to actualization.

Second, *profitable saints take risks* (Matt. 25:16-17). Moses was endowed with leadership ability, despite his physical speech impediment. He took a definite risk in appearing before Pharaoh to request he release the Israelites to him. Joshua was endowed with military ability. He took a definite risk in crossing the Jordan with a rag-tag army of ill-equipped Israelites. Daniel was endowed with faith. He took a definite risk in standing tall while everyone else knelt before the great idol built by the godless king. Let there be no doubt about it. Profitable saints see their God-given spiritual resources and then take definitive action for God. The saints of the parable before us are no different.

"Immediately" stands emphatically at the head of the sentence in Greek to emphasize how godly, profitable saints behave. No grass grows under their spiritual feet once they know what their resources are. Immediately they put those resources to work in ways which could potentially prove disastrous,

“¹⁶ Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more.”

Any time you start trading money there is risk involved because of market shift and change. There is also a chance for realized, amazing gains. Back in 2011, had you placed \$10,000 in a couple of the following funds, you would have had \$100,000 within two years. Consider the gain percentages of some of the supersonic stocks: Crocs (1347% gain), Ruby Tuesday (1.072% gain), La-Z-Boy (1016% gain) to name a few.²

Yes, the servants who quickly invested the monies could have lost them, however, they went for it, knowing their Master was looking for them to increase their resources and expand the size of His estate. Their risk paid off, too. They enjoyed a 100 percent net gain. Not bad for two Jewish slaves.

What are our talents? Three things: Time, talents, and treasures. Each day, each moment of each day, we should be individually concerned with taking these three resources and

² <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/perfi/columnist/krantz/2011-03-29-two-year-stock-gains.htm>.

using them to the glory of Jesus Christ. Why? Because He is looking for us to invest them so they can be exponentially increased before He appears to settle accounts with us. So, go ahead. That a hard look at your time, your talents, and your treasures and ask yourself this pointed, pragmatic question: Are they properly invested in the work of God's kingdom?

The profitable servant doesn't have to be begged to serve at church. No he steps up to the plate willingly and excitedly. The profitable servant doesn't have to be reminded to include his Christless neighbors in his life because he knows this is the right thing to invest his time in. The profitable servant doesn't miss an opportunity for corporate worship because He naturally wants to be with God's people, lifting up His holy name and learning how to walk with Him. A profitable servant doesn't have to be coaxed to tithe because it comes natural to him. A profitable servant knows the God-given resources he has in his life and he excitedly looks for opportunity to use them inside and outside the local church. Believe me, as we grow numerically, we are going to need more saints to utilize these resources for the advancement of the kingdom.

The late Larry Burkett is well-known for his impact in the field of Christian financial planning, and because in founding Crown Financial Ministries. Most, however, don't know anything about his life prior to him emerging on the Church stage.

In the 1960's Larry was a successful electrical engineer. He made a lot of money because his company was linked with the NASA Apollo mission. However, in his soul, he just didn't feel like he was investing his life as God desired. So, in the early 1970's he sold his company for \$2 million, gave all the proceeds to Christian ministries, and *then* he poured his life and efforts into Christian Financial Concepts.

The Lord called Larry home in 2003, and I'm sure the Lord was quite pleased with his performance because through his selfless gift to charities and impact on the Church at large countless lives were changed forever, and God's kingdom was expanded and enlarged (Terry Parker, *Investing In God's Business*: 17). Or in parabolic language, ol' Larry turned five talents into ten.

I've seen Larry types throughout my pastoral career.

In my first church in Arizona, they assigned me to do Monday night visitation with a man I'll call Ian. I'll never forget how he was dressed when I showed up to get to work checking up on wayward sheep. He had on plaid shorts, a colorful and flowery Hawaiian shirt, sandals, and a circular, well-worn straw hat. Believe me. Nothing he had on matched. Everything he had on probably repelled people from coming back to worship with us. And his car was another matter. Ever seen a Datsun B-210? The blistering desert heat had taken its toll on the paint job, for sure. Again, I thought, "We're going visiting in that?" We did on many occasions, and on those drives I learned I was in the presence of a godly, giving man.

