

## The Unprofitable Servant

Read Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 17:5-10

Jesus spoke two parables about an unprofitable servant. In the first, in Matthew 25, the servant ends up in a place where “*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” So we don’t want to be like that one. But the other servant, in Luke 17, is commended. That’s the one we want to be like. So, what’s the difference between the two? Lets see.

### Matthew 25:14-30

*14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

天国又好比一个人要往外国去，就叫了仆人来，把他的家业交给他们。

This first parable is given to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like. In the story, a man travels to a far country after giving all his goods to his servants to look after while he’s away. It’s talking about us. God is the man who’s “gone away” as it were (although He hasn’t really), and we’re the servants left to look after His goods.

Notice that even while the man was away, the goods are still his. We don’t own anything in this world. It all belongs to the Lord. We’re only looking after it for a time. We have discussions in the church as to whether we should tithe – give 10% of our income to the Lord, or not. But it’s really the wrong discussion. 100% of what we have is His anyway.

Psalm 50:10,12

*“For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. ....If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.”*

因为树林中的百兽是我的，千山上的牲畜也是我的。....我若是饥饿，我不用告诉你。因为世界，和其中所充满的，都是我的。

And also notice that one day the man’s coming back. One day, God will return to this earth in the form of Jesus Christ, and there’ll be a judgment, an accounting, a reckoning:

Matthew 12:36

*“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”*

我又告诉你们，凡人所说的闲话，当审判的日子，必要句句供出来。

*15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

接着各人的才干，给他们银子。一个给了五千，一个给了二千，一个给了一千。就往外国去了。

In the Old Testament, a talent was a unit of weight. In 2 Samuel 12:30 we read that the weight of King David's crown was a talent of gold. But in the New Testament, apart from in Revelation 16, when stones "*about the weight of a talent*" start falling on people, the word "talent" only occurs in Matthew's gospel, and we're not told what it's a weight of. So, it seems to no longer be a unit of weight but a unit of currency.

It was still probably quite a large amount. Matthew had been a tax collector, so he may have occasionally dealt with talents, which is why we only read about them in his gospel.

What does the "talent" in the parable represent? All we know is that they are something given to us by God to look after while He's "away." And they're given "*according to his several ability.*" All of us have been born with different abilities – different capacities to understand, and capacities to do things. Those that have been given more abilities will be expected to do more for the same reward.

Luke 12:48

*"unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."*

多托谁，就向谁多要。

There'll always be plenty of people who have far more knowledge or abilities that we have. We shouldn't worry about them. We're not competing with anybody. All we should be concerned about is doing our best for the Lord ourselves with what we've been given.

*16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

那领五千的，随即拿去做买卖，另外赚了五千。那领二千的，也照样另赚了二千。但那领一千的，去掘开地，把主人的银子埋藏了。

We shouldn't get confused between this parable of the talents and a similar parable in Luke 19, the parable of the pounds. They're similar but different. In this parable, one man is given five talents, another two and another one. The man given five talents gains five talents more, the man given two talents gains two talents more. Both get the same reward. The man given two talents isn't expected to make five talents more, just 100% with what he'd been given. So this is about us starting with differing abilities, but making the same percentage profit.

But in the parable of the pounds, in Luke 19, there are ten men and they each receive a pound each. We're only told the results of three of them. One makes ten pounds and is given a reward of ten cities, another makes five pounds and is given a reward of five cities, and the other hides his pound in a napkin. They all have exactly the same to start with, but make differing amounts of profit. So that parable speaks of differing rewards in heaven depending on what we do down here. That's a different lesson altogether.

But in both parables, the unprofitable servant (or “*wicked servant*” in Luke 19) teaches us the same lesson. Here, in Matthew 25, he buries his money in the ground, in Luke 19, he lays it up in a napkin, but otherwise the lesson is the same. Don’t be like him.

*19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

过了许久，那些仆人的主人来了，和他们算账。

Now, the reckoning. The lord comes back. And it’s after a long time. The servants must have been tempted to think he’s never coming back. So, even though the Lord seems to be delaying His return, we must always watch and pray and be ready:

Luke 21:34-36

*“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”*

你们要谨慎，恐怕因贪食醉酒并今生的思虑，累住你们的心，那日子就如同网罗忽然临到你们。因为那日子要这样临到全地上一切居住的人。你们要时时儆醒，常常祈求，使你们能逃避这一切要来的事，得以站立在人子面前。

*20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

那领五千银子的，又带着那另外的五千来，说，主阿，你交给我五千银子，请看，我又赚了五千。

*21 His lord said unto him, 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.*

