

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS **Matthew 25:14-30**

By Archpriest Peter Olsen

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The Parable of the Talents was spoken by our Savior to the apostles while they were making the long trek to Jerusalem. He tells them about a man who will be going away on a far journey, alluding to Himself and His eventual departure into heaven until His return in the Second Coming. Before his departure, he entrusts his servants (the apostles) with talents — to one he gave five, to one he gave two, and to one he gave one. In Jesus' time, the talent was a unit of currency; the largest in circulation. The talents represent the individual abilities that God gives to each person. Christianity has so influenced society that in modern language the "talent," which was a unit of currency, now has the meaning of "ability," "gifts," or "creative potential."

What is the meaning, when Jesus says, "For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away"? It means that man cannot remain neutral with God. He either moves forward or falls backward. God gives each one of us various gifts and abilities, and we are required to use our gifts for our salvation, and for our neighbor's advantage. We are given a mission to use our talents to struggle to conquer sin and acquire virtue, to help build up the church and our church community, and to help our neighbor. It is impossible to be a Christian and remain idle. In other words, one cannot simply choose to play a waiting game: a person either does what God expects of him or not. When we do not fulfill God's will, then we are fulfilling the will of the devil. There is no in between. It is one way or the other. The Lord said, "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad" (Mt. 12:30). Therefore, it is a great sin and evil if we bury our talents in the ground.

A man's spiritual riches grow exponentially if he puts his talents to God's service and the service of his neighbor. This is symbolized in the parable by the wise investment of money. The more income a person accrues, the more it grows. In other words, a person's spiritual capital grows when he puts his talents into circulation.

Finally, the question of one's intentions is crucial: does someone use his talents for personal enrichment, to fulfill carnal desires, for distractions and passions, or does he become a fellow-laborer with God (1 Cor. 3:9), using his abilities and gifts for God's work? God is inviting all of us to be His allies and fellow laborers, whether Bishop, priest, or lay person, it doesn't matter. We all have a role to fulfill, we all have a calling, and we all have our individual gifts and abilities which we can offer to God, the Church, and our neighbor. The apostles and the people were very concerned about a person's fate after death. All of Jesus' parables are connected, and even though he uses various symbols and stories, they all convey the same lesson and revelation about what we must do in order to be saved. We all know the expression that "time flies." Sometimes we may forget that life is short. St. John of Kronstadt wrote in his spiritual diary that we must be diligent to say our evening prayers, even if we feel tired because it is the end of the day and we are preparing to sleep, because we do not know if that will be the last time we will have the chance to pray. We don't know if tomorrow we may be ill, or perhaps we may not even waken from our sleep. Therefore, let us not squander the valuable gift of life and the time that God has given us. Let us not bury our talents in the ground or use them for selfish, carnal purposes, and as a result provoke those awful, terrible words, "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; where men will weep and gnash their teeth." Let us wisely invest and multiply our talents, and may we all on that final day hear the joyous words of the Lord, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Amen.

See "The Parables of Jesus: Jesus Christ, His Life & Teachings, Vol. 4," by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, SVS Press, Yonkers, NY, 2021, pages 376-390.