

A Lenten Journey Through the Parables

5. Parables of the Great Day of the Lord's Coming

Sunday, March 25, 2012
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
Presenter: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness

References

- **The Parables of Jesus**, by David Wenham. IVP Academic, 1989. ISBN 978-04308-12864
- **The Parables. Understanding the Stories Jesus Told**, by Simon J Kistemaker. Baker Books, 1980. ISBN-13: 978-0801063916
- **A Journey Through the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes. Audio CD Course. Now You Know Media. **Stories Jesus Told. Modern Meditations on the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes, Liguori, 1991. ISBN 0-7648-0413-8
- **Stories with Intent. A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus**, by Klyne Snodgrass, 2008, Eerdmans Publishing Co., ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-4241-1
- *Audio excerpts from:* **The Listener's NIV MP3 Audio Bible**, narrated by Max McLean

Today

Grouping as per *Stories with Intent*

- **Parables of the Great Day of the Lord's Coming (Parables of Future Eschatology)**
 - **The Servant Entrusted with Authority = The Faithful or Unfaithful Servant (Matthew 24:45-51)**
 - **The Ten Virgins = The Ten Bridesmaids = The Wise and Foolish Girls (Matthew 25:1-13)**
 - **The Talents and the Minas = The Talents and the Pounds (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27)**
 - **The Sheep and the Goats = The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)**

Lord, how great is your patience. You are full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy, and true! You make your sun rise on the good and on the wicked alike; you send rain on the just and the unjust alike. You do not desire the death of sinners; you would rather that they turn from wickedness and truly live. By your patience you lead us to repentance.

- Augustine of Hippo, 354-430

**Parables of the
Great Day of
the Lord's
Coming**

**Parables of the Great Day
of the Lord's Coming:
The Servant Entrusted
with Authority
(Matthew 24:45-51)**

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Gospel Context

- All of our parables today are found in succession in Matthew Chapter 24-25, part of Jesus' answer to a question of his disciples.
- Matthew 24:1-3: Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (NIV)

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Gospel Context

- Jesus talks about the end times, telling his disciples in 25:36:
 - “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”finishing by noting in 25:42:
 - “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”
- Then he continues by telling his disciples these four parables:
 - The Servant Entrusted with Authority = The Faithful or Unfaithful Servant (Matthew 24:45-end)
 - The Ten Virgins = The Ten Bridesmaids = The Wise and Foolish Girls (Matthew 25:1-13)
 - The Talents and the Minas = The Talents and the Pounds (Matthew 25:14-30)
 - The Sheep and the Goats = The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-end)

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Matthew 24:45-51



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is

staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (NIV)

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Background

- A master of a number of servants has to leave his household for an undetermined length of time.
- The master calls a trusted servant and gives him charge of the household and the responsibility for looking after his fellow servants in his master's absence.
 - In Luke's version (Luke 12:42-46), the servant is called a 'manager' or 'steward.'
 - We should think of a senior and presumably capable member of the household who is entrusted with considerable responsibility.
 - He is his master's "right-hand man"

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Background

- “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites”
 - “cut him to pieces” = likely an idiom meant to be understood metaphorically, like the expression “skin him alive.”
 - In the Qumran literature, “cut him to pieces” meant “to cut him off” or “to cast him off” from his people.
- “hypocrites” – in Luke’s version, “unbelievers”

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Interpretation

- Message seems relatively straightforward:
 - Master of the household → Jesus
 - Servant left in charge → Jesus' disciples.
- As disciples of Jesus, we are called to:
 - **Faithfulness** to our master.
 - **Wisdom, thoughtfulness** in carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to us.
- If we are **faithful** and **wise** in the discharge of our duties and responsibilities, Jesus will reward us abundantly upon his return.
- If we are *not* **faithful** and **wise** in the discharge of our duties and responsibilities, we may get assigned a place “with the hypocrites [unbelievers], where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Interpretation

- As Jesus disciples, we do not know the time when our Lord will return.
- Our proper choice is to be **faithful** and **wise** servants, doing the Lord's will, ready for his return at any time.

Servant Entrusted with Authority

Interpretation

- The fact that the parable is about a servant put in charge of other servants suggests it may be aimed *particularly* at Christian leaders with the responsibility of other Christians in their care.
 - Indeed: in Luke's version, Jesus begins the parable right after Peter had interrupted him to ask, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

**Parables of the Great Day
of the Lord's Coming:
The Ten Virgins
(Matthew 25:1-13)**

The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (NIV)

The Ten Virgins

Background

- A young girl in Israel could be promised in marriage by her father after age 12.
- The wedding feast was typically celebrated one year after the betrothal.
- The wedding feasts were great occasions, with many guests, lots of food and drink, lasting a long time,
 - They took place at the groom's parental home.
- The feast would begin “when all was ready:”
 - food had to be prepared
 - last-minute negotiations took place at the groom's parental home between the groom, his family and his in-laws about the terms of the marriage contract (the “Ketuba”), in particular the dowry.
- Only when the dowry was paid and the contract signed could the feast begin.

