

25:14 *A man travelling into a far country*- The same word is used in the parable of the tenants (21:33), and also at the end of the Olivet prophecy in describing the Son of Man travelling into a far country and leaving His servants to watch, not knowing exactly when He shall return (Mk. 13:34). The parables of Matthew 25 are an extension of the Olivet prophecy and appear to comment particularly upon the fact we do not know the exact time of the Lord's return but are to live as if He is coming any moment. The key phrase in this parable, in this connection, is the idea of the Lord returning to assess the servants "after a long time" or delay (see on :19). It may be that the Lord foresaw the rescheduling of His intended return in the first century, and wanted to teach that regardless of the delay, His servants were to keep 'ready' and watching by trading the goods He entrusted them with, and progressing His work on the earth. In one sense, the Lord Jesus is very present. The teaching of the Comforter passages in Jn. 14-16 is that through the Spirit, He is as good as personally present with us. And yet He is apparently absent, in that we no longer possess the miraculous gifts, and it visibly appears that He is far away. The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

His own servants- A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

Delivered unto them His goods- The same word is used about how all things have been delivered unto the Son by the Father ("All things are delivered to me from My Father", Lk. 10:22). The totality of the action is the element of unreality- that this Master would share out all He had amongst His servants, when He Himself was not present to oversee their work. Again, this is metaphor. He is present. But He is 'absent' in the sense that He will not forcibly intervene to ensure that His work prospers in our hands. He has left us with absolute freewill and self-determination. In a different metaphor, Paul likens the community of believers to the body of Christ. we are Him, and without us, He is not. We each have part of His work, some aspects of His characteristics, which we are to develop and reveal in the world. The most common usage of *paradidomi* concerning what has been delivered to us is in the context of "That form of doctrine" which has been "delivered" to us (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:2,23; 15:3 2 Pet. 2:21; "the faith which was once delivered to the saints", Jude 3)- not to simply keep buried, but to develop in various ways, to the glory of the Lord who gave it. Thus the basic doctrines of the Faith were "delivered"

to us at our conversion, as the talents were delivered to the servants. We are asked to use that understanding of basics to develop our own character. It doesn't mean we're each given different doctrines; but we all have different characters and areas of spiritual growth, and we must each use the same doctrines we are "delivered" to develop these. This would explain why it's so easy to see others' lack of spiritual development in some areas, whilst being so sure that we have grown spiritually in other areas. Our observation is correct; this *is* the case. But it's nothing to be proud or critical about; we ourselves have our blind spots. This approach to the parables of the pounds and talents may also explain why brethren of past generations seemed so strong in some areas (e.g. defence of the Faith and preaching) but so weak in others (e.g. compassion).

His goods- This follows on from the Lord's word that "He shall make him ruler over all his goods" (24:47 s.w.). What we are faithful with now will be in some sense eternally given to us in the Kingdom age. We will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.). The talents here are the pounds of the similar parable in Luke 19, His very *own* (Lk. 19:23). Here in the parable of the talents we read of the servants as "His own". The Lord's personal identity with His servants and His goods could not be more stressed. This is no disinterested business transaction. The goods of Christ are those which He took from the devil (Mt. 12:29), the absolute righteousness which is possible once sin is bound. I would suggest the goods of Christ refer to the ultimate spirituality which He has, the various aspects of His character. The ten pounds are delivered to the ten servants, who are to be compared with the ten virgins of Mt. 25. The ten servants and ten virgins represent the body of Christ, each of whom has been given a part of Christ's "own" to develop; we are called to develop His likeness, and I am suggesting that each of us has been given a certain amount and aspect of His perfectly righteous character to develop. The unworthy calls what he has been given "...yours" (Mt. 25:25)- when it was intended to be *his* personally (cp. Mt. 20:14). He just didn't let himself see the wonderfully personal nature of what God had given him.

