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## STEWARDSHIP OF THE POUNDS AND TALENTS.

MAY 17. – Luke 19:11-27. Compare also Matt. 25:14-30; 1 Cor. 4:1-7.

"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." – Luke 16:10.

THE Parable of the Pounds and the Parable of the Talents, as companion parables, illustrate from different standpoints the responsibilities of the stewardship of God's people. St. Paul says, "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers [servants] of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." This stewardship and ministry, while it belonged in a special sense to the apostles, belongs also to the whole Gospel Church, all of whom have the anointing and the commission (Isa. 61:1,2) and the consequent responsibilities of the sacred trusts committed to them. And as stewards of God we have nothing of our own, nothing with which we may do as we please; for, says the Apostle, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Nothing. And what have we to call our own that has not been included in our covenant of consecration to God? Nothing. Consequently all that we have belongs to God, and we are merely stewards of his goods.

"Moreover," says the Apostle, "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"; and the parables under consideration show what is considered as faithfulness to our stewardship. To merely receive the gifts of God is not faithfulness, tho many seem to think so. Many indeed seem to think they have done God a great favor in merely accepting his grace through Christ, and are satisfied to make no further efforts. But such make a great mistake; for faithfulness, as here shown, consists in a proper and diligent [R1972 : page 99] *use* of our gifts in harmony with the divine purpose and methods; and both the Lord and the Apostle point to a day of reckoning, when even the secret things will be brought

to light, and all the counsels of the hearts shall be made manifest. – Luke 19:15; 12:2,3; 8:17; Mark 4:21,22; Matt. 25:19; 1 Cor. 4:5.

We observe that in the former parable each of the servants received exactly the same thing – a "pound," while in the latter the gifts varied: one received five talents, another two, and another one, "every man according to his several ability." The "pound," being the same to all, fitly represents those blessings of divine grace which are common to all God's people. Among these are the Word of God and the various helps to its understanding, the influences of the holy spirit, the privileges of faith and prayer and communion with God and fellowship with Christ and with his people. But the "talents" being distributed according to every man's several ability, represent opportunities for the service of God along the lines of such abilities as we possess. They may be talents of education, or money, or influence, or good health, or time, or tact, or genius, with opportunities for their use in God's service.

In both parables our Lord is represented as about to take his departure to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. And a part of their object was to disabuse the disciples' minds of the idea that his Kingdom would immediately appear. He thus intimated that while he was about to return to his Father in heaven there would be an interim between then and the time of his return, during which time their faithfulness to him would be fully tested, and that all that would prove faithful to their stewardship in his absence would **[R1973 : page 99]** be owned and blessed of him in his Kingdom upon his return.

The commission to each and all of the Lord's stewards is expressed in the words, "Occupy [which, in old English, signified, "Do business with," "Use," "Traffic with"] till I come." And the *first* business with the King on his return is not to deal and reckon with and judge the world, but to reckon with these servants to whom his goods – the "pounds" and the "talents" – had been committed; to see how much each had profited thereby, as a test of their fidelity, to determine what place if any should

be granted them in his Kingdom. Notice also that the reckoning with them is as individuals, and not by groups or classes.

In plain language, these parables teach that it is the duty of every Christian to make good use of all that the Lord has given him. The right use of the "pound" is to diligently profit by all the means of grace for the spiritual upbuilding of ourselves and others. We cannot afford to neglect any of these; for we cannot do so without loss. If we neglect to consider and ponder the principles and precepts of God's Word, or to heed their wholesome instructions; if we fail to consider or to follow the leadings of the holy spirit; if we neglect the privilege of prayer and communion with God; or if we fail to cultivate the fellowship and communion of saints, we are folding our "pound" in a napkin. It cannot yield its legitimate increase while thus unused. Christian character cannot grow and develop in the neglect of the very means which God has provided for its perfecting. In such neglect a spiritual decline is sure to set in; and the more persistent and long-continued is the neglect, the less realized is the decline, and the less inclination is there to energy, diligence and zeal in correcting it. But in the diligent and proper use of these means of grace there is a "feast of fat things" which is sure to build up and invigorate the spiritual life and cause it to bring forth much fruit unto holiness, which is the increase for which the King is looking.

