

Oasis

綠洲



CHRISTIAN GOSPEL DISCIPLES CHURCHES OUTREACH PUBLICATION
VOL. 40 NO. 1 DECEMBER 2020
Website – www.christiandiscipleschurch.org



The Parable of the Talents
Matthew 25:14-30
Message by Pastor Eric Chang

We continue in the exposition of God's word and we turn to the Parable of the Talents in Mt 25:14-30. It reads like this:

“For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property (his possessions); to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. So also, he who had two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

This settling of accounts is generally a picture of the judgment in the Bible. V20 reads:

“And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’”

I would like you constantly to notice the frequency of this word ‘more’. V21 continues:

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’”

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest (notice that is also the ‘more’). So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’”

NT Church and Full-Time Servants of God

This is a parable which is rich in meaning and powerful in content. Here the picture is of a household of a master and servants. This picture of a household is very common in the Bible. Earlier, in the last section of Matthew Chapter 24, you will notice that v45 onwards has exactly the same picture of a master and a whole group of servants, and there is one who is in charge of those servants, he misuses his authority to beat up some of his fellow servants, getting himself drunk and feasting himself, without any care for his fellow servants.

The picture of the church as a household is also very common in the NT. This concept is something that we need to grasp very clearly because it is so fundamental to the Scriptural teaching. Paul speaks about the “*the household of faith*”, for example, in Gal 6:10 and he speaks of “*the household of God*” in Eph 2:19. So, Paul is drawing on the Lord’s teaching about this household of which the Lord Jesus is the master and others in the household, that is, you and I, we are his servants. Now, in this sense, you will see that in the Lord’s teaching, all are servants. There are no exceptions. Within this household, everyone is a servant, serving the same master. Notice the word ‘servant’ – it is literally the word ‘slave’ in Greek, ‘δοῦλος’ (doulos), the well-known word for ‘slave’. Are there any part-time slaves? No, there is no such thing as part-time slave. The slave is always wholly, completely, the possession of his master.

Now, I would like you to catch a glimpse of the NT concept of the church. I say “catch a glimpse” because we may not have reached, spiritually, the stage in which we are yet able to implement it. But at least it is time for us to catch a glimpse of what the NT concept of the church is like.

Look carefully again at this picture. The Lord Jesus, of course, is represented by this master who is going away and who is going to come back. The Lord Jesus has gone to be at the right hand of his Father, and he is coming back again for us. That is the whole point of the parable. Notice its position after Matthew Chapter 24, speaking about the last things and

his coming again. And now he turns his attention to us, and points out that we are in his household and we are his servants.

We often like to stress our sonship much to the neglect of our responsibility as expressed in this idea of servanthood. But Paul delighted supremely in the title of being “a slave of Jesus Christ”. He does not speak of himself as a “son of God”; but he opens every letter with the words, “Paul, slave of Jesus Christ.” That word ‘slave’ is the same word as in this passage here. For Paul, that was the title of supreme glory. For him, it was even more precious than his adoption as son. It is remarkable. We would have expected that he would have begun with a statement, “Paul, a son of God”, but he does not use the term; he would rather speak of himself as a “slave of Jesus Christ”. And then he sees everyone in the church as a slave of Jesus Christ, living totally for him, as indeed every slave was totally the possession of his master, living totally for him.

If only we could seize hold of this concept of the NT pattern of the church as the household of God in which we are all fellow servants, we can forget about this distinction of some being full-time workers and others not full-time workers because all of us would be living for him. Everyone will have this responsibility of being a full-time servant of God and a slave of Jesus Christ. I feel our churches are full of part-time employees of Jesus Christ, not servants, not slaves of Jesus Christ. We clock-in in our spare time. We are spare-time attendants of the household of God. That is not the NT picture at all. If everyone in the church was a full-time worker of God and a true slave of Jesus Christ, every person could be trained as a full-time worker. Now think of a whole church all fully trained, fully equipped – not just some in the process of being equipped – but everyone fully equipped.

True Christian – A Life Living Totally for Christ

We are speaking about the NT idea in which no Christian lives for himself, but only for Christ. Let me show you in Paul’s writing, his concept of the Christian, lest you think that I am inventing all this. For example, in Rom 14:7-9, Paul is not talking about some high level specialized Christian workers but Christians in general. Earlier, in the context, he is

talking about relationships within the church and then he goes on to say: *“None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end (for this very purpose), Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”*

Is Jesus Lord in your life? If so, you live to him; you do not live to yourself anymore. You are answerable only to him. Your whole life is lived with him as its direction. You live to him! If you claim to be a real Christian, can you honestly say that that is the direction of your life: that you live to him?

