

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

9. Cash Converters

The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25v 14-30

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Cash Converters: The Parable of the Talents

What defines God's people? Is it great exploits we do in His name? Often our industry for the Master has defined us, but our identity is more about who we are than what we do. The Christian is to be set apart to serve God, as a child of God. This distinctiveness was never meant to slip into isolationism, where we withdraw from society and bemoan its decline behind our four walls of worship. Such separation brings dishonor to the church and weakens its witness for Christ. No. It is our very "differentness" where Jesus is so obviously Lord of our lives, impacting every area that defines God's people and lead others to Him. We often preach the parable of the talents by simply saying "What are you doing for God?" Despite the validity of this question, the real challenge preempts it: "As a child of God, do I know who He expects me to be?"

In this parable, Jesus exposes the way Israel had buried her identity. The once heralded nation, given a privileged gift with royal responsibility, had become blinded to its own self important, self reliant status and, even in the midst of national decline, remained intransigent: stubbornly refusing to seek the road of repentance that would lead them not only back to reestablishment and reward, they belligerently buried their master's talent and now blindly waited for His return.

The master returns to his would-be investors to see how they've faired in the story. The context of this whole section of teaching in Matthew's Gospel is end-time judgment and the need to be alert, industrious and ready to do the master's bidding before His return. Israel's lapse into self-sufficient religion denied their true identity and brought little spiritual dividend. The question for God's people today remains the same: What defines us? Are we embracing the high and holy calling that God has given His people and are we wisely stewarding this for His glory?

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Read: Matthew 25v 14-30

Key words: master, servants, talents, gained, hid, faithful, harvest, wicked

- **The Talents and the Task: making the most of the master's money – 25v 14-18**
A master commissions his servants to work wisely in his absence. Upon his return, they are to be ready to give account of their efforts.
- **The Return and the Reward: the willingness of the workers -25v 19-23**
Upon returning, the Master recognises two of his servant's investments, granting them extra favour for the diligence they show.
- **The Worker and the Warning: the sin of the servant – 25v24-30**
The master condemns the servant who buried his talent for his fear and lack of initiative. His resulting punishment is a sobering warning to all.

Ears to Hear?

- **Time to talk Talents:**

What talents has God given you? How did you discover them? What other talents would you still like God to give you to use for Him?

The talents in the parable are financial. Does this mean the parable is just about our giving responsibilities, or is the emphasis on our efforts?

- **The Point of the Parable:**

What is the main point of the parable? Explain it in your own words.

Is the master harsh in his dealings with the third servant? How would you apply the parable's meaning for us today?

- **Reaping Right Rewards:**

The master happily rewards the servants who honour his investment. How often do you consider working for heavenly rewards?

What do you think such rewards will be like?

Do you think the prospect of being rewarded is a justifiable reason to serve God, or just another potentially carnal desire?

Do you think there is room in heaven for regret over lost rewards or jealousy of other people's rewards? If not, then does it actually matter if, as a saved person, I actually go on to serve God faithfully or not?