25:15 *Talents*- This is one of the most programmatic, persistent and widespread translational problem in the New Testament. A talent is a weight, a measure. The Lord did not have in view 'talent' as in the natural ability in a particular area which a person may have. These talents are given to us by Him when we are called to Him; they are not something we had of ourselves. A Roman talent weighed 71 pounds or 32.2 kg. The servants were given *His* goods; something they previously did not have was given to them. And to each servant was weighed out a different amount, suggesting that gold or silver is in view. The use of *argurion* in :18 confirms it is silver. The suggestion that the one talent could have been left with the bank in order to receive interest confirms that a precious metal is in view. The figures are large- 32 kg. of silver for the one talent

man. The story line of the parable suggests he thought he had not been given much- but 32 kg. of silver is a huge amount. Even if we think we have little or no capacity for service, we need to consider that in fact we have been given a huge amount. And the five talent man was given 160 kg. of silver. As I write this in 2014, 1 kg. of silver is worth around 700 US\$. The one talent man was therefore given the equivalent of around 22,000 \$. And he considered it not enough to do anything much with. The story line suggests that many of us have been given far more than one talent. The five talent man was therefore given something like 110,000 \$. This is all a picture of the great riches in Christ which are given to us- each one of us. The relative lack of guidance they were given, with their Lord leaving immediately and leaving them to get on with it, is an insightful picture into how *so* much has been delegated to us to get on with according to our own initiative, and how we are tempted to think we have not really been given that much. And it's a powerful statement of what huge potential we have.

The parables several times speak of the relationship between our Master and ourselves. They do so in somewhat unreal and arresting terms. It would've made everyone think when the Lord spoke of how a master handed over a total of eight talents to His servants and told them to use them as best they could. This was, humanly speaking, a huge and unreal risk for a master to take. He *so* trusted those servants! And so much has the Lord delegated to each of us, entrusting us with the Gospel. And we can imagine His joy when they lived up to the trust He placed in them. We can also imagine them walking away from their meeting with Him, wondering why ever He had entrusted so much to them, feeling nervous, praying for strength to act responsibly and zealously. The talent was worth 6,000 denarii, i.e. 20 years' wages for the workers in the parable of the labourers (Mt. 10:1-16). In 2014 the average annual income in the USA was 50,000\$- 20 years wages would therefore be \$1 million in dynamic terms. For one talent. But most of the Lord's servants are given more than one talent. Looked at in this way, the church is a millionaire's club. The element of unreality in the story is that this is a huge and unrealistic amount to give to a servant to have responsibility for! But this is the huge responsibility which passes to us in having been called to the Gospel. Likewise, what human Owner of a vineyard who give out his vineyard to *other* tenants, after the first lot had proven so wicked, and killed not only His servants but His beloved Son? But this speaks of God's amazing desire to keep on delegating His affairs to frail mortals. And just as people typically fail to manage large sums of money which they are unaccustomed to, so we too miserably mismanage the Lord's wealth. But it was and is His will that we should use our own initiative in progressing His work and managing His wealth.

Note how valuable just one talent was- equivalent to 20 years earnings of a working man. This seems to me to be an element of unreality in the story, that flags up a lesson. The point is, we have been entrusted with a *huge* amount. We tend to see it as something ordinary; that we have a

faith, a denomination, just like many others do. But the personal, individualized gift which we have been given is simply *huge*. Imagine if you were given say \$1 million to use for the Lord's service. You'd be quite busy working out how to spend it all. But the point is, we have each been given *far more* than this. The parable has specific application to our witness; for it was just prior to the Lord's departure that He gave us the great preaching commission, corresponding to how in the parable, the Master leaves His servants but just beforehand, gives His servants the talents to go and trade with. Hence the one talent man is criticized for not having lent the talent on usury, a practice which Jews could only practice with Gentiles. He should've taken his talent, the riches of the Gospel, to the Gentiles. And yet I'd suggest that 21st century disciples aren't one talent people. We have been given *so much*- not least literacy and having the Bible in our own native languages.

To every man- This idea is repeated and alluded to so often in the New Testament. Each man shall be judged individually according to his works because to each servant something has been given, and he must answer for its usage (16:27). This parable leads on from the Olivet discourse, which concluded with the Lord's teaching about the household which "the Son of Man" departed from, "and gave authority to his servants, and to every man [s.w.] his work" (Mk. 13:34). In a culture where religious specialists were thought to be God's workers, this was a radical teaching- that each and every one of us has been given specific work to do. And the culture of our present age is a no less difficult one into which to introduce this teaching. Our fear of responsibility, our desire to retreat deep within ourselves, to live only semi-aware lives in an age of abstraction and minimalism... all this makes it difficult to accept that we have been given specific work to do, for which we shall be judged at the last day. 'Every man... each of you' is a very common term in the New Testament, seeking to persuade people of their personal connection with God and Jesus, and not to rely on mere group membership. Hence "Be baptized *every one of you*... in turning away *every one of you* from his sins" (Acts 2:38; 3:26) would appear redundant until we realize this personal appeal that was necessary against a culture of group mentality.

Analyzing the later NT allusions to this term "to every man", we have an insight into what in practice the talents may represent. God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3); we have each been given a specific ministry, and according to Romans 12, we are to develop that ministry. If we have no idea what that ministry is, what hopes the Lord has for us, we need to earnestly ask Him to reveal it to us. But if we're not perceiving it, this may well be because we don't want to perceive it. On a more obvious level, it may be that faith itself is a gift of God, and different people are given different amounts of it- but we are to develop whatever we are given and not leave the potential dormant. This would explain the great diversity of spiritual levels and of faith which there clearly is within the body of believers. Life and especially psychological and spiritual life is not experienced by each person on an even playing field. There are background factors which affect how easy it is for a person to believe; and the Lord is aware of this and will judge accordingly.

When we read of how “the Lord gave to each man” (1 Cor. 3:5 s.w.) we have a very clear allusion to the parable. But the context is of how the Lord ‘gave’ converts to both Paul and Apollos. This too is a gift which we must use. Some make much brave effort to preach and never win a single convert. Others seem to keep stumbling across folks eager to hear and respond to the message. But that is all a gift from the Lord, for us to use and develop. And so the testing of ‘each man’s work’ in the day of judgment will be a testing of the quality and extent to which they have worked with people (1 Cor. 3:8,10,13). Another allusion to this part of the parable is in 1 Cor. 7:7, where singleness or marital situation is described as “every man has his *idios* gift [s.w. “his own / *idios* ability / power”]... one [this way]... one [that way]”. This is the same wording used in speaking of how this one was given five talents, that one was given two talents. As God has distributed to and called every man, so we are to develop our lives in that calling (1 Cor. 7:17), whether as slaves, single people, married or whatever. Many lament their marital situation, considering that if only it were otherwise, they would be able to serve God better. But it is in fact a gift from God, to be used for Him.

1 Cor. 12:7,11,18 again allude to the parable in saying that the gift of the Spirit “is given to every man... the Spirit... dividing to every man *idios*, personally”. The talents therefore refer to the Spirit, spiritual gifts to be used within the body of Christ- so the passage continues. Likewise “unto every one of us is given grace” (Eph. 4:7). “Grace”, *charis*, does indeed mean simply a gift. But it is so often used in the context of God’s forgiveness that we can overlook the obvious fact that the gifts of God to us are His recurrent acts of patient forgiveness, given so freely to “every man” in Christ. These gifts of grace, and so many other such gracious gifts, are to not merely be *accepted* but developed and used. Again in allusion to this parable, Peter pleaded: “As every man [s.w.] has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).