Yet the parable shows different degrees of increase in different cases following the right use of the "pound." The "pound" in the care of one servant gains ten, while with another it gains five. This reminds us of what we commonly observe, that even the same means of grace do not profit all to exactly the same extent. Some, for instance, are by nature more studious and thoughtful, or more generous, or grateful. And therefore the appeals of the various means of grace to the heart differ in different individuals, and the consequent fruitfulness also differs in quantity. Another illustration of the same thing is also found in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:8), where the seed in *good ground* produces fruit in varying quantities – some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold.

But all such fruitful characters are appreciated and rewarded as "overcomers," and of the "little flock" to whom "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom." The different measures of fruitage – the thirty, sixty, and hundred-fold, or the ten pounds and the five, mark differences in obstacles to be overcome, etc., rather than unfaithfulness in the use of the means of grace. Some may work long and diligently for small results, while the same effort in others of more resolute will and of greater continuity may accomplish great things. Some by slips and occasional backslidings, from which they subsequently recover, lose time and opportunities which can never be regained, although they are forgiven and generously reinstated in the divine favor and thenceforth run with diligence and patience to the end.

All of these, therefore, because of their faithfulness, because they have overcome the obstacles in their way and have diligently cultivated the fruits of the spirit in the use of all the means of grace provided, are accorded a generous welcome into the everlasting kingdom, although the best efforts were short of perfection, and each must still have the robe of Christ's righteousness imputed to him by faith. But the degrees of exaltation in the kingdom differ according to the measure of their fruitage here. The steady diligence that secured the gain of "ten pounds" here is rewarded with corresponding exaltation there, which figuratively is likened to authority over ten cities; while the faithfulness which was sometimes interrupted and imperilled by dangerous backslidings afterward healed, but which apart from these perseveringly gained "five pounds," is rewarded with an exaltation in the Kingdom represented as "authority over five cities."

The Parable of the Talents illustrates fruits of labor. In it the ratio of increase is the same with both of the faithful servants – each doubled his "talents"; and the same approval is expressed to each, according to the principle mentioned by Paul (2 Cor. 8:12), – "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." A truly "willing mind" to serve the Lord will always find a way to serve him in the use of whatever talents are

possessed; and the increase is sure to follow; and if not under our immediate, present observation, it will appear by and by. "God is not unmindful of our work and labor of love," however unfruitful it may appear to us. The fruit will be manifest by and by when all the secret things shall be revealed.

The differences of reward, accompanied by the same words of approval and welcome to the Kingdom glory and joy of the Lord, call to mind those scriptures which bid us rejoice in all present opportunities for that suffering and service which attest our faithfulness, because they work out for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and also remind us that there will be some least and some [R1973 : page 100] greater in the Kingdom of heaven. This is an incentive to "lay up treasures in heaven," where moth doth not corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal. – See Matt. 5:11,12; 2 Cor. 4:17,18; Matt. 11:11; 6:20.

But what of the faithless servant who wraps his "pound" in a napkin (who failed to make use of the means of grace for his own spiritual upbuilding and character development) and who buries his "talent" (of time or means or education, or ability of any kind, great or small) in the earth – in the service of self and Mammon? Is there any reward for his faithless misuse of the Master's goods? No! even that which he hath shall be taken away, and he shall be cast into outer darkness. (Luke 19:24-26; Matt. 25:28-30.) The principle announced in the golden text is that upon which the rewards are to be given. Great trusts are to be committed to the "overcomers" of this age, and their worthiness must be tested: they must endure the tests, and thus be proved.

The citizens that hated him (verse 14), and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us, represent not only the Jews who cried, Away with him! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar! but includes also all who having come to a knowledge of Christ and his coming kingdom are so out of accord with righteousness that they do not desire the promised Millennial Kingdom.

Wrath will come upon these, a great "time of trouble, such as was not since there was a nation," soon after the "servants" have been reckoned with and rewarded. "Bring them hither and slay them before me," speaks of the Lord's righteous indignation against evil doers, but in no way cuts off hope of forgiveness for those who shall then repent and become loyal subjects of the King.

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