When we launched our church building program to accommodate growth, the Senior Pastor, Glenn Lawson, called me into his office before our big dinner fund drive. He said, "Marty, I want you to look at something so you can learn a lesson." With that he lifted up a check for \$90,000. It was from Ian. With a building budget of \$275,000, that one gift put us well on the way to raising all we needed to in order to build the new buildings we desperately needed. And one devoted disciple who desired to use the financial resources God had entrusted to him.

Makes me want to ask, "Who is the next Ian?"

Make me also want to ask, "What are you doing with your talents?" Wise servants are taking risks by investing them. Larry took a risk. Ian took a risk in his retirement. Will you?

Will you release your white-knuckled grasp on those talents to see lives can be impacted for eternity? The Church, universal and local, is waiting for you.

Third, *profitable saints anticipate returns* (Matt. 25:19-23). I make this point based upon Christ's words:

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And the one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' ²² The one also who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'"

Jesus is coming back for the Church. The Scriptures categorically teach this truth is an imminent reality (Philippians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9). And when He appears it is to settle accounts with His servants. That's us. What greater thing could you offer the King when you see Him than the fact you used His resources loaned to you to accomplish much for Him? I can't think of anything. What greater thing could Jesus say to you than, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master." "Well done" ... not "What have you done?"

For those who invest their spiritual and physical resources for the advancement of God's Kingdom, there are words of deep appreciation and also tangible reward, "I will put you in charge of many things." Just what is this in reference to? Since the Tribulation is contextually view (Matthew 24), this most likely denotes placement in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, which follows the Tribulation. Interestingly enough, the word in verse 21, *put in charge*, is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint/LXX) for giving a person political power over nations (viz., of Joseph being made second in command of Egypt, Genesis 41:41; and of Daniel placed as the rule just beneath the king of Babylon (Daniel 2:48). Based on this word usage I think it's safe to say that profitable servants will be given rulership rights in Christ's long-awaited kingdom on earth. A new government is talked about in the prophets (Psalm 2:6-9; Isaiah 2:1-5; 11:4ff; Jeremiah 23:5), and Israel and the Church will give political leadership to it, as well as enjoy it (Zechariah 8:20-23; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:14-27; 1 Corinthians. 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

In the *Parable of the Minas* (Luke 19:11-27), which is quite similar to the parable before us in many respects, Jesus says to those who faithfully invested their resources:

"Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little things, you are to be in authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17).

Jesus promises, therefore, to put profitable servants in charge of cities when He establishes His reign. Isn't this an exciting concept? Look around you. I'm sure there will be a grandpa or grandma who lived right here and will be quite powerful there. Imagine moving from your

humble estate and position here as, let's say, a senior citizen, to be responsible for thousands of citizens. Unbelievable ... no, make that believable.

All of this leads to another logical question: What will your reward be when you see Jesus? Will you be given the unique privilege or ruling alongside Him over a portion of the earth, or will you be sweeping streets, as it were? Maybe if I couched this all in financial terms, it would pack more motivational punch.

Unfortunately, not everyone is excited about using their God-given resources for Christ.

Some Saints Are Unprofitable (Matthew 25:18, 24-30)

I'm sure you've heard of the 80/20 principle where churches are concerned. It means that on any given day, 80 percent of believers are watching 20 percent of believers doing all the work of the local church. And in some cases, from what I've seen in my lifetime, I'd say the stats might be more like 95/5. Which side of the equation are you on?

Verse 18 introduces to a servant content with the left side of the equation:

¹⁸ But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money

The unprofitable servant, like the profitable servant, understands he personally possesses costly resources from God. He'd never argue this point, for he knows it's a reality. However, he has no intention of using it, so he just hastily digs a hole and drops it in it and covers it up for safe keeping. Right.

When the Master of the home returns, things don't turn out like this servant anticipated. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

²⁴ And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.'

Have you ever heard a lame excuse? Here are some excuses you might like to try next time you are caught asleep during a really interesting class:

- They told me at the blood bank that this might happen.
- I'm testing one of the 15 minute power naps they raved about at the time-management course you sent me to.
- Whew! Guess I must've left the top off the white out. You got here just in time!
- Why did you interrupt me? I almost figured out a solution to our budget problem.
- The coffee machine is broken.
- Someone must have put the decaf in the wrong pot.