主人说，好，你这又良善又忠心的仆人。你在不多的事上有忠心，我要把许多事派你管理。可以进来享受你主人的快乐。

*22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*

那领二千的也来说，主阿，你交给我二千银子，请看，我又赚了二千。

*23 His lord said unto him, Well done, 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.*

主人说，好，你这又良善又忠心的仆人。你在不多的事上有忠心，我要把许多事派你管理。可以进来享受你主人的快乐。

When the lord returns, the servants must give an account of what they'd done. One day we'll have to do that to the one true living God, and we won't be able to hide anything:

Romans 14:12

*"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."*

这样看来，我们各人必要将自己的事，在神面前说明。

Hebrews 4:13

*"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

原来万物，在那与我们有关系的主眼前，都是赤露敞开的。

And here, the lord calls these two *"good and faithful servant."* They've done everything the lord commanded them to do, even when he was far away and didn't seem to be looking. They haven't cheated him, but did their best with what he trusted them with. So the lord tells them, *"thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."* This was all a test to see if the servant could be faithful. And after the lord returned, the servant is rewarded with much more than he had before.

Everything we own, everything we are, belongs to the Lord of glory. And He's given it to us to look after for a while. How are we using what we've been given? Are we diligently using everything we've got to the glory of God? Or are we using it for our own pleasure? That's like the unprofitable servant. He despised his lord, he didn't recognise all he had was his lord's, and he did his best to convince himself that he's never coming back.

*24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

那领一千的，也来说，主阿，我知道你是忍心的人，没有种的地方要收割，没有散的地方要聚敛。我就害怕，去把你的一千银子埋藏在地里。请看，你的原银子在这里。

This servant thought his lord was a hard, unfair man. But that's not true. Maybe he thought it was unfair that he'd only been given one talent and others had been given a lot more than he had. And he claims he was afraid of his lord, but he wasn't really. While he was away, what was he doing? If he really had the fear of his lord in him, he would've

done what his lord told him. So he didn't really fear him at all. He hid the talent in the earth, to try to forget his lord ever existed. And many people do exactly that:

Psalm 14:1

*"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."* 愚顽人心里说，没有神。

*26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:*

主人回答说，你这又恶又懒的仆人，你既知道我没有种的地方要收割，没有散的地方要聚敛。

*27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

就当把我的银子放给兑换银钱的人，到我来的时候，可以连本带利收回

His lord calls him wicked and slothful. He couldn't even be bothered to go to the bank and open a deposit account. He's done absolutely nothing useful with his life. And we look out there in the world, and it's full of people just like this unprofitable servant.

Ephesians 2:12

*"having no hope, and without God in the world."*

并且活在世上没有指望，没有神。

They're all living totally unprofitable lives. Living for self. What pleases self. Trying to get what they can out of life for themselves. And the wretched thing is that every one of us was like that once. We're all born into that condition. Were all slaves to our natural instincts to please self. And we like it. It doesn't bother us. We all desperately need to get away from this self-centred nature of ours and turn to the Lord. Otherwise we're going to end up just like this unprofitable servant. That's why God sent our Lord Jesus Christ into this world. He came to save us from our sins, from our selfish nature. And we all need to turn to Him, and put our trust in Him. He's the only One who can help us.

John 3:17,18

*"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already."*

因为神差他的儿子降世，不是要定世人的罪，（或作审判世人下同）乃是要叫世人因他得救。信他的人，不被定罪。不信的人，罪已经定了

*28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*

夺过他这一千来，给那有一万的。

*29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

因为凡有的，还要加给他，叫他有余。没有的，连他所有的，也要夺过来。

The unprofitable servant didn't do anything with the talent he was given. He had his opportunity to use it, and he didn't take it. It was never his, so it was quite rightly taken away from him again, when his lord returned.

But the one who had made ten talents gets even more. On the face of it, that seems a bit unfair. Why should he get even more? But that's what's going to happen. We have such a reward and blessing awaiting us in the next world, far more than this world could ever give us. But to obtain that blessing, we have to stop living for ourselves, and make sure that we're obedient to the Lord in this world with whatever He's given us.

Luke 16:10,12

*“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.... And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?”*

人在最小的事上忠心，在大事上也忠心。在最小的事上不义，在大事上也不义。....倘若你们在别人的东西上不忠心，谁还把你们自己的东西给你们呢？

*30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

把这无用的仆人，丢在外面黑暗里。在那里必要哀哭切齿了。

And the unprofitable servant ends up in hell fire. Just judgment for his disobedience. The lesson is: Don't be like this unprofitable servant.