According to his individual ability- The Lord recognizes that we each have unique abilities in some areas- and thereby unique inabilities in others. And He gives us work to do according to those abilities and not according to our inabilities. It may be that understanding of ‘correct doctrine’ is a gift given to one and not another; because not all are wired as Bible students. The giving of such different gifts, in different amounts, suggests that there can never be uniformity of spiritual level or achievement in the church. And yet so much church structure, hope, intention and expectation is geared towards achieving such uniformity. We each start at a different point and much more is expected of those who start further down the road. *Kata... dunamis* is the very phrase Paul uses in 2 Cor. 8:3 in commending some brethren for responding to others’ needs “according to their ability [*kata... dunamis*], yes, and beyond their ability”. Surely this is an

allusion to the Lord's words here. The point is that the Lord understands our ability and asks us to work according to that; but those brethren excelled themselves in that they responded beyond what the Lord even expected or hoped for from them.

The goods are distributed "to every man according to his several (Gk. *idios*, individual, s.w. "private") ability" (Mt. 25:15). We each have our own private spirituality which we must develop in our own private way. The talents parable is alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:7-12: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man (RV) to profit withal". In the first century, this was seen in the way in which different believers were given different gifts of the Spirit. In our dispensation, each of us is called to manifest a different aspect of the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). But the principle of 1 Cor. 12:7-12 remains true, as indicated by the way Paul reasons that we each have a different aspect of the Spirit to manifest because "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit". In principle, these words are true of our baptisms. At baptism we were given our talents, our different aspects of the Spirit / mind of Christ to manifest. We are all in the Christ body, and manifest His spirit / mind in different aspects. And as the manifestation of different aspects of the Spirit in the first century caused frictions, so too today.

However, there is no equivalent of the pronoun "his" in the Greek text here. *The Lord* gave the talents to the three servants "according to his own power and immediately took his journey". The 'he' in view could quite easily be the Lord, and the 'His... ability / power' would then refer to that of the Lord. This is rather confirmed by the recurrence of *kata... dunamis* in Paul's writings [which allude once every three verses at least to the Lord's words in the Gospels, especially His parables]. "*Kata* the gift... given unto me *kata... His power [dunamis]*" (Eph. 3:7)... that He would give you, *kata... the might [dunamis] through His Spirit*" (Eph. 3:16). "He that is of power [*dunamai*]... *kata* the power [*dunamis*] that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). Each of these verses associates *kata... dunamis* with the *gift* of the Lord, and the same word is used as in the parable for the giving of the talents to believers. Note too 2 Tim. 1:8 "*Kata* the power [*dunamis*] of God".

I suggest there is a purposeful ambiguity of meaning here. We are given some aspects of the Lord's goods according to *our* power / ability, and in order to develop them and use them we are given *His* power / ability. For His Spirit is to be merged with our spirit. Maybe Paul appreciated this when he wrote: "I also labour *kata* His working, which works in me with power [*dunamis*]" (Col. 1:29).

Immediately took His journey- Perhaps an element of unreality in the story. For we would expect Him to train them and explain to them how He intends the wealth to be used. The one talent man's response at the end suggests that he had not been given any clear commands by his Lord as to how to use his one talent. But this is the point. We have been given the talents we have, and we are to use them- at our initiative, and not in response to a legal code which defines how we use them. And therefore one believer will make more than another out of what God gives.

The same word for 'took his journey' has just been used by the Lord at the end of the Olivet prophecy in saying that the Son of Man 'took a far journey' and "left His house" (Mk. 13:34). The leaving of His house surely connects with the introduction to the Olivet prophecy, in which the Lord stated that "Your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38). It was no longer His house, but theirs. And in departing from the temple, He was leaving the house of Israel. The structure of Judaism was no longer going to be used- instead, He would give His wealth to a few individual servants and leave it to their initiative what they did with it. And this is what was and is so hard for so many- to serve the Lord on our initiative, without religious, legalistic structures. And these are [re]built exactly because people generally struggle with the calling to take ownership and responsibility for what the Lord has given them.