The problem with excuses is it's so easy to see right through them. The unprofitable servant's words here are nothing more than an unjustifiable excuse as to why he didn't increase his

Master's estate. The little pious pipsqueak squealed, "I thought you were such a mean-spirited Master, you know, a real tough guy, I was scared to do anything risky with your resources, so I just made sure I didn't lose any of them. Isn't that great? Aren't you proud of me?"

Do you see what this bellyacher just did? His words are an earmark of unprofitable servants. *Instead of taking risks, they look for blame.* He would fit well in our "I'm a victim" culture. He blames his inaction on his twisted view of his Master. How audacious! How cocky! How ridiculous!

How did the Master respond? He marshals the egregious evidence and lands into him:

²⁶ But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed. ²⁷ Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.

Did you catch that? The Master uses the man's own lame excuse against him. Kind of makes you swallow hard, doesn't it? Makes you recall the words of Jesus from an earlier teaching session about divine judgment in Matthew:

³⁵ The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. ³⁶ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment (Matthew 12).

Gulp. Will your excuses for what you don't use your spiritual resources as you should come back to haunt you in eternity?

Listen, you might fool me, other pastors and directors on staff, the elder council, and a host of Christians sitting around you as to why you don't properly use the resources entrusted to you, but you will never fool Christ. He can quickly and easily zero in on your spiritual problem. This is exactly what He does with the unprofitable servant. He moves right past the man's rude, illogical argument to the core of his spiritual problem: He's lazy.

A paltry two and a quarter percent interest from a bank would have been better than nothing, but this character was too lazy to get on his camel and make it do the local Jerusalem Mutual Bank. He was perfectly content to do nothing until His Master returned because he just didn't have the energy to do it. His inaction reminds me of the words from Proverbs:

¹³ The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square! (Proverbs 26).

Translated: "I can't work because a hungry lion might be lurking outside. Better to stay safe indoors." Lame, wouldn't you agree? Most excuses are.

How does the Master respond to the sinful servant? Does He coddle him? Try an understanding? No, with the sternness of General Patton, the Master bellows:

²⁸ Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be

taken away. ³⁰ And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The unprofitable servant doesn't gain a return, he loses everything. This is a second tale-tell earmark. He forfeits his resources, his position as a servant, and his prospect of dwelling with the Master. Speaking prophetically, this denotes what happens to Jews in the Tribulation who fail to serve the Lord, even though they are quite familiar with who He is. Dr. Thomas Constable highlights this when he skillfully writes:

“Does the unfaithful slave represent a believing or an unbelieving Jew in the Tribulation? In view of the punishment he received he must be an unbeliever (cf. 13:12). Everywhere else in Matthew's Gospel where the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" occurs it refers to the final condition of unbelievers (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51). The darkness outside (v. 30) contrasts with the joy inside the messianic banquet and kingdom (vv. 21, 23)” (soniclight.com, Matthew).

His lack of performance will cost him dearly.

Such is not the case for the Church, and this is where this parable heads in a different direction. The principle, however, is biblical that Jesus will judge our performance, or lack thereof, coupled with the motives behind our performance at His Judgment Seat (1 Corinthians 3). Are you ready for that day? Are you ready because you've been laboring or because you have been lounging? If you are not ready, I'm sure you have your excuses ready, at least.

- “Lord, there is a good reason why I never gave at least a 10% tithe. You know about my credit problems and about all the money I had to pay in alimony.” His reply, “No, you were lazy.”
- “Lord, you know what kind of schedule I kept at work, so there was no way for me to really serve at church.” His reply, “No, you were lazy.”
- “Lord, you know I worked in a godless environment for years. Had I piped up for you they would have had me for lunch.” His reply, “No, you were lazy.”
- “Lord, yeah, you really blessed my financial life, and, yes, I heard that story about Larry Burkett, but I had too many prior commitments to do what he did.” His reply, “No, you were lazy.”

And so on and so forth ...

Want to get privy to a known truth? If I can see through most of the excuses, I'm convinced Christ can. Your perpetual smoke screen isn't fooling anyone, so stop launching it right now and start becoming known as a profitable servant who uses his or her resources for the good of God's Kingdom.

In 2003 a successful, well-groomed, professional-looking electrical engineer appeared in the presence of Christ. I wonder what words he heard? Need we ask? He heard the choicest words any saint can ever hear from the mouth of Christ:

“ Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

Will you hear those words?