Now let's look at the other unprofitable servant. He's altogether different.

**Luke 17:5-10**

*5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

使徒对主说，求主加增我们的信心。

The disciples ask a question: “*Increase our faith.*” Well, that's a good thing to want. Faith can vary in size. Many times the Lord rebukes the disciples, and others, by saying, “*O ye of little faith.*” And Christ once said about a Centurion, “*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*” So it's not wrong to ask for an increase in faith. It's a good thing.

But the Lord replies:

*6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.*

主说，你们若有信心像一粒芥菜种，就是对这棵桑树说，你要拔起根来栽在海里，他也必听从你们。

There are also other passages which talk of faith as a grain of mustard seed being able to move mountains. Now this statement of our Lord's is very misunderstood. We're agreed a mustard seed is the smallest of the seeds. Christ tells us that in another parable:

Matthew 13:31,32

*"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."*

他又设个比喻对他们说，天国好像一粒芥菜种，有人拿去种在田里。这原是百种里最小的。等到长起来，却比各样的菜都大，且成了树。天上的飞鸟来宿在他的枝上。

So we're told here that just a very small amount of faith, the size of a grain of mustard seed, can move a tree or a mountain. The problem is that people think that's possible. Now, I've never seen anyone move a mountain. So maybe it's talking of a spiritual mountain, something big in your life that seems immovable, but then if we just have enough faith to pray, it'll disappear and we can live the victory life, with all our problems in this world taken away. But I don't think that's what Christ meant either.

In answer to their question to increase their faith, Christ told them that nobody's got faith even the size of a mustard seed. And we should never think we have either.

We must believe in Christ for salvation, so we must have some faith to be saved. But the point is that we're not to boast in what great faith we have. We should always keep in mind that none of us can ever have even as much faith as a grain of mustard seed. When the disciples asked the Lord to increase their faith, Christ replied in the way He did, because He knew that if they did have their faith increased, they'd start to boast about it. Later on they started to ask among themselves which one of them was the greatest.

This is a call by the Lord to humble us, to bring us down to reality. Yes, we need faith, yes, it's possible to have great faith, like the Centurion, but even he couldn't heal his servant by his faith, he still had to go to Christ to do it. We shouldn't go about boasting we've got such great faith that we can move mountains, because we can't. Faith is a gift of God. He gives us just as much as we need at the time we need it.



Ephesians 2:8,9

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

你们得救是本乎恩，也因着信，这并不是出于自己，乃是神所赐的。也不是出于行为，免得有人自夸。

To further clarify Christ’s answer, He tells them this parable of an unprofitable servant.

*7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?*

你们谁有仆人耕地，或是放羊，从田里回来，就对他说，你快来坐下吃饭呢？

*8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?*

岂不对他说，你给我预备晚饭，束上带子伺候我，等我吃喝完了，你才可以吃喝吗？

If a man has a servant, after the servant has done his work in the field, is that the end of his duties? Does he tell his servant, “You go and eat first. Don’t bother about me, you can get my supper later?” No! As long as the servant is in his master’s time, it’s his duty to serve his master. That’s what he’s paid to do. He’s got to work in the field, then get his master’s supper, and only when he’s finished serving his master for the day, he can then go home and get his own supper. A servant’s duty, in work time, is to serve his master.

*9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.*

仆人照所吩咐的去作，主人还谢谢他吗？

And the master doesn’t need to thank him either. If he did something over and above his duty, then thanks would be due. I mean, if you clock off from your day’s work, and you find your boss in the car park and his car won’t start, what do you do? It’s out of work time, so you’ve got no obligation to help him at all. You could walk off and leave him to it, if you wanted to. But if you did stay behind for half an hour in your own time to help him get his car fixed, then thanks would be due to you, because you didn’t have to do that. But as long as you’re in work time, you’ve got to do what he says, and he’s got no obligation to thank you for it. Doing what’s commanded, warrants no thanks at all.

*10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*



这样，你们作完了一切所吩咐的，只当说，我们是无用的仆人。所作的本是我们应分作的。

As long as you're in your master's time, you just do what's commanded of you. No thanks is due to you, you've just done your duty. You're just an unprofitable servant.

Once we've become a Christian, and been truly born again of the Spirit of God, we don't serve ourselves any more. We're now the Lord's servants:

1 Corinthians 7:22

*"For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."*

因为作奴仆蒙召于主的，就是主所释放的人。作自由之人蒙召的，就是基督的奴仆。

If we're now the Lord's servant, we should give our entire lives over to Him. There's no clocking off on this job. So we should do everything He commands of us, and never pretend we're so good, we deserve thanks or a reward in any way.