If this is not plain enough, let us turn to 2 Cor 5:15 to make sure that we have understood the matter perfectly. Here, Paul writes, *“And he (that is, Jesus) died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”* He died for us! He died for you, that you do not live for yourself anymore, but for him. He died for me, that I do not live for myself anymore, but for him. Can you honestly say, if you say that you are a Christian and that Christ died for you, that from now on you live for him?

Now think of this, brothers and sisters. If in the church, all of us are living for Jesus, then where is the distinction between a full-time worker and a non-full-time worker? Where is the distinction? Do you mean that the full-time worker lives more for Jesus? Well, in the state of affairs today in the church, it does indeed look like that the full-time worker lives more for Jesus. But is that what it should be? What does the Scripture say? It says that if Jesus died for you, if he truly died for you, you do not live for yourself anymore. Let me ask you: Can you and do you honestly dare to say that that is true in your life? Now if you live for him day by day, moment by moment, then that is a full-time worker. How else would you define a full-time worker?

Being a full-time worker does not necessarily mean that he will not be engaged in any form of employment. That is not the Scriptural sense of a full-time worker. It is well known that Paul often, when financial ne-

cessity arose, engaged in working with his hands, doing a job to earn his own living. Similarly, the First Full-Time Training Team who serve in the church in Hong Kong, also engage in jobs: some in teaching, some in the lab, in chemical research, and others are doing various different things. These are jobs for them. They can apply their learning just to earn their living. But for them, they live for Jesus. The moment there is a necessity in the Lord's work, the job is gone! Immediately! [For example,] when one of them discovered that his job was taking too much of his time so that he was no longer able to concentrate on getting on with the Lord's work fully, he immediately resigned from his job. He decided that he would look for something less time-consuming, so as to give more of his time to the Lord, so that even when he was engaged in that job, he was doing it for the Lord. His direction of life was for Jesus. So, how does he differ from anyone else in the team? Nothing! No difference at all!

When those of the present (Second) Full-Time Training Team go back, they will, according to the necessity of the situation, take up their own jobs for a time. For them this is simply a way of maintaining their livelihood. The direction of life is living for Jesus. The moment the Lord's work requires it, all of them will immediately drop their jobs. Their commitment is not to the job; their commitment is to the Lord. Now if this is true for them, how does it differ for any other Christian?

If you are engaged in a job, is that your priority? If that is your priority, how do you live for Jesus? Now try to think of the concept of a church in which everyone lives for Jesus. That is how it should be, is it not? Is the Scripture not perfectly plain about that? That is how it should be. Let us grant that by God's grace, this Scriptural teaching will become a reality in our midst, where not only the Full-Time Training Team, but everybody in the church will function just in the same way as the Full-Time Training Team functions. In fact, do you know that the Full-Time Training Team is meant merely to be a model, a nucleus for the church as a whole? It is meant to show, as it were, like pioneers, the path for the whole church to go because that is the way the NT church functions.

You may be in your job; that is okay. But are you prepared when the

Lord requires it, when the spiritual strategy of warfare requires it, that you go somewhere else and do another job? “Sure! I’ll go! I am at the Lord’s disposal at any time. I am available for his service” Will you say that? Is that attitude primary and foremost in your life? That is vital for you to think about. Now if that is your thinking, then you are no different from the Full-Time Training Team because that is their attitude. And if that is your thinking, we are on the way to building a NT church, in which every person genuinely lives wholly for Jesus. I say ‘genuinely’ because I know most Christians are only prepared to beat around the bush when they say, “Oh, yes, I’ll live for Jesus.” I doubt, if closely questioned, that that kind of a statement can be sustained in the lives of many Christians. I am very blunt when it comes to speaking the words of the Gospel.

So, let us try to capture, by the grace of God, this vision of the church of the NT. No wonder the NT church could turn the world upside-down! Everyone could see their devotion to God. When people look at your life, are they drawn by your devotion? Or do you just pour forth impressive spiritual-sounding language? Do you even do that much in your place of work or in your school? When you get to school, you are a coward and you are so embarrassed at being a Christian that you hardly open your mouth at all; your Christianity is for the church. When you come to church, then you put on the church gown. When you go to school, you put on the school gown, and that has nothing to do with the church. Is living for Jesus (2 Cor 5:15) a reality in your life? When your family, when your friends look at you, what do they see? “Wow! This guy really lives for Jesus. For him nothing else matters! His devotion is totally there! He does his job and he does it well, but his direction is for Jesus.” Would that God grant us such a church in these days, because until then, the world will not bat an eye with all our talk about Christianity!