This idea of using one's own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfill societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

Several times Paul alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and

Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

25:16 *Received*- We have freely received [s.w.], and are to freely give (10:8). The context is of giving the things of the Gospel to others. This is the incredible wealth of silver we have been entrusted with. We "receive" [s.w.] the seed / word of the Gospel (13:31,33), just as in the previous parable the virgins receive [s.w. "took"] their lamps (25:1) when we "received the knowledge of the Truth" (Heb. 10:26). The emphasis upon their 'receiving' the talents (:16,18,20,22,24) shows that the talents are not natural abilities, but what is given by the Lord. And straight after this teaching, the Lord uses the same word to urge His followers to take or [s.w.] 'receive' the bread and wine, the symbols of His life given to us (26:26,27). But that is ongoing- we receive [s.w.] "of His fullness" (Jn. 1:16), all that He is, He has divided amongst us His servants; different aspects of His personality and work in this world. This is achieved practically through the medium of the word and the Spirit- for again He uses the word about us 'receiving' the Father's words (Jn. 17:8) and receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). There are specific things we are called to do- Paul surely alludes here when he speaks of how what he "received of the Lord Jesus" was the ministry of testifying to the good news of His grace (Acts 20:24).

Went- This may seem a superfluous word, until we perceive a connection with the great preaching commission, to *go* into all the world with the Gospel.

Traded- The same word is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word has just been used by the Lord in saying that the Son of

Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:14) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is

the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: "The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags" (Mt. 25:16 NCV). The law of the peace offerings was designed so as to encourage the person who decided to make such a freewill offering to execute immediately- they were to eat it the same day they offered it, and the sacrifice would be totally unacceptable if it was killed but left for some days (Lev. 19:5-7). If we have an impulse to respond to the Lord, we should respond to it immediately. This isn't mere impetuosity. It's a spirit of always having an immediacy of response, which empowers us to overcome the procrastination which holds us back so much.

With the same- Why not say, more simply, "traded with them"? The idea surely is that we are to trade / work with what the Lord gives us to do, with those same things; rather than decide that our natural talents, which were not given at conversion but rather are an outcome of our own environment and experience, are to be developed just as everyone in the world does- and then claimed as work for the Lord.

Made another five talents- "Made" translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it has just been used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found 'doing' care to his brethren (24:46). And the word is twice used later in this chapter about 'doing' good unto the least of Christ's brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It's worth noting that this teaching is followed by the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She "did it" (*poieo*, 26:12,13), she "worked" (s.w. "traded") a good work ['trading'] on the Lord (26:10). It's as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of 'absence' of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

25:17 *Gained*- The word is used regarding 'gaining' others for the Kingdom: "You have gained your brother" (18:15), Paul was sensitive to his presentation of the Gospel "that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19,20,21,22); unbelieving husbands are "gained" by the example of the believing wife (1 Pet. 3:1). Clearly enough, the trading and gain of talents refers to what we do for others on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has personally given us. Not having oil to give light to others in the house [the ecclesia] and to the world is made parallel with not gaining more talents, which matches not ministering to the least [the word often refers to the spiritually least] of Christ's brethren. This shows the primacy of preaching & pastoral work / effort for others, especially in the last days. Oil burning is giving light to others. Going to sleep / not tending the lamps in the last generation is therefore lacking in love to the household, not keeping ourselves awake to give light to others. Lack of care for others in the last days results in lamps going out and our generation slumbering. Does this imply that in the last days there will not be the care for the least of Christ's needy brethren which there should be? The last generation will be slumbering when shouldn't be, i.e. not giving light to the world and brotherhood as they should. And could it be that the spiritually "least" whom they despise are the new converts made in the last days tribulation, whom they somehow disregard?

25:18 *Hid*- The tragedy is that the Gospel is hid from the majority anyway (s.w. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). It is treasure hid in a field which must be found (13:44). And it is hid now by one to whom it was revealed in order to share with others, put back in the earth from which the Lord Jesus had extracted it. By hiding it, the man effectively was placing himself in the same position as the unbelieving world. The allusion is clearly to Achan, hiding God's talents in the earth, for himself. In this connection we perhaps have an insight into the man's mentality. Can we infer that the man reasoned that the Lord might in fact never return, and therefore, his Lord's talents would become his? His excuses about the Lord being unreasonably demanding and "therefore" he did nothing with the talent all seem rather illogical, as if he was just saying it for the sake of mumbling at least something. His real motivation, surely, was to keep the talent for himself- on the basis that his Lord would not return. And this is the context of the parable. The fact we know that Christ will return, even if we do not know when exactly, will guard us against such an assumption- that we can take what is His as ours.

