

August 11, 2013

Parables: Stewardship

By Bryan Hodge

Definitions of steward –

“The manager of a household or estate.” ~ Vine’s

“The management of a household or household affairs; specifically, the management, oversight, administration of other’s property.” ~Thayer

“A steward is someone who has been given something to use for the benefit of someone else. He is a manager who has been placed in charge of someone else’s money or property... A steward is someone entrusted with something that doesn’t belong to him, to use for the benefit of others.” ~Kenny Gardner

Note: The English word comes from the Old English “styward,” “stig” or “sty” in reference to people referred to a “hall,” in reference to animals it referred to an “enclosure” or “pen.” “Weard” or “ward” meant “guard” or “protect.” Thus, it was one who had the responsibility to care for something.

Let us consider two parables that we will classify as “stewardship” parables.

Talent (Matthew 25:14-30)

The setting (Matthew 24:1-ff): Jesus is with his disciples (Matthew 24:1), specifically with Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3). He spoke to them of the judgment day, saying – “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only... watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:36, 42).

The Parable (Matthew 25:14-30): A man is to travel to a far country. The man is Jesus (Matthew 25:14, 19 cf. 25:31-ff). The far country, which is also mentioned in other passages (Matthew 21:33; 25:14; Mark 12:1; Luke 19:12; 20:9), no doubt refers to heaven (Luke 19:12 cf. Daniel 7:13-14; John 14:1-3).

Prior to the man’s departure, he entrusts varying amounts of talents to each of his servants. One servant received 5 talents (The ESV Study Bible calculates this to be about \$3 million in today’s money). One servant received 2 talents (about \$1.2 million). One servant received one talent (about \$600,000). They were to be good stewards of what was entrusted to them.

After a long time the Lord returns. This long time is emphasized throughout Jesus’ teachings concerning His return (Matthew 24:48; 25:5; 25:19; Luke 12:45).

He summoned his servants. The first two servants are found to have used their talents profitably. The five-talent man had gained another five talents. The two-talent man had gained another two talents. He commends each of them saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The third servant had buried his talent. He had done nothing with it. He tries to make a defense. However, the Lord indicates that the real reason for the lack of productivity was that he had been a “wicked and lazy servant.” This man did not enter into the joy of the Lord as the other two, but was cast into outer darkness.

The application: While the apostles may primarily be in view (Matthew 24:1-ff), all Christians are servants of God (Romans 6:22; 12:11). (1) Each servant received something. We may not all have the same abilities. However, we do have ability and talent that should be used in His service. (2) Whatever we have really belongs to Him. We are His stewards (cf. Psalm 24:1; 50:10). (3) We are entrusted with a treasure, the treasure of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:7). How are we using it? Are we burying it? (4) The Lord judges based on our abilities (cf. Luke 12:48; 2 Corinthians 8:12; Mark 12:41-44). Wayne Jackson, "It was not the number of talents, but the quality of service that was praised" (The Parables in Profile, p. 64). (5) The one talent man was condemned not for what he did, but for what he did not do. Christianity is more than 'don't'. It is a religion of 'dos' (cf. James 4:17; Galatians 6:10).

Pounds (Luke 19:12-27)

The setting (Luke 19:11): Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11; 18:35-37; 19:1; 19:11; 19:28). Excitement is high, and a throng of humanity press to see him (Luke 18:35-37; 19:1-4). The expectation is that he would soon declare himself King, and set up a physical kingdom. This parable is set forth, "because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately" (Luke 19:11).

The parable (Luke 19:12-17): A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. The man is Jesus. The kingdom would be received in a far country, not in Jerusalem. The far country, no doubt, is heaven, and is mentioned several times by Jesus (Matthew 21:33; 25:14; Mark 12:1; Luke 19:12; 20:9). Note: This was not historically or politically unusual. A man might journey to Rome to appear before the Emperor and Senate before receiving kingship over a land. Jesus was to go to the ancient of days to receive the kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

Prior to departure the nobleman entrusted ten servants with one pound (KJV)/Mina (NKJV) each, and instructed "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:13). The ESV Study Bible implies that a mina would be worth about \$7,200 today.

While he was away, some citizens sent a delegation to the far country saying, "We will not have this man reign over us" (Luke 19:14). Note – such a thing actually happened with Archelaus (cf. Matthew 2:22) the son of Herod the Great (Gospel Advocate Commentary on Luke, by H. Leo Boles, p. 302).

He returned a king. He summons his servants. The first two servants had been productive with varying success. However, the third servant had done nothing productive. He tried to make an excuse. Ultimately, he had his stewardship stripped from him. Next, he orders that those who did not want him to reign over them be brought before him and slayed.

The application: (1) The Kingdom would not be received in Jerusalem, but in a far country (cf. Daniel 7:13-14). (2) We will be held accountable to Him. (3) He will return.