

“Enter the Joy of Your Lord!”

Thomas Robinson, *Matthew—Conflict and Vision* 6, March 6, 2016

Matthew 25:14-30 (Cf Lk 19:11-27)

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them **his property**. ¹⁵ To one he gave **five talants**, to another **two**, to another **one**, to each according to **his ability**. Then he went away.

¹⁶ He who had received the **five talants** went at once and traded with them, and he made five talants more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the **two talants** made two talants more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the **one talant** went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ Now after a long time **the master of those servants came and settled accounts** with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the **five talants** came forward, bringing five talants more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talants; here I have made five talants more.’

²¹ 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**.’

²² And he also who had the **two talants** came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talants; here I have made two talants more.’

²³ 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**.’

²⁴ He also who had received the **one talant** came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a **hard** man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so **I was afraid**, and I went and **hid your talant** in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘**You wicked and slothful servant!** You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ 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**.

²⁸ So take the talant from him and give it to him who has the ten talants. ²⁹ For **to everyone who has will more be given**, and he will have an **abundance**. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the darkness outside. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 23:13

¹³ “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

Matthew 13:10-13, 16-17

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” ...

¹⁶ “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Matthew 8:11-12

¹¹ "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be cast into the darkness outside. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The Talents – A Parable Well-Known

Every time we admire someone's talent or speak of them as talented, we are alluding to this parable of Jesus. The English word 'talent' is from the Latin *talentum* from Greek *talanton*. That connection reflects and shapes how this parable is understood, past and present.

The parable is regularly interpreted as being about the talents that God has given us and how, when Jesus returns, he will judge our lives on the basis of how we have used those talents. Did you make use of your talents and increase them? Did you bury your talents? It helps us to see our abilities as gifts of God, not our own achievements, and to see life as stewardship, to be lived boldly, not fearfully. It is even better when we see these talents as spiritual gifts, given to us for responsible use by God's Holy Spirit to benefit others.

This discourse of Jesus, however, starts from the question of the destruction of the temple and Jesus' manifestation (*parousia*) as king (Mt 21). The disciples can't imagine the crucifixion and resurrection or a second coming. What would Jesus have meant by this parable as he spoke to them in their context? Could that help our understanding of it?

What are the Talants?

A talent/talent of course is not a personal ability but a large amount of money – 75 lb. of silver, 6,000 denarii (a day's wage, Mt 20:2). Thus nearly 20 yrs wages. Five talants is 100 yrs wages (at \$30,000/yr = \$3 million). More than a fisherman could imagine, much less a slave. This is the estate of the master, entrusted to his own servants.

All three servants have huge amounts to work with. Two actively let these funds work and they double. One is fearful of loss and of a hard master and keeps it safe. The first two are approved, the third intensely condemned. The talant of the third is given to the first.

Jesus is not talking about the abilities of the disciples but about God's great gift to Israel, his promises of God's kingdom (Dan 7) that Jesus' proclaimed. Part of what was happening in Jesus coming to Jerusalem as king and in all that would unfold was the master coming to open that gift: Humble king, crucified, resurrected, 'all authority,' all nations included, or violent conflict with Rome, destruction of temple. Jesus' negative judgment was focused on the chief priests and Pharisees for rejecting/blocking God's kingdom he proclaimed.

It is that Kingdom of heaven breaking in that is the valuable pearl, hidden treasure, growing mustard seed, the talants. The question for the disciples: Are you open to its power? Do you let it work? Do you let it break through boundaries. New wine in new wineskins. Or, like the Pharisees, do you stop it's work, hide it, try to keep its promise safe for yourself?

Joy and Darkness

God called Israel as a light to the nations. In the Kingdom, light was opening out to all nations. Rejecting that inclusive kingdom meant sentencing oneself to darkness, regret, anger.

Disciples learn that letting the treasure of God's kingdom work in its own surprising way means gain, learning to trust God, and ultimately joy: "*Enter the Joy of your Lord!*" That joy is the way of life defined by God's love and transforming presence, the way Jesus taught. It becomes the conquest of death and separation, fulfillment of all God's promises. It comes down to challenge us as well. In that great gift, even my little talents find a place.