The first parable taught the idea of some kind of reward in the next world. But we shouldn't try to please God on this earth for what we're going to get out of it in the next. That's some kind of works religion. We should want to please Him here because we love Him, and are thankful for what He's done for us. It's not us that should be thanked for anything we do for God, it's God that should be thanked for everything He's done for us.

So, Christ is telling his disciples that everything they do in this world is only their duty anyway, so they should stop trying to boast how much faith they've got.

On one occasion, Christ gave seventy men special powers to cast out devils. They were so excited about having these powers, but Christ had to rebuke them:

Luke 10:17,20

*"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And He [Christ] said unto them.... Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."*

那七十个人欢欢喜喜地回来说，主阿，因你的名，就是鬼也服了我们。....然而不要因鬼服了你们就欢喜，要因你们的名记录在天上欢喜。

All this is teaching humility. We shouldn't boast in what the Lord's given us to do, or how successful we've been in what we've done for Him. I've met so many people who would say something like, "I led three people to the Lord last night," or "I've been doing this for the Lord," or "I've been doing that for the Lord," and it's just boasting. Christ wants us to get rid of that attitude from our lives altogether. We're called to humility.

Matthew 5:5

*“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”*

温柔的人有福了，因为他们必承受地土。

1 Peter 5:5,6

*“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”*

因为神阻挡骄傲的人，赐恩给谦卑的人。所以你们要自卑，服在神大能的手下，到了时候他必叫你们升高。

This “unprofitable servant” in Luke 17 was altogether different from the one in Matthew 25. In Matthew 25, he was truly unprofitable. He was wicked and slothful. He did absolutely nothing with what he was given. He fully deserved a place *“in outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

But this “unprofitable servant” in Luke 17 was exactly the opposite. He wasn’t really unprofitable at all. In fact he *“did all those things which were commanded him.”* He was very profitable, just like the first two servants in Matthew 25, who received the reward. He didn’t deserve *“outer darkness,”* he deserved to *“enter into the joy of the Lord.”* The parable is teaching us to have his attitude of heart. To do everything commanded of us, and never to boast about it. But rather to see ourselves as unprofitable servants.

We’re called to a very privileged life. We’re called to be witnesses of the Lord of glory, the one true God Lord of heaven and earth. If we’re true believers, God has shown us the way of salvation, given us a new heart, and put the Holy Spirit inside us to guide and help us. We are God’s chosen people. But we should never boast in our exalted status.

Our natural hearts make us so proud of ourselves. If we follow our natural heart, we’ll be like the orthodox Jew, thinking he’s one of God’s chosen people, despising unbelievers and feeling himself far superior. That’s not the attitude we should have. But if we follow the new heart the Lord gives us, we’ll be humbled to the dust. We won’t be boasting we’re God’s chosen people, even though we are. We’ll rather be saying, “Why has God chosen me, and not my neighbour?” The new heart is a source of humility, not pride.

Whatever we have, it’s been given us from the Lord:

1 Corinthians 4:7

*“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”*

使你与人不同的是谁呢？你有什么不是领受的呢？若是领受的，为何自夸，仿佛不是领受的呢？

And because we're so naturally proud in our hearts, God often has to come into our lives to bring us down, in case we get exalted above measure. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, to keep him from feeling proud of himself for the revelations he'd been given:

2 Corinthians 12:7

*“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”*

又恐怕我因所得的启示甚大，就过于自高，所以有一根刺加在我肉体上，就是撒但的差役，要攻击我，免得我过于自高。

And the further he matured in the faith, the more he saw his own wretchedness, and the more this would keep him down, keep him from boasting in anything in himself:

Ephesians 3:8

*“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

我本来比众圣徒中最小的还小。然而他还赐我这恩典，叫我把基督那测不透的丰富，传给外邦人。

1 Timothy 1:15

*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*

基督耶稣降世，为要拯救罪人。这话是可信的，是十分可佩服的。在罪人中我是个罪魁。

Romans 7:24,25

*“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

我真是苦阿，谁能救我脱离这取死的身体呢？感谢神，靠着我们的主耶

The bottom line is that in ourselves we are nothing:

Galatians 6:3

*“For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”*

人若无有，自己还以为有，就是自欺了。

That's the attitude we need. The world doesn't have it. The world boasts all day long about it's achievements. But we're different. We know we've got nothing to boast about except our sin. Any good we've got is from the Lