

2013

Matthew 25:14-30 Exegetical Perspective

Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "Matthew 25:14-30 Exegetical Perspective" (2013). *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies*. 329.
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/329>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Christian Studies at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Exegetical Perspective

The parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 provides continued instruction for believers living in the interim between first and second comings of the Son of Man (chaps. 24- 25). As one of several parables Matthew adds to Mark's apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13), the second of three parables in Matthew 25 bears the closest parallels with Luke (Luke 19:11-27). It also coheres with the master-servant parables and references elsewhere in Matthew: pray to the lord of the harvest so send forth laborers, 9:37-38; a servant will suffer as did his master, 10:25; laborers need not uproot the tares, as such will be gathered and burned before the harvest, 13:24-30; the servant receiving mercy from the master should have shown mercy to his lesser debtors, 18:23-35; the vineyard owner pays the same daily wage to early and late-coming workers, 20:1 - 16; the wicked tenants refuse to pay their dues and even kill the vineyard owner's son, 21:33- 42; the wise servant is faithful and just, versus one who is slothful and cruel, 24:45-51. Similarities and differences are intriguing.

In sum, Jesus here describes the master's entrusting three servants with different amounts of money (a talent, talanton, would have been worth six thousand days' wages, between fifteen and twenty years' earnings): five talents, two talents, and one talent-each according to his ability (dynamis, power). While the servants entrusted with five talents and two talents double their master's investments, securing his praise and commendations, the steward entrusted with one talent buries it for fear of the master. At this, the master scolds him harshly-revealing indeed his fearsome character-giving his single talent to the man with ten. At least he could have invested it to garner interest. The last verses declare the point of the parable directly (vv. 29-30): "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth:"

While this parable seems terribly unfair and devoid of the graciousness characterized by other Matthean parables, it adds the themes of responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative to what it means to be prepared for the Lord's imminent return. As a means of bolstering the appeals of Jesus, Matthew adds "weeping and gnashing of teeth" warnings a total of six times (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke adds the motif to the teaching on the narrow and the shut door (Luke 13:22-30; cf. Matt. 7:13- 23; 8:11-12; 19:30). Such a device would have challenged the teachings of Pharisees during the Jamnia Period (70-90 CE) in their motivating adherence to the way of Moses as they understood it, employing the rhetoric of eternal consequences. It also would have emboldened believers regarding the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (67-70 CE), calling on them to remember eternal rewards as followers of Christ, over against competing political sirens of the times.

Some of Matthew's emphasis becomes clarified when this parable is compared and contrasted with the parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11-27; both are expansions upon Mark 13:34. In Luke a nobleman going to a far country to receive a kingdom calls ten of his servants together, entrusting each with one pound (mina, worth three month's wages) with which to trade (versus a man's going on a journey and entrusting his servants with five, two, and one talents, Luke 19:12-13; Matt. 25:14-15). Upon his return two of his servants have produced tenfold and fivefold

profits, whereupon the nobleman places them in charge of ten and five cities accordingly (versus those doubling the five and two talents, receiving the master's praise, Luke 19:14-19; Matt. 25:16-23). The fearful servant hides his pound in a napkin (versus burying a talent in a field, Luke 19:20-21; Matt. 25:24-25). The master condemns the man and gives his pound to the one who had ten (similar to giving the single talent to the man with ten, Luke 19:22-24; Matt. 25:27-28). Despite the cry of unfairness ("Lord, he has ten pounds!"), to those who have much, more is given, and from those who have little, even that shall be taken (versus the lack of an explicit mention of unfairness, although both traditions feature the rewarding of the productive, Luke 19:26; Matt. 25:29). The enemies of the nobleman are slain for not wanting him to rule over them (versus the casting of the worthless servant into outer darkness, where weeping and the gnashing of teeth will abound, Luke 19:14, 27; Matt. 25:30). Coming through clearly in both renderings is the call to responsible and productive ingenuity, even while awaiting the Lord's return. Both traditions also focus on the unfairness of the master's rewards (implicitly in Matthew; explicitly in Luke), but such informs the way of the wise versus that of the foolish.

The call to faithful and productive ingenuity would have rung true on several levels for Matthew's audience. First, as believers in Thessalonica become troubled over the delay of the Parousia (1 Thess. 4:1-18), Paul calls for them to hold on to their hope in Christ's return, but also not to give up their day jobs. If one does not work, neither shall he or she eat; believers must continue to be responsible on conventional levels, despite awaiting the imminent return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:1-17; 3:1-15).

A second level of meaning may simply have applied as a wisdom parable: the most productive will be most amply rewarded. Therefore, all persons are called to be proper stewards of that with which they are entrusted-in physical resources and otherwise- in furthering the work of the master.

A third level of meaning applies to the stewardship of the gospel. In all seasons and times, despite waiting for the Lord's return, believers are exhorted to further the good news in ways creative and effective. After all, only after the kingdom is "proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations" will the end finally come (24:14). If this parable is seen to continue the thrust of the previous one, perhaps keeping one's lamp filled and lit involves prospering the kingdom.

PAUL N. ANDERSON