Every Servant Is Entrusted with Talents

What is the next thing we see from this parable? In this household, everybody is equally committed. Everybody has a job and a responsibility within this household. The Lord did not give talents to only some and

none to others. Everyone in the household has been entrusted with a certain responsibility.

The word ‘talents’ here is simply a term for a particular sum of money. In fact, the word ‘talent’ began as a weight of silver or of gold. So, in the OT you can read about a talent of gold or a talent of silver or a talent of brass. It has nothing to do with the English word ‘talents’, meaning: having abilities or gifts. It is simply that ‘talent’ is a weight, and that became the term for a certain sum of money.

In fact, a talent was a very big sum of money. You will see in the footnote of RSV that the talent was more than fifteen years’ wages of a laborer. Fifteen years’ wages! If you worked for fifteen years, then all the money you could save up would be equivalent to one talent. That is a big sum of money! Assuming that the average worker earns about \$20,000 in Canada and if you talk about fifteen years, then we are talking about something close to \$300,000. A quarter of a million dollars is an awful lot of money! A talent was a very, very big sum! In the old days, the transaction of states, between one nation and another, was talked about in terms of this great unit of monetary wealth called the ‘talent’. So, what is being indicated in this parable is that something of enormous value is being entrusted to us. One is being entrusted with five talents. Wow! If we are talking now in modern days, these would be in terms of millions

So, we can see that the Lord has entrusted something to us. But notice, in this parable, not all is entrusted with the same amount. One is entrusted with five, one entrusted with two, and one only with one talent. What is the decisive factor? What decides this matter? Well, the parable tells us that it is decided on the basis of each man as he is able. The Lord gave five to one, two to another, “*to each one according to his ability.*” (v15).

Natural Ability Can Be a Hindrance in God’s Work

‘Ability’, as in the NT, must never be understood solely in terms of natural ability. It is a great mistake to think in this way. The Lord does

not entrust one with more simply because he is naturally more able. Natural worldly ability in God's work is not necessarily always an asset. It can, in fact, become a hindrance. It can instill a lot of pride into one. People who are able are generally very conscious of their ability. You know your own capacity because you have many chances to compare yourself and your performance with others. You become fully aware of your ability. No matter how humble you try to be, it is very difficult to be humble when you know that you are better. You know you are good. I mean, at least Muhammad Ali was not trying to be super-humble when he said that he is the best; he is the number one. He used to blow his big horn. He was boastful. But he knew he was good. Some people know they are good and they say, "I'm really nothing." But in their heart they say, "I'm the best, but of course, I'm not going to say that." True humility comes when you do not deny the fact that you are good. If you are good, you are good; you do not have to pretend you are no good.

However, we have a genuine reason to be humble. The genuine reason is not the failure to recognize the reality of your ability, but recognize that in the realm of spiritual reality, your natural abilities do not necessarily advance the work of God; it is not necessarily that useful. In fact, it can be counterproductive because we tend to do things in our own way, relying on our own ability rather than doing things in God's way. When we are too confident in our own capacity, we tend to feel we do not need to trust in God. Whereas the person who is weak and recognizes his weakness and inability realizes he has to trust in God. So, it is very important for those who are capable, to learn the lesson that in the spiritual realm, in the realm of spiritual warfare, your ability is not that which counts. It is God's power manifested in you which counts.

Paul was a very capable person. You need only read his letters and you realize how intelligent and capable he was, both in management as well as in his profound insight into the Scriptures and into spiritual truth. Yet, because of that very ability, the Lord had to cripple him because he was simply too capable and too brilliant. That is why we read in 2 Cor 12:7 that a thorn had to be put, as it were, into Paul's flesh. It made him very uncomfortable. It weakened him greatly. When he pleaded with the Lord to remove this thing, the Lord would not remove it. The Lord said,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” [v8-9] And Paul understood it and he said, “I know it. It is because I am proud and I have to be kept humble. Therefore, from now on, I would rather rejoice in my weakness that the power of Christ may be manifested in me.” You see, Paul was a very capable person, but it began to be a hindrance to him, so this thorn had to be put into his flesh. Some of us have to be humbled in this way because this business of the ability goes to the head and begins to affect the way we function, and becomes a hindrance to the advancement of God’s work.

Spiritual Capacity Increases Through Faith

So, now we understand that when the Lord distributes these talents to the various servants, it is not based on the matter of natural ability. This word translated ‘ability’ is the Greek word for ‘power’: each man according to his power, his spiritual capacity. Now spiritual capacity is the key idea here. Clearly, you give or entrust a certain responsibility to a person according to his capacity. As I have illustrated this before, you do not put power in the hands of a person who is not really capable of using that power. For example, you do not put a live hand-grenade in the hands of a twelve-year-old or a five-year-old child. A twelve-year-old may be quite sensible, perhaps, but you cannot entrust it to him. He might just one day get so angry – the temptation is there – that he pulls the pin out, out of spite. As for the five-year-old – definitely no way! He has no clue about what this thing is in his hand. He might think that pulling this pin will have some interesting effect. He has not reached the moral capacity to cope with the responsibility of this explosive in his hand. It is not something to play around with. In the same way, when the Lord entrusts things to us, he must look at whether we have reached the capacity where we can handle the situation.

It is very important for us also to grasp that this capacity is not a fixed thing in the Bible. The Scriptural evidence constantly indicates that you can increase the capacity. That is, you may start out as a one-talent man, spiritually speaking, and go on to becoming a two-talent man and onto a five-talent man. Now the word here is: *“to each one according to his ability”* – his very own ability or power – ‘own’ does not mean that we

have power in its innate sense, in which somehow we were born with this, or predestined with this.

In Lk 1:17, it speaks about “the spirit and power of Elijah” – the power of Elijah – there you have the same word in the Greek as it is translated here as ‘ability’. What is Elijah’s power? Did he generate this power in himself? No! When we speak of the power of Elijah, we mean God’s power as functioning in Elijah. So, fundamentally, the power is God’s, but it is the power of God in Elijah. Therefore, it can properly be called Elijah’s power. It has been given to him by God. It is in a sense truly his.

Now this ability or power is not something predestined, that God somehow predestined some people to be able to have five talents and others to two talents. That is not Scriptural teaching at all. The Scriptural teaching is indeed that every person can rise to the level of Elijah and have the power of Elijah within himself. What is the determining factor? To answer this, let us look at Rom 4:20, “*No distrust made him (that is, Abraham) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.*” Notice the words “*he grew strong*” is ‘ἐνδυναμόω’ (endunamoō) in the original; it means ‘increase of power’. It is of the same cognate as this word translated as ‘ability’, the same word as the word translated as the ‘power’ of Elijah. They are all the same word. Abraham stood in the face of the challenge of the reality of Sarah’s barrenness, which would seem to make God’s promise impossible, that his descendants couldn’t be numbered for multitude as the sand of the sea. Yet, having God’s promise, Abraham did not waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong by faith. The word ‘in faith’ or ‘by faith’ is the same in Greek. It does not make any difference here. It is the instrumental ‘in’ (instrumental dative). He grew strong by faith. Now this power then comes through faith. This point is made very clear.

Acts 9:22 has exactly the same thing. (Rom 4:20 is related to Abraham; whereas Acts 9:22 is related to Paul.) When Paul became a Christian, (but here, his name has not yet changed from Saul to Paul), he met strong opposition of the Jews. Acts 9:22 reads like this: “*But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.*” Now this word, trans-

lates here as “*increased...in strength*,” is exactly the same word as it is in Rom 4:20, ‘ἐνδυναμόω’ (endunamoō) from ‘δύναμις’ (dunamis), that is, “he grew strong”. Saul was growing strong. He did not start out that strong, but now he was increasing in strength through faith.

This point goes on right through the NT. You will find that, for example in Eph 6:10, and in Phil 4:13 where Paul says, “*I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*” There you have the same word again in the original. Paul is saying, “God increases my strength so that I can do all things.” [Phi 4:19, 2 Cor 12:11] Paul’s confidence in God is limitless. Paul is totally confident that God can do anything through him. Therefore, he can do anything through God. Now that is the kind of Christianity we need in the church. When your faith is of that kind, your faith is such that your strength increases through faith, then God can entrust more talents to you. This is very easy to understand.