The Ten Virgins

Background

- *Meanwhile:* the bride would be waiting at her house.
 - By custom, she would be surrounded by bridesmaids, likely were her special friends, about the same age as the bride.
- When “all was ready” the groom or groom’s father would go to the bride’s house and claim her, bringing her to the groom’s parental home in a celebratory procession led by musicians for the wedding and the feast.
- Task of the bridesmaids:
 - provide light for this traditional wedding procession to the groom's house.
 - perhaps to perform a colorful “torch dance” at the groom's house
 - help provide illumination for the festivities at the groom's house
- Their lamps or torches burned oil: they would need to bring *enough* to last through the festivities.

The Ten Virgins

Interpretation

- The joyful wedding feast → the kingdom of heaven
- The groom → Jesus
- The ten virgins / bridesmaids → Jesus' disciples (or would-be disciples)
- The burning lamps → the responsibilities and duties of discipleship

The Ten Virgins

Interpretation

- Of the two qualities asked of Jesus' disciples:
 - **Faithfulness** to our master, Jesus
 - **Wisdom, thoughtfulness** in carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to us.
- This parable emphasizes quality #2: **wisdom and thoughtfulness** in carry out the responsibilities entrusted to us.
- The five wise virgins thoughtfully prepared themselves for their tasks, bringing extra oil.
- The five foolish virgins were “fools,” thoughtlessly neglecting to bring the extra oil required for their task.

The Ten Virgins

Application

- To live an authentic Christian life requires us to thoughtfully and willfully live prepared for our death (or the Jesus' Second Coming = the Parousia) at any time.

**Parables of the Great Day
of the Lord's Coming:
The Talents and the
Minas**

(Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27)

The Talents

Matthew 25:14-30



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful

servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

“‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw the worthless servant outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (NIV)

The Minas

Luke 19:11-27



*Voice of Max
McLean*

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’

“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five

cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’”

“He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”
(NIV)

The Talents

Background - Talents

- A “talent” was the largest unit of money in use.
- The total annual income of the kingdom of Herod the Great was 900 talents.
- 1 talent = the wage of an ordinary worker for fifteen years = the wage of an ordinary worker for half a lifetime (for that era).
- It has been suggested that the best estimated “exchange rate” with modern currency would be:
1 talent = 1 million dollars
- The master of the servants is entrusting to his servants an *enormous* amount of money.

The Talents

Background – Partners

- The master of the servants is treating his servants in typical oriental fashion as partners in his enterprise: he is entrusting to them what may well be his entire available cash reserves, an enormous sum of 8 talents.

The Talents

Background – Investment

- The safest way to preserve treasure in Jesus' day (as we saw in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure) was to bury it.
- It was possible to “invest” the money in ways that would double the sum, but such schemes were extremely risky, wildly speculative.
- Banking in the Roman Empire = lenders, often based in temples, who:
 - made loans
 - accepted deposits
 - changed money
 - not always trustworthy

The Talents and the Minas

Background – Luke's Version

- In Luke's version (the Parable of the Minas or Pounds; Luke 19:11-27) the unit of money is a minas or pound.
 - A minas (or pound) is about 100 days wages of an ordinary laborer.
- In addition, the “master of the servant” is clearly portrayed negatively:
 - He is a man of noble birth going to a distant country to have himself appointed king.
 - But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say “We don't want this man to be our king.” (Luke 19:14)
 - The nobleman gets to be king anyways, and at the end, after he has awarded the first two servants and punished the third, he orders the enemies who did not want him to be king killed in front of him (Luke 19:26).

The Talents and the Minas

Background – Luke's Version

- This is strikingly parallel to the story of Herod's the Great son Archelaus.
- When Herod the Great (the Herod who tried to kill the infant Jesus) died in 4 BC, he willed his kingdom to his sons:
 - To Herod Antipas (who killed John the Baptist and tried Jesus): Galilee
 - To Archelaus: Judea (including Jerusalem), Samaria, and Idumea
- Caesar had to approve the transfer.

The Talents and the Minas

Background – Luke's Version

- Archelaus went to Rome and petitioned Caesar Augustus to approve him as Rome's client king.
 - Just before Archelaus traveled to Rome to petition Caesar, his troops murdered 3000 Jews in the temple in Jerusalem to quell a minor disturbance.
- 50 Jewish deputies also traveled to Rome, appeared before Caesar Augustus and:
 - accused Archelaus of the murder of 3000 of their countrymen in the temple
 - asked Caesar to entrust their country to a Roman governor rather than Archelaus.

The Talents and the Minas

Background – Luke's Version

- Caesar Augustus approved Archelaus' client kingdom anyways, and Archelaus dwelt brutally with those who had opposed him.
- Archelaus served from 4 BC until 6 AD, when Caesar Augustus removed him as incompetent and put the region under the control of a Roman governor.
 - Pontius Pilate was the fifth Roman governor of the Roman Province of Judea, serving from 26 to 36 AD.
- The parallels between the parable's story of the nobleman and Archelaus would have *obvious* to everyone in Jesus' audience.

The Talents and the Minas

Interpretation

- The master of the servants → Jesus
 - Only Jesus would dare compare himself to Archaleus to drive home a message
- The servants → Jesus' disciples, or would-be disciples
- The talents (or minas / pounds) → the gifts God has entrusted to us.

The Talents and the Minas

Interpretation

- What did the third servant do wrong to get treated so harshly (and what did the first two servant do right to get treated so generously?)
- One answer:
 - The third servant apparently knew his master was a rapacious, mean S.O.B (= as bad as Archelaus), harvesting where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed.
 - He should have known his master would want a return on the money.
 - The first two servants knew this and acted accordingly.
 - The third servant also knew this and should have also acted accordingly – but did not!
 - The third servant's failure was *not* do what he knew his master wanted.

The Talents and the Minas

Interpretation

- What did the third servant do wrong to get treated so harshly (and what did the first two servants do right to get treated so generously?)
- Another answer:
 - The third servant acted out of **fear** of his master.
 - The first two servants acted out of **faith and trust** in their master that they would be generously rewarded.
 - The failure of the third servant was *not* to have **faith and trust** in his master, instead letting **fear** paralyze him into inaction.

The Talents and the Minas

Interpretation

- Jesus often told his disciples, “Do not be afraid.”
 - When Peter protests, “Leave me, Lord. I am a sinful man,” Jesus responds at once: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:8,10).
 - “Do not be afraid of anything,” Jesus tells the Twelve in emphasizing God's providential care (Matthew 10:31).
 - To the synagogue official, Jairus, pleading for the healing of his little daughter, Jesus says: “Fear is useless. What is needed in trust” (Mark 5:36).
 - At the stilling of the storm on the lake he rebukes his disciples for their fear. “Why are you so terrified? Why are you lacking in faith?” (Mark 4:40; cf.6:50 and John 6:20).
 - When Jesus’ three friends—Peter, James, and John—are “overcome with fear” at his transfiguration, Jesus tells them: “Get up! Do not be afraid” (Matthew 17:6f).
 - He speaks the same words to Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” on Easter morning (Matthew 28:10).

The Talents and the Minas

Application

- The fact that the first two servants speculated recklessly – boldly – with their master’s money suggests God expects us to do the same with the gifts he has entrusted us.
- The “Christian thing to do” is to act boldly.
 - The boldness of the first two servants came not from themselves, but from their trust in the master’s generosity.

The Talents and the Minas

Application

- As Rev. Hughes puts it (p. 93):
 - “Trusting him means risking all, our hearts first of all. It means loving: generously, recklessly, without limit and without conditions. Because that is the way God loves us. And doing that will mean suffering the wounds that love inevitably inflicts.”

**Parables of the Great Day
of the Lord's Coming:
The Sheep and the Goats
(Matthew 25:31-46)**

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The king will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (NIV)

The Sheep and the Goats

Note

- Some parables, such as that of the sower, consist of a story which is followed by an interpretation.
- In this parable, the story and the interpretation are *interwoven* with each other.
- The parable of the sheep and the goats is a mixture of:
 - straight description (“when the Son of Man comes”)
 - pictorial language (“the sheep and the goats”)

The Sheep and the Goats

Background

- Mixed flocks of sheep and goats were common in Jesus' day:
 - it was economical to work with one herd
 - the more restless goats tended to keep the herd on the move, leading to more effective grazing in sparsely vegetated areas.
- However, the goats could not be left outside at night, while the sheep could.
 - At night the herdsman would have to divide up his herd, leaving the hardier sheep outside and bringing the goats in overnight

The Sheep and the Goats

Interpretation

- Sheep → those faithful to Jesus
- Goats → those unfaithful to Jesus
- Son of Man / King → Jesus. This identification recalls:
 - Vision in Daniel 7: the “Ancient of Days” (God) is on his throne to judge the nations. Then “**one like a son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven ... approached the Ancient of Days and was led to his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV)
 - Prophecy: God will bring salvation to his people through a **new king in the family of David** who will rule in justice and righteousness (for example, Isaiah 9:1-7)

The Sheep and the Goats

Interpretation

- **Those faithful to Jesus (the sheep)** are now *defined as* those who care for the people the king calls his “brothers”:
 - “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ... whatever you did for one of the least of **these brothers of mine**, you did for me.”
- If we were in any doubt about the meaning of ‘using our talents’ well for the Master, there can be *no* doubt here.

The Sheep and the Goats

Interpretation

- New Testament scholars differ on who exactly are the people the king calls his “brothers.”
 - Some scholars argue “brother” does not mean “everybody” but only the “disciples of Jesus.”
 - Other scholars (the traditional view) argue “brother” refers to the poor and needy *in general* – making it a classic statement of Christian Social Responsibility.

The Sheep and the Goats

Application

- Wenhan, page 93:
 - The parable makes it “clear how much the Lord cares for those who suffer. The parable is a severe warning to those who see the revolution of God as something purely spiritual and to do with ‘my personal relationship with God’, and who fail to see that the kingdom is a practical down-to-earth revolution and that no amount of spiritual gifts, or fervour in calling Jesus Lord, will be persuasive on judgement day. Jesus calls his followers to be a revolutionary, caring community, not comfortable conservationists protecting the status quo”