His Lord's money- The fact it was not his meant that he had no right to simply not use it. The fact we have been given so much by the Lord is undeniable; and we are to use it for Him and not hide it. Because it's not ours to do that with.

25:19 *After a long time*- *Chronos*, "time", can as a word imply delay or an interval. If time has 'length', as it does here, this can only be in the expectation of human beings. It would be fair to

interpret this phrase, even simply on the basis of the original Greek, as meaning 'after a long delay'. And this would admirably fit the context- for the parables of Matthew 25 are a commentary upon the closing warning of the Olivet prophecy, that there is indeed a delay to the Lord's coming (24:48; 25:5). Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps. 37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time" (25:19). See on 20:16.

Reckons with them- The Lord's coming was surely not in AD70 because He did not reckon up with all His servants then; there was no resurrection of the faithful in order to reckon with them. The Greek text here is *sunairo logos*- He reckons the *logos* with them, He considers the thought behind their actions. It wasn't so much a reckoning on a simply utilitarian, mercenary level. Rather was it an examination of their inner *logos* and motivation, as demonstrated by the discussion with the one talent man concerning his inner thoughts about his Lord. *Sunairo* is only used elsewhere in 18:23,24 where the Lord's reckoning with His servants begins now in this life. And they had miserably failed in money management. Yet He still wanted relationship with them, and frankly forgave them, whilst assuming they would on that basis forgive any of their own far smaller debtors. But even that didn't work out. Putting the Lord's parables together, so many of them are about servants; and the servants often behave in an incredibly bad way to Him. And we are those servants.

25:20 *Came-* This is *proserchomai*, and the word used for the Lord's coming is *erchomai* (:19). He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. As outlined earlier, this will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquitting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

Brought- He offered / presented the talents to his Lord. Only in the day of judgment will we achieve final self-knowledge and be able to perceive what we have done and achieved with what He has given us. Our trading / work is clearly with the Lord's people. The presentation of the wealth gained therefore refers to what we have done for others. Paul spoke of how he would 'present' his converts to Christ at the last day; hence his concern about their development, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

You delivered me- This is the word used for the 'delivering' to believers of the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3). Again we see that the talents refer to what is specifically given to us by Christ at the time of our calling by the Gospel, and not to any latent natural ability within us.

25:21 *Faithful servant-* The term used in the previous parable (24:45). There, the "faithful servant" was faithful in that he provided food for the other servants within the household, and didn't beat the fellow-servants. Here, the faithful servant trades his Lord's wealth for a profit. The metaphors refer to the same essential activity- sharing the wealth we have in Christ for the benefit of our brethren. To cut them off, waste their energy and attention with empty arguments and pedantic concerns, ignore them... is to not trade the talents, to be unfaithful.

A few things- The equivalent parable in Lk. 19:17 says "in a very little" (*elachistos*). This very same word is found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated "the least" of the Lord's brethren (25:40,45). The talents we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the "few things", and how we shall be given "many things" to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centered merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord's work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally.

I will make you ruler- The preceding parable says that we have already been made ruler in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the

Lord's goods (24:47). We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to be prepared for eternity.

Many things- The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. "Many things" is equivalent to "all His goods" (24:47; Lk. 12:44). There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

Enter into- This is *eis-erchomai*, and is the Lord's confirmation of how the servant responded to the call to come to Him by 'coming' to Him, *pros-erchomai* (:20). Once again we meet the teaching that our initial response at the Lord's return, our willing desire to go to Him, will be confirmed by Him bringing us closer to Him. The same word has just been used about the wise virgins 'going in' to the wedding (25:10) having initially responded to the call without delay. The same word is used of Noah entering the ark (24:38), and these parables in chapter 25 appear to be an expansion upon that.

The joy of your Lord- The joy of the Lord Jesus as revealed in His own teaching is specifically His joy at the repentance of others. He speaks of Himself as the shepherd rejoicing over the lost sheep (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:5) and the repentance of any sinner (Lk. 15:7), at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32), joyful that the disciples believed in Him (Jn. 11:15), joyful at finding the believers in the world (Mt. 13:44). The reasons for the Lord's joy were all related to the salvation and spiritual blessing *of others*. He went on to say soon afterwards that His joy was to become the joy of the disciples even in this life (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). This will ultimately happen at the point of entry into the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but the essence of it is to begin now. And it can indeed begin now, if the Lord's joy at others' repentance, growth and salvation becomes *our* joy, and our joy is no longer in ourselves and material things. There is also here a

Joseph allusion- "They were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.

25:22 *Received*- Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor. 4:7: "For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?". All that we have spiritually including the knowledge of the Lord Jesus in truth, is a gift we received. And yet we can easily act as if we did not receive it, suggesting instead that we found the Lord ourselves by our own searching. Many people have a spiritual search all their lives and never find much if anything. What we have got is a gift we received, and we must ever be humbled by that.

25:23 *A few things*- The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

Enter into the joy of your Lord- The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done... enter into the joy of your Lord". The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "you, enter into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things He reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" sounds like the Lord may have to encourage us to get over our weeping, and enter into the sheer joy which He has, that we've finally made it. "*Come...!!* You blessed of my Father! Enter the Kingdom...!" sounds like something similar. Now all these things are highly emotional. Yet we will have God's nature. He therefore has the same kind of emotional capabilities as we will have. And, He exercises them right now.

25:24 Then- The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

Lord- The man considers himself one of the Lord's servants, within the household. He clearly felt he had been given too little to do anything much with; but actually the talent was worth around 1 million \$, or 20 years' wages. He didn't appreciate the greatness of what he had been given.

I knew you- In reality, he didn't know his Lord. For those who 'know the Lord' will be saved, and it is the unbelieving world who do not know Him (s.w. Jn. 17:3,25). Because that isn't at all how the Lord is (hard, unreasonable, etc.). But the Lord doesn't correct the false understanding, thereby justifying Himself. Rather does He [as so often] reason with the man upon the basis of the man's professed belief system. We see this so often in the Lord's teaching style, and in the way the Gospels use the language of demons. Error is not baldly exposed and corrected, rather are those who believe it worked with according to their understandings, and gently brought to a realization that those views are unhelpful and not the correct reality. The focus, therefore, was upon people, upon the persons holding the ideas, rather than the error of the ideas in themselves. And this has much to teach us; for so many Protestant groups have become obsessed with exposing intellectual error for its own sake; whereas our focus must be upon the individuals who hold those misbeliefs.

You are a hard man- The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and

understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as “the man Christ Jesus”, able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title ‘men’ even in immortality.

Reap- The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19:13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he ‘knows’ [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has ‘known’ [*eido-* which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being ‘You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates’. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: “I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured...”. The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

Where you have not sown- The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord ‘reaps’ or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes

responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

Gathering- This was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him a talent, 20 years' wages, \$1 million. And yet the man reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and showered with all spiritual blessings... can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

Where you have not strawed- The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

25:25- see on Mt. 25:14.

I was afraid- Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25). Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

Hid your talent- In line with our earlier suggestions that the man was alluding to the Lord's words, one wonders if here he has in mind the Lord's teaching about the Kingdom as treasure hid in a field [i.e. in the ground] which must be found (13:44). Of course, it's terribly out of context. But that's the way so many people use the Lord's words, as if sharing the same lexical items with Him somehow adds legitimacy to their doing just precisely what *they* want to do- rather than serving Him. The Lord Jesus was the man of 13:44 who sold all that He had to buy / redeem the field in which the treasure was buried. By returning the treasure into the earth, the man was effectively undoing the work of the Lord on the cross; for the field is the world (13:38), and the price of the field's redemption was the Lord's blood. But by laziness and a vague hope that the wealth would by default become his own, the Lord's work on the cross was undone for this man. The connection with 13:44 is surely purposeful.

You have what is yours- So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his talent, but buried it and returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Lo, there You have what is Yours" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn't ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn't

spend it on himself, he wasn't like the prodigal son. But too late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You have what belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. Thus the other two servants speak somewhat differently, of the talents which had been "delivered" to them. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation. See on :29 *Taken away*.

Perhaps we have never seriously thought of being generous to someone else [even if it's a few pennies from our poverty]; of actively telling an acquaintance about the Gospel; of doing acts of kindness for someone 'out of the blue', thinking up something nice for them which will make them feel 'Wow!'; doing mission work; reconciliation with our enemies; seeing beyond our immediate emotions of hurt, pleasure, anger, passion. When we step out in faith and do these things, we start living a totally new kind of life. We find God setting us up with situations, working with and through us- and we feel it. We will see beyond the steely silence of the skies to know the reality of Angelic existence. One of my favourite Bible stories is that of Elisha and his frightened servant. Elisha asks God to open the man's eyes so that he might see the Angelic armies surrounding them; Elisha [and I so love this] didn't ask for his own eyes to be opened to see them; he was so certain they were there.

25:26 *Wicked... servant*- The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" of 25:26 does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, his laziness [AV "slothful"], meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first

kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

You knew- See on :24 *I knew you*. There are different words used. Here, *eido* means more 'to see'. The Lord's response could actually be translated as a question: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow...?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

25:27 *You ought-* Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that... is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. "Oughtest", *dia*, means you must have , you had to- very possession of the talent meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers. I have often pondered what we are to learn in our generation from the strict statement that males without the ability to procreate were barred from the Lord's congregation during the Old Covenant (Dt. 23:1). Perhaps the point is that all those who are the Lord's people must recognize their ability to procreate for Him, in the bringing forth of yet others in their Lord's image.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen.

3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something!* Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind.

Therefore- In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

To the exchangers- The Lord probably means that the man should have done at least something, putting the money into "the bank" (Lk.), doing something effortless [in line with his lazy character], but at least doing something. And yet just possibly the Lord may also have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (1). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

Received- The Lord will *receive* back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead).

There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

Lk. 19:23 says at this point that the Lord will "require" of us our use of wealth (Lk. 19:23). The man who did nothing with his pound should have at least lent it out on usury, the Lord said- even though this was illegal according to Moses. He should have done at least *something* with his money, even if it involved taking a lower level of service than the Lord ideally expects. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our achievements at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord.

My own- The fact He is Lord *of all* means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God? Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, in this life, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.*

25:28 *Give it unto him who has-* The faithful will have enough self-knowledge to be able to say: 'You gave me these basic doctrines and these characteristics to develop with them, and I can now present you with this...'. That part of the character and mind of Christ which was given to the

unfaithful servant to develop is taken away and given to the faithful. The unfaithful receive the riches of Christ but do nothing with them; they don't let them impact their character.

He who has ten talents- This is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours" (:25). The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. Yet words like 'achievement' are almost dirty words in the vocabulary of grace which some insist on. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

25:29 Shall have abundance- This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

From him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has- This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have talents, or not? He did, of course, have a talent; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

Taken away- Perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused talent that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the talent- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the talent as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours" (:25). The Lord intended that we identify with the talent, rather than see it merely as His. See on :25 *You have what is yours.*

25:30 *Unprofitable*- Unless we are going to actually achieve something for the Lord, then we are unprofitable. But of course the same words for “unprofitable servant” are found in Lk. 17:10- after we have “done all” that we could, we are to recognize that we are still in this category of “unprofitable servant”. Salvation itself is still by grace. The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word "charis", usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" there (Lk. 17:9). The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become slaves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.