Parable of the Ten Virgins vis-à-vis Parable of the Talents

Let us come to the central part of this parable. Last time, we saw in the Parable of the Virgins [Mt 25:1-13] that the whole parable hinged on the matter of the extra oil. The extra oil was what made all the difference. The five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins all had their lamps burning. There was no difference in that point whatsoever. But the whole difference was that five of them prepared for the age to come. Their extra oil was of no use in the present time. The extra oil only became useful in the age to come. The extra oil – that is where the whole thing mattered. How we try to expound the picture or to unravel the symbols, as it were, of this metaphor is not very important. The key idea lies in the word ‘more’ – the ‘extra’, the ‘increase’! What this means is what we need to look at in more detail.

Now all the virgins carried a lamp, as we saw last time: the lamp of life, the light of life. The burning lamp symbolizes life in the OT, in Proverbs, for example. When the lamp is burning, it symbolizes that you are alive. When the lamp goes out, the person is finished. He is dead! The lamp of life is extinguished. Now if we follow in this picture, of course, the vessel then would represent the body. The fire, the flame would rep-

resent the activity of a person who is alive. When he is dead, there is no more activity. The lamp goes out; the light, the fire ceases to burn. The oil, then, which is critical for the burning of the lamp, would represent life. And so, the picture would be that as the oil runs out, the life runs out, the fire goes out. It stops burning. If this is the picture that is understood in the Parable of the Virgins, then the extra oil would refer to life – an extra supply of life. Now this does not mean life within them. That is very important to grasp because this oil is not in the virgins, as we saw. It is oil that they bring along with them. What does all this mean? Well, in the Lord's parables, one has a way of explaining the other parable. Instead of using the picture of the extra supply of oil, the Lord now changes the picture to talents. Let us try to see what this means.

The picture here in the Parable of the Talents is virtually the same in the fundamental idea as in the Parable of the Virgins. What happens is this: they all started out with this being entrusted with certain talents. But what makes the difference is not at the present time. It is in the time of the accounting – at the time of the judging, at the time of the judgment – whether you could produce 'more'. It is exactly like the extra oil, whether you had 'more'. Now if you have five talents, there needs to be at least another five talents. If you have two talents, there needs to be another two talents. And if there is one talent, there needs to be another talent. Because the last servant did not have the extra, the 'more', he was in trouble. He is cast out into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He is finished! That servant is finished! Everyone had to have 'more.' You see the same basic idea, but now it is elaborated in greater detail.

Parable of the Pounds vis-à-vis Parable of the Talents

What are these extra talents? How are we to understand the picture? To understand the picture, let us compare the Parable of the Pounds [Lk 19:12-27] and the Parable of the Talents. I have expounded on the Parable of the Pounds before, so I shall not go through that again, but simply to look at the difference in order to bring out the meaning. Now, in the Parable of the Pounds, it stresses one aspect of the spiritual life, an

aspect which is a matter of empirical observation and is evident to all of us, and that is: basically we all start out the same. Each person begins with one pound. Everyone got the same one pound to start with.

What is the one pound compared to? This point is brought out in Scripture, for example in Acts 11:17, that we all equally have the same gift of life. All are equal to start with; all get the same pound to start with. We get the same spiritual life. We get the same Holy Spirit. The word translated in the English as ‘same’ in fact, is the Greek word for ‘equal’. There are different words for ‘same’ in Greek, but this word is the word for equality, of equal value – the life of equal value. The Gentiles and the Jews now have life. It is not that you and I have the same life in the sense of having certain sameness, but of being equal. God has treated each one equally by giving him the same Holy Spirit, the same life, this equal portion of life.

In 2 Pet 1:1, this same word for ‘equal’ appears again. We have the same faith, the same gospel. There the RSV translates the “*faith of equal standing*” quite correctly. So, we have, to begin with – you and I, we all got – one pound. When you came to the Lord, you got the same pound as I got when I came to the Lord. You got the same life through the Lord Jesus. You got the same gospel. You got the same Holy Spirit. Equal with me! I with you! No difference! We all started out the same.

What strikes me time and again is that everyone listens to the same message, same word, same teaching of the Lord Jesus, Sunday after Sunday, yet one becomes a spiritual giant, another is a spiritual pygmy, a spiritual dwarf, and another one is completely out of the picture altogether. How come? There you have the Parable of the Pounds. The one person got one pound like all the others and he ended up with ten pounds at the end of the day. The other one starts out with one pound and he ends up with five pounds at the end of the day. And another one starts out with one pound and he ends up with nothing! He even lost the one pound that he got! That is very true in the spiritual life, is it not?

