# First, God Gives! (The Parable of the Talents)

**Rod Matthews – 15 Nov 2026**

We are really blessed to have a relationship with the Creator of the universe. Like all relationships, the longer they exist the better you get to know the other person.

One problem that restrains people from having a relationship with God is that they have a totally wrong concept of what he is like. I'm sorry to say that this applies to many who designate themselves as Christian.

Many adults still carry the concept that the great Parent is a hard being, a restrictive taskmaster, perhaps a little like how toddlers (and perhaps teenagers) view their parents – they wouldn't permit them to stick their fingers in the power point, they wouldn't let them run freely outside the fence around their home and onto the street, they wouldn't let them have chocolate every time they desired it, they made them have vegetables with their macaroni and cheese, they made them go to bed when they were tired and wound-up but had no self-awareness of their behaviour, who wouldn't let them poke their baby sibling in the eye to see what happened, etc, etc.

It's like some Christians who sincerely would like to obey God but haven't moved past the concept that his laws would simply squeeze the pleasure out of life and are so restrictive because God only tolerates perfection now.

The scriptures tell us that the law is rather like a parent or a school master, designed to guide and teach about what is appropriate conduct living in a community; about limitations, self-respect leading to respect for others; how to think ahead and understand consequences, about developing wisdom now for success and enjoyment later. It's purpose, clearly stated in Gal 5:24 was that it was "put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified (made right) by faith" – not by obedience to the law.

In reality, God's goal is for us to live in relationship with our Creator, so that we learned to be compatible with his nature – summarised in one word –

LOVE. And that love expresses itself in a whole host of ways like joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So today, we are able to again delve into another story Jesus told that was intended to reveal what God is like - the King of the Kingdom of God. This parable is one of many because there are so many aspects of the Kingdom and its King that are best explained by addressing, explaining and amplifying characteristics individually. Then we build up a picture of the nature of God brick by brick.

Mat 25: 14-30 "Again it (that is the Kingdom of – that originates in - heaven) is like a man going on a journey...."

[Scripture reading]

**The Parable of the Bags of Gold**

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his
servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags
of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,[a] each
according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who
had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to
work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of
gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went
off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled
accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold
brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five
bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "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!'

22 "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you
entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

[23] “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!’

[24] “Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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. [25] So I
was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is
what belongs to you.’

[26] “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? [27] 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.

[28] “‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has
ten bags. [29] For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an
abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be
taken from them. [30] And throw that worthless servant outside, into
the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Notice how the story begins. Before anyone is asked to do anything, the master gives to them of his wealth, his property, his treasure.

But we must get the perspective correct. In the older versions of the scripture, what he gave his servants before his departure is calculated in “talents”. We might think this is a coin but it was originally a unit of weight, which is why some more modern translations have reworded it as “bags of gold”. In weight a talent was about 75 pounds, or about 34 kilos. In the environment of the Middle East in the time of Jesus, in monetary terms, a talent was the equivalent of 6000 denarii, and a denari was a day’s wage for a labourer. So one talent was about 6000 day’s wages – that is getting close to 20 year’s worth of wages. So it was a huge amount of money. That is just one talent.

But in the parable, one servant is given five talents. That is the equivalent of wages for 100 years; and another two talents, equal to wages for 40 years. We are talking of amounts that in today's money would come to about $10m and $4m respectively if we use the figure of the median wage for full-time employees in Australia of about $100,000.

So the amount that the master gave his servants was huge. And with it, there is no mentioned of instructions of what to do with it – no contracts, no hints, no threats about a final accounting.

The master gave amazing amounts of money – his own wealth – and went on his journey. In this story, the trust of the master in his servants was astonishing.

Now we must remember that this parable is given by Jesus to better explain what the Kingdom of God or heaven (it's origin) is like. So far we are learning what the King of the Kingdom is like. He is extremely generous.

It was the pattern of God from the very beginning. God gives first. He brought this world into existence and handed it to humanity before we had done anything. In the history of his dealings with Abraham, for example, he promised to bless Abraham before Abraham did anything. He delivered Israel from Egypt before he gave them a single commandment at Sinai. The rescue came first. The response came afterwards. The Father gave his own Son long before we knew what it was all about.

Rom 5:8 "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Now the next conclusion some make is that the parable is about using our personal talents to the fullest extent. However, this means we have changed the definition of "talent" to our modern usage – meaning our skills or aptitudes. And, besides, in the parable, the talents are not the servant's abilities but the master's property, wealth and treasure, freely placed in their hands. It would seem, though, that he certainly took their personal capabilities into account in handing out his riches.

So we can pause here and perhaps consider what the master, representing the Father or the King, has entrusted to us. Certainly he has given us free

moral agency to make decisions, he has put us into a wonderful world that he designed, he has given us his grace, loving us before we even knew how to love him, he has given us his Spirit, without cost, living in us, and enabling us to share God's riches with others – making us his representatives on earth.

Now based on what the first two servants did, it is obvious they knew their master. They knew his character. They knew he was generous because they had evidence of that in their hands. A master who freely entrusts others with fortunes will not crush someone if an honest venture doesn't produce all it could.

So they immediately took this vast fortune that he had given them and traded with it. At once. No hesitation, no apparent anxiety, no committee meetings. They took their master's wealth freely given to them and put it to work.

These servants were risking someone else's fortune. Trading in that world involved risk. Ships sank. Markets failed. Ventures collapsed. Thieves stole treasures. Yet these two servants handled their master's treasure with open hands and apparent fearlessness. Because they **knew** their master's character and generosity and trust – and could therefore be bold in their actions.

This parable illustrates how God's grace works. People who know that God is for them live differently from those who suspect that God is against them. People who know they are loved take holy risks. They forgive because they have been forgiven. They give generously because they know they have received generously. The qualities of God that have been given to us are passed on to others with the same generosity – the gifts of grace and love. It isn't something received and kept but, in a sense, put to work in the interests of others.

Now the next point from the parable is the reaction of the master when he returns and enquires about what happened with his gifted riches. The one who had been given five talents had made five more and the one given two talents had also doubled his.

The master's reaction to both of his servants was identical: "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."

"Entrusted with a few things….." Amazing, since they had actually been entrusted with an immense fortune. Well, since the master represents the Father, the creator and owner of the universe, of course to him it isn't much.

But note that the master praises faithfulness, not profits. The two men were given different amounts, yet they received the same commendation, word for word. The lesson is that God does not compare us, one to another. Different people, different capacities, different skills and therefore the type of comparisons we usually make are useless exercises.

Remember that Paul taught in **2 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV):** We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise."

Or in stronger language…"they are utterly foolish."

This is a clear admonition that character qualities like faithfulness are what is of importance to God.

Then we can look at the reward they were offered for their faithfulness: it was an invitation into the family of the master to share his joy or happiness. We should remember that joy is not what the master has, but what he IS. Joy is a natural expression of love which is what the Father is made of. 1 John 4:8 explains that God IS love, and Gal 5 clearly explains that joy is one of the fruits of love.
These faithful men are offered something even beyond the fortune that they were entrusted with. They are offered a share in the life of the master – who owns everything, we should note.

Now we come to the sad part of the parable. The man who had been given one talent would have received the same reward as the other two if he had doubled it. But he buried it instead. No loss and no gain – no change. No

effort, no thought, no gratitude for the trust placed in him. And his rationale for this:

“Master, I knew you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scatted seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”

Does any of this match the reality of what we know about this master? He freely handed out amazingly large amounts of money even to this man. He attached no conditions. He trusted his servants in his absence. Nothing in this man’s excuse matches the reality of the master revealed here. The master who was demanding, squeezing all he could get even from bad situations, taking where he had not given, was all in this servant’s imagination. He had hid from a master that did not exist.

There’s an irony here; this servant thinks his master is a bookkeeper, watching over every penny to be sure none get away. Yet it is the servant who is the bookkeeper, making sure that all the master gave him is returned. The ledger was balanced. Nothing owed. By the standards of the false master he believed in, he did everything right. Unfortunately, he missed everything that mattered.

The God who gives first, who treasures faithfulness rather than profits, invites us into his joy, not into his ledger. The parable tells us that this approach leads to darkness.

