

Dear Friends,

We often remind ourselves of 1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV) that the Lord will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to resist. Perhaps subtle, but in this lesson, Jesus also teaches us that He will not call us to do anything in His service that we are not able to do, either by our personal ability and disposition or by His empowering us. Jesus framed the "Story line" of the parables. They were stories created by Him to teach lessons that He wanted both the immediate hearers and subsequent Bible readers to learn. In this parable, Jesus told us that the master distributed different amounts to each servant "*...to every man according to his several ability.*" A major theme of this parable, a lesson that I believe applies to believers from the first century till the Second Coming, has to do with final and certain accountability. How long did the third servant bury his master's money? How long till the master returned and judged this unfaithful servant? We wonder; did the servant think his faithless conduct would be acceptable to the master? And how often do you and I do something we know, both by Scripture's teaching and by our own conscience, to be wrong, but we try to rationalize it and think the Lord won't really disapprove or chasten us, despite Scripture's clear teaching against our conduct? However long the delay, this servant learned what you and I shall surely learn in the end. Though at times long delayed, the judgments--and chastening--of the Lord are certain. Eventually they do come. They are both righteous and just, but they are often far more severe than we rationalized them to be. (Romans 11:22, KJV. The Lord's blessings are always good, but do not ignore; His judgments are always severe, righteous yes, but severe and fearful)

In my youth in my faith, I recall hearing an older believer, a man I loved and respected. He had spent his life in the church serving much of his time as a deacon, and a wise and good one at that. However, he often told of deep convictions he felt early in his Christian journey that convinced him the Lord had called him to preach. He refused to obey that conviction for whatever reason, though he tried to serve with integrity in a different role. He spoke of the chastening he had endured because of his failure, a lingering chastening that remained with him. Once after he had spoken to the church about this I asked him, "Why don't you obey this conviction now?" By his reaction, I wondered if anyone had ever asked him this question before. He became noticeably anxious and replied that he thought it was too late, that he was too old to consider at that time. Perhaps he would not have become a pastor or served in a conventional manner, but I believe, had he obeyed, even as an old man, the Lord would have given him a place to serve with edifying profit. I've known a number of ministers whom I thought might have served better as a deacon, but this is the single individual I've known who resisted his conviction to preach and served as a deacon.

However, the master's judgment against the unfaithful servant in this parable does raise questions for us to ponder. Perhaps we each face a time or season of reckoning in our discipleship. If we neglect and fail for too long, the Lord may well shut the door and send His loving but severe chastening for our neglect.

The wise choice for each of us to make is always to choose the Lord and His way and to avoid our own. Do we wish to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of thy Lord"? Or do we prefer to hear, "Thou wicked and slothful servant...Take from him and give to another"? In this parable, there are no other options. In our discipleship, there are no other options.

Follow the faith-way,  
Joe Holder

## Parable of Talents

*For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (Matthew 25:14-15 KJV 1900. The parable continues through Verse 30.)*

Study the setting of this parable before digging into its details. Immediately prior to the parable, Jesus taught the Parable of the Ten Virgins, beginning with ***“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto....”*** He applied the parable to a specific time or event that, according to Matthew 24 likely occurred in 70 AD with the Roman army’s siege and destruction of the City of Jerusalem. The parable of the talents is immediately followed by Jesus’ lesson on sheep and goats, I believe a symbolic explanation of the Second Coming and final judgment. If these two interpretations hold, we should expect the time between the Lord’s judgment against Jerusalem in 70 AD and the Second Coming to be explained by the parable of the ten talents.

The money conversion chart I have for first century talents to U. S. Dollars was published in 2013, so, based on that date, a first century talent had the value of \$1,200 in U. S. currency. Based on this conversion, the first servant received \$6,000, the second servant received \$2,400, and the third servant received \$1,200.

According to Jesus’ information (And He created this “Story” or parable Himself to teach His lesson), the difference in value of the resources given to each servant related to the master’s assessment of each servant’s “several ability,” his knowledge of each servant’s individual ability to manage the value given to him.

In the story, Jesus tells us how each servant used the money. The first two servants “Traded” or invested the money and doubled their master’s investment. The third servant dug a hole in the ground, apparently in a safe place, and buried his master’s \$1200.

Eventually (Verse 19, *“After a long time”*) the master returned and called his three servants to report and return his money with whatever they had gained to him. After hearing the report of the first two servants the master spoke the same words to each of them.

*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 24:21 KJV)*

These two servants took their assignment seriously and worked to obey. A small “Test” assignment resulted in a future promotion to greater responsibility and trust from the master. Each servant heard the good news, *“Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”*

How did the third servant report his conduct?

*Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. (Matthew 25:24-25 KJV)*

This servant wholly ignored his master's command. He was so presumptuous as to judge his master rather than obey him. One must wonder. If this servant was so convinced that his master was such an evil person, why continue working for him? Why not go to work for a master whom he respected? Instead, he dishonestly remained in the role of servant, gladly claiming all the benefits he could gain related to his position, but he refused to obey his master, to do what the master commanded him to do. Was this servant afraid? No doubt he was. If he truly believed his master was as harsh as he accused him of being, what might such a master do to a disobedient and wicked servant? What if he lost money on the master's trust? Ah, but he might also have gained.

The master wisely judged this servant by his own words. Be careful explaining your vain rationale for disobedience to the Lord. He often judges us by our own words. However, even by the servant's self-serving and false judgment of his master, he failed to justify his lazy conduct. In effect the servant could have invested his master's talent in what we might consider a savings account so that, at least, his master would have earned interest on his money during his time away. That would have been a logical response, given the servant's utter lack of respect for the master, but he failed to do even that.

How does this servant teach us in our discipleship? I've heard similar words many times, "I know Scripture teaches me to do 'A,'" but what if I try to do it and fail?" Or "I tried it once, and it didn't work out well." What Jesus teaches in this lesson is a lifestyle, not a single isolated incident. What if you do it and succeed? For example, I've heard this disobedience rationale regarding Jesus' simple teaching in Matthew 18 regarding offenses between believers. "I tried it once and it didn't work." Perhaps you approached the person who offended you with a chip on your shoulder. Did you clearly and sincerely explain to them why and how their conduct offended you? In that lesson, Jesus didn't say you would always succeed, but He did say you should always respond to offenses from a brother or sister in this manner. Who is wiser, Jesus or you? There is no right excuse for any disobedience of Scripture's teaching, none.

Jesus stated His own explanation of the parable.

*For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. (Matthew 25:29 KJV)*

How might this general principle apply to you and me in our personal discipleship? In the logic of the lesson, he that “hath” refers to the two servants who obeyed, who invested and doubled their master’s funds. He that “hath not” refers to the wicked servant who disobeyed, buried the master’s money in the ground, and returned it to him. Believers who measure their discipleship, not by what they can gain for self, but by what they can do for the Lord and for His people, shall be blessed. They shall “*Enter into the joy of the Lord.*” And believers who know what the Lord has taught them in Scripture, but knowingly choose to ignore His Word and do what they want to do shall face the frightening judgment of the Lord taking away both what He gave them initially, as well as any hope for future promotion to greater responsibilities in the Lord’s spiritual kingdom. Further, the Lord commanded an immediate judgment against this wicked servant.

*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*  
(Matthew 25:30 KJV)

In today’s cultural equivalent, the master tells this servant, “You’re fired.” In the Lord’s rule over His kingdom in this world, too many of His people live as if He is not the Lord of His kingdom, that they can do as they wish with no consequences from Him. They might be heard to say, “The Lord loves me too much to chasten me.” Oh no! They need to read Hebrews 12:5-13, especially noting Verse 6, “*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.*” Inspired Scripture teaches the mirror opposite to this unbelieving person’s vain rationalization of their unfaithfulness. *He chastens you because He loves you.*

I am saddened and puzzled by a common attitude of contemporary Christians. They seem to feel immune from the Lord’s judgments or chastening. The self-defeating and self-destructing attitude of entitlement has taken over many minds. They feel entitled to do whatever they want to do, what they rationalize as right in their private court of opinion with no consideration of God’s ultimate moral judgment, always revealed in Scripture. The Lord is final judge, even of this attitude and conduct. As a Bible student and observer for over six decades, I fear the future of authentic Christianity in this country if this attitude prevails. An attitude of faithful, selfless service should govern our discipleship, not a self-focused attitude of entitlement.

In simple words and with a clear message, Jesus warns each of us in this parable. The moment we choose to ignore God, our only legitimate “Master,” by not doing what He commands us, and by not shaping our values and moral conscience to His mold in Scripture—in ***Scripture alone***—we effectively imitate the “Wicked” servant. We judge the Lord as being “*...an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.*” (Matthew 25:24 KJV) We join the wicked King Saul in thinking we can ignore God’s commands to us and do as we wish with no fear of His judgment. How did this attitude work for Saul?

*And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For*

*rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (1 Samuel 15:22-23 KJV)*

Based on Samuel's words to Saul, to rebel, knowingly refuse to obey the Lord's commandments, commandments specifically stated in Scripture, is equivalent in His moral judgment as if we practiced witchcraft. To be stubborn against Him and His will and ways, again as clearly revealed and stated in Scripture alone, is equivalent to iniquity or idolatry. What was the Lord's ultimate judgment against Saul for this sinful choice to do his own thing and to ignore the Lord's commandment? The final verse above faces us squarely and fearfully, "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being....*" From being what He called or appointed you to be and to do in His kingdom.

Folks, if we follow Jesus' warning in this parable, affirmed by Samuel's words to Saul, disobedience is not a real option. It is our inviting the Lord's judgment that shall fall in His time and way but fall on us it surely shall.

I believe Jesus framed this parable to wisely teach us what to expect and how to live for Him in His kingdom from the first century till the Second Coming. He gives each of us opportunities, commandments, and instructions. He gives them based on His perfect knowledge of our ability, either our inherent ability or ability as empowered by Him. He shall never charge us to do more than He knows we are able to do, but do not deceive your own heart. He expects each of us to do what He has commanded us to do, again, as clearly and repeatedly stated in Scripture alone, and our failure to obey surely brings His righteous judgment against us. This is a "Kingdom" lesson, not a salvation lesson. It is about how children of God regard—or ignore and disrespect—His commandments in their life. It is also about His fearful and certain judgments that we shall face, should we choose to ignore Him, His commandments in Scripture alone, and go our way instead of His. ***We have only two choices in the end.*** Obey and enter His joys. Disobey and invite His judgment. The parable allows no other option. Which shall we choose today?

Elder Joe Holder