Look at those who came to the Lord recently or who were baptized recently. They all look the same right now. But in five years’ time, the

difference can be very significant – one is way, way ahead; another is way, way behind; and some are somewhere in the middle. Yet they started out with the same thing. Did I hear a different gospel from you? No! I received exactly the same message. Did those in the Full-Time Training Team have a different gospel or a different message? They got the same message. The vital difference is in the difference of the response! And it is that which we call ‘faith’. The response! Faith is a response to God. It is that response which determines the power or ability. The power begins to vary and the difference gets wider and wider as time goes on.

Paul describes this in terms of a race. You start at the same starting point, right? You all heard, “On your marks, get set, go!” Bang! The gun goes! You all start from the same line. After a time, one is so far ahead, another one is somewhere in the middle, and another is way behind trying to catch his breath yet. Let us picture the situation, somewhere halfway between the starting point and the finishing mark, there comes the Parable of the Talents as a reality now. It is because by that time, one has got five; one has got two; one has got nothing. There you have exactly the situation. The person who has ten talents, did he suddenly, on the last day, get all ten talents? Or did he increase his talents or pounds steadily, building up all along, say, he had one pound on the starting day, a bit more the next day, two pounds by the end of the week, five pounds by next week, and so on? (There is no difference between pounds and talents. They are just different figure of speech, expressing the same basic idea.)

It Is All of Grace Through Faith

Now you may ask, “In this case, isn’t it the ten talents were all given to him?” “Or would he be earning five talents?” “Are all the extra talents given by the master or earned by the servant?” If you think like this, you have not yet understood the Scriptural principle. In the spiritual life, everything is of grace. There is nothing in the spiritual life that is not of grace. Paul said, “*I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*” So, fundamentally, everything he does is of grace: “It is through him that strengthens me.” If you got the five talents or pounds, did you do it of

your own strength? No, it was of grace, too. All the time, he was enabling you. Or as Paul puts it in Phil 2:13: “*God is at work in you, both to will and to work*”; it is with our co-operation. It is your faith that determines how much he will will and how much he will do in you. You see, that is vital! Your faith is the determining factor in this.

We see that the Parable of the Pounds indicates what the Christian life is about at the start. The Parable of the Talents has to do with somewhere further along in the Christian life, where there has been a continuing increase of power and things have begun to change. God is entrusting more and more to you. Did God entrust all that to you when you first started? In a sense, prospectively, “Yes.” Maybe right from the beginning, your response to God was fuller. But in some cases, people responded poorly at the beginning, but changed completely afterwards and had a very full response. So, the Parable of the Talents really describes something further along in the Christian life than the Parable of the Pounds. Yet, whatever we have of the increase, it is all of grace through faith.

Now this also means that within the church, of course, a gap widens out. This widening of the gap is what makes the difference in the Christian life. Stratification begins: some emerge as spiritual leaders because of their increased spiritual capacity through faith; others are further behind and some are non-functional at all in the church. There are many non-functional Christians in the church, unfortunately. Why? Is it because God is less kind to them? No, it is because their response to God is either very inadequate or non-existent. If these same people would throw away their obstruction to God’s grace, and commit themselves totally and unreservedly to God, they would have the same power as those who are presently the spiritual leaders or becoming the spiritual leaders. God will be entrusting more talents, more responsibilities and more gifts to them.

I have seen people who began with virtually the inability to preach. But God goes on and transforms them and anoints their lips and makes a preacher, a mighty servant out of a person who was a very unlikely candidate in human estimation. God can do amazing things with each one,

if only there is that response of faith to him without reserve. If you do not believe what I say, just test it. Put my word to the test. Put the Scripture to the test and see what God can do with you. There is nobody here that God cannot transform into a mighty man or woman of God. He can do marvelous things indeed!

There Has to Be the Increase of Talents

We now understand that there has to be the increase of talents, the increase of life. It is very important to notice in this parable. If God has entrusted something to you through Christ, whether it be the pound or the talent, when he has entrusted his life to you, [if] on the judgment day you are going to stand there and say, “Lord Jesus, I thank you for giving me eternal life. Now here is the life that you have given me, intact. You see, here it is. I’ve kept it safe for you,” [then] you are in trouble, my friend! Anybody who thinks that he will be saved simply because he has got the gift of life – that he can keep it to himself and he is okay – will be in trouble. You have not understood the Lord’s message yet.