The master’s response to this servant is not the explosion of a harsh God to finally showing his true colours. It is the sorrow of a generous lord, God, handing a man what he, himself, chose, a world without grace. A world of darkness.

Jesus’ warning is sobering. Life apart from God’s grace is darkness. The servant’s fear has become the world that he chooses to inhabit. He believed in a hard master and therefore chose to operate in that perspective. It was his preference and the master let him have his preference. It is a case of God giving people what they want as part of his respect for them and their desires.

So the parable leaves us with the question, What do we believe about the

Giver? If we believe that God is generous, that he consists of LOVE and that everything he does and says flows from what he is, that he expresses himself with grace and mercy, then we have the liberty to live in freedom, openly, even boldly with all he has given us in his generosity. He isn't hovering over us waiting for the first slip up, to condemn us for sin or misjudgement.

He is saying, go and use what we have been given. Make it count. Don't bury the gift. NO need to strain or strive for fear of the results of not measuring up to some preconceived standard. Trust in the nature of the Great Giver. Be like him. Be generous like him, forgive like him, be merciful like him, lavish praise like him. Take risks like he did with what he owned.

For those whose personal experience in life has given them the impression that God is hard and unforgiving in his daily life, go show what God is really like. This is good news. God has already given us the treasure, the greatest of which was his Son, and all this even before any of us asked. Throughout the story of Biblical Israel and the great men of the Bible like Abraham, God always gave first. He never asked for anything he did not first supply.

The door the master holds open is not the door to an audit. It is the door to a celebration, a great banquet, joy in the old-fashioned sense.

I'd like to conclude with a very powerful story from Victor Hugo's book, and later presented as a stage show, of Les Misérables. Perhaps one of the greatest stage shows every produced, with the most powerful of music. It is a scene that has moved generations of readers and members of the audience to tears. A man named Jean Valjean has just been released from nineteen years of brutal imprisonment. His crime was stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. He was punished for nineteen years for a loaf of bread. A hungry young man was imprisoned and, unsurprisingly, returned a hardened, bitter one. Everything in Valjean's experience taught him about the worst of how the world works. You are watched. You are measured. You are punished. Every debt is collected in full.

Then, after his release, one night a bishop takes him in. He feeds him at his own table and gives him a warm bed. But in the middle of the night, Valjean can't help himself and repays this kindness by stealing the bishop's silver (plates and cutlery) and slipping out into the darkness. He doesn't get far. The police catch him, and in the morning, they drag him back to the bishop's door, wanting confirmation that the stolen silver belonged to the bishop. He fully expecting the bishop to send him back to prison for life.

What happens next changes everything. The bishop looks at Valjean and says, in effect, my friend, I am so glad you came back. You forgot the best pieces. And he places his silver candlesticks, the most valuable things he owns, into the hands of the man who robbed him.

Valjean stands there holding a fortune he cannot comprehend. He came expecting judgment and received an extremely expensive gift. He came braced for the harsh master his whole life had taught him to expect, and instead he met generosity that asked for nothing in advance. It nearly broke him there and them. And then it remade him. And the candlesticks take a significant place in the rest of the story of Valjean's life.

This is where the comparison between Jean Valjean and the third servant in our parable part ways. Both men began in the same place. Both had been taught by life to expect a harsh master. But when grace was placed into Valjean's hands, he let it shatter his false picture. He let the candlesticks tell him the truth about the giver.

The third servant held the same kind of evidence, a fortune freely given, and refused to let it speak. He clung to the hard master in his head against all the generosity in his hands.

Jesus' warning is sobering. Life apart from God's grace is darkness. The servant's fear has become the world he chooses to inhabit. Having rejected the master's generosity, he experiences only the darkness his false picture of the master could produce. He believed in a hard master, and in the end, that is the only master he had left himself with.

So let's be sure we allow the revelations in the scriptures about the God of love and mercy and grace craft a correct image of the Father we worship. Let's make sure that the demonic concepts of a harsh and unforgiving God are made powerless in our lives by the light from the Word.

Let's be bold in that confidence as God has placed untold riches in our hands, so go out, be bold, use what we have been given without worrying about the measuring the results against someone else.

And then the Great Creator will be so eager to say "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."