We are given this life in Christ not just so that you can save your own spiritual neck, or that I can save my own spiritual neck. He gives me this life as a trust that I am his servant and you are his servant. If you have got that life, you are answerable to him for what you are going to do with that life. You have got to do something with life. Life is not there just for keeping. Life is something to be lived, something to be exercised. You have to do something with it. But if you do not do that, you are in trouble.

For so many of the Christians today, I dare not think what will happen to them on the judgment day. They are going to come to the Lord and say, “Thank you, Lord, for giving me life. Now I have kept it very safe all these years. I haven’t done anything with it; I’ve kept it very safe. I was afraid I would lose it and so I have kept it safe. Here, see? I’ve still got it!” Then the Lord will say, “Depart from me, you worthless, useless servant!” (The word translated ‘worthless’ there is ‘useless’ – useless servant.) You say, “Lord, don’t get angry. I’m giving back to you what you gave me. I know you are a hard man; you are a tough character, and

so I kept it safe. You see, I was scared that this very thing would happen. Now I am giving it back to you.” You will not get away with this because if God gives you eternal life, he means you to be a channel of that life, to pass it on to others, to live for others and for him.

Now you begin to see why we quoted these words at the beginning. If Christ died for you, he died so that you will no more live for yourself and you live for him. “Live for him” means that you channel the life that he has given to you onto other people. Think of it. How do you channel life? How do you have another pound, another talent? It is very easy! When you draw someone to Christ and you make another person a disciple of Christ by his grace, by his power, does the life in you diminish? Do you have less life in you? Of course not! Here is the wonder that happens! You still have got the life and that one also got the life through you. Now the one pound, the one life in you, has become two lives because you have brought another one to life. You have given him life; you have been a channel of life to him. Two lives now!

Thus, if you bring yet another person to the Lord and he becomes a disciple of the Lord, that life that started out as one in yourself now becomes two, now becomes three, and then maybe four, five, six, seven, . . . ten! Do you see now what it means? Extra oil! Extra talent! Extra pound! There it is! That is the extra one. You have got the one still with yourself, right? The life is still in you. Now there is another life in there, there is another life in the next one, and another – all starting with you transmitting the life to the next one. The Parable of the Pounds and the Parable of the Talents are very easy to understand.

On that day when you stand before the Lord, you do not just say, “Lord, you gave me life. You see, here I am. I’ve kept it safe in me.” Oh, you are in trouble if you do that! No, no! You will say, “Look at this one. Look at that one. Look at this one!” Paul will say, “Who is my joy and my crown?” He will say, “You are my joy and my crown. You are the evidence of the life that is in me because you have got that same life in you now that was in me and still is in me.” Oh, the whole Corinthian church! The whole Ephesians church! The whole Philippians church! Well, how many pounds has Paul got! He has become a spiritual mil-

lionaire! Can you grasp the message? Grasp it clearly in your mind. There is the message for you.

The Lord's Warning

Any person who thinks that he will save his life, the Lord Jesus says, "He will lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake and the gospel's, will gain it unto eternal life." When you are giving your life to another person, when you are training him or her as a disciple, you are giving your energy, your time, your sleepless nights – you are giving your own life. You are losing your life, but you will gain it in giving it. But, if you are going to keep your life to yourself, you will lose even what you have. That is the gospel of the Lord Jesus. That is what he says.

What is more, not only do you lose what you have, you are in trouble. Look at the ending of this parable. The Lord says in Mt 25:28, "*So take the talent from him*". Now if the talent represents the life that he gave to us (or the pound, since the same thing is true of the Parable of the Pounds; the pound was also taken away from that slothful servant), if that is taken away from you, you have lost it. You are finished! You have lost the life that was given to you. What else does it mean? This point is confirmed perfectly and explicitly in v30: "*And cast the worthless*" – the useless – "*servant into the outer darkness*"! The meaning of that is not to be missed. It is very, very plain. You see, in the Bible, life is always associated with light. That is why the Lord Jesus can speak of being the light of life. [John 8:12, 14:6] Light and life are always associated together. Where there is light, there is life; where there life, there is light. Always the two together! This also means that in the Bible, darkness always has to do with death. Death and darkness in the Bible always go together. "Outer darkness" is the place of death. In the spiritual sense, it is the place of eternal death, as the opposite of eternal life.

This is what Peter says in 2 Pet 2:17, that this darkness is reserved for the perverse sinners: "the darkness of death". The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is what they will do in that place of "outer darkness". This is the place where the hypocrites go. Mt 24:51, tells us that the unfaithful servant will be put with the hypocrites: "*there men will weep and*

gnash their teeth.” Now where do the hypocrites go where they will weep and gnash their teeth? We are told twice in Matthew Chapter 23, in Mt 23:15 & 33 that the place where the hypocrites go to is Gehenna, hell. And that is where the unfaithful servant goes.

Also twice in Mt 13:42 & 50, the Lord tells us that this place, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, is the furnace of fire. That is why hell is often pictured as a place of fire, a furnace of fire. Actually it comes from the idea of the branches that were cut off. What do you do with them? You throw them into the furnace of fire, there to burn up in those places. This means that the pictures of darkness and fire, in fact, are one. The fire symbolizes the destruction in hell and the darkness symbolizes the same thing. Destruction is the opposite of life. It is to be cut off from the life of God, from his light and from his life. It is total darkness and total destruction! The fiery furnace! The place of spiritual darkness! That is not a place that anybody would like to end up in.

Increase of Life in Proportion to Faith and Commitment

But let me say it again, because that is what the Lord Jesus says. If you have received the gift of life from the Lord Jesus – the gift of eternal life, this pound, this talent, whichever it is, fundamentally, it is still that life functioning in us – unless you multiply it, unless there is going to be ‘more’, you will be in trouble. On that day before the Lord Jesus, you can be like the wise virgins with extra oil, the life that had been produced in others, then that life will be your joy and crown. Indeed, it has to do with you, too, but also the life that is represented by this increase of pounds or the increase of talents. You see, the one who had two talents had to bring at least another two. The one who had one talent needed to bring only one more, and he did not even manage that, which shows that there is a direct proportion between commitment and the end result.

Think one more time as we close: On what basis were the extra talents given? It is on the basis of the response of faith! If that is the case, then clearly the person with five talents was one with the greater response of faith. Therefore as he grew in the spiritual life, he was entrusted with

greater responsibilities, more gifts to do his work in the Lord's service. The one with two talents had also a full response, but not to the same extent as the other one. It is not surprising, therefore, that the one-talent man in both parables is the one that fails. Both of them came just to get a pound, a talent; they produced no results. Nothing! No 'more'! You see, their commitment was already shown by the fact they were entrusted in the Parable of the Talents with only one talent. Beware, therefore!

Lastly, let me come back to this point. I cannot over-emphasize it: Check carefully your commitment to the Lord. What sort of commitment have you got? Can you honestly say you live for him? If not, be careful, because if there is not 'more', you will be in trouble. If on that day you can say, "Look, here is the result: my sons, my daughters have come to you. I have brought them to you. And look at my friend, and those people in the church, this one and that one. Life has multiplied. The life that is in me has now multiplied in them and into the next one." On that day, they will prove to be your joy and your crown because they are the ones who are going to be the evidence of God's saving grace and power in your life in such a manner as is acceptable to him.

I pray that as the Full-Time Training Team goes forth, they will bear this message in mind. Maybe they have to labor with weeping sometimes, with tears as they give of themselves. But remember this, that as you lose your life, you gain it. It is in giving of yourself that you will multiply life in others. It is no easy road; it is a hard road. But it is well worth it! You will see how worth it is, when on that day you and I will stand in his presence and by his grace rejoice with unspeakable joy.



End of message.

*All Scriptural quotations in italics are from the Revised Standard Version,
unless otherwise noted.*

This is an edited transcription of the message.

The editors accept full responsibility for arrangement and addition of Bible references.



From the Editor's Desk



To our dear readers:

For many, 2020 has been a very bad year. With the Covid-19 pandemic and global economic downturn, even the Oxford English Dictionary has chosen, for the first time, not to name a word of the year, describing 2020 as "a year which cannot be neatly accommodated in one single word".

Yet, the word of God in Romans 8:35-39 focuses our hearts in Yahweh our God, "... for neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come... will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

May God Yahweh keep you safe under the shadow of His wings always!

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and fruitful New Year !

From the Oasis Team



CHRISTIAN GOSPEL DISCIPLES CHURCHES
OUTREACH PUBLICATION
Unit C 1/F Garley Building,
45-53 Graham Street, Central Hong Kong



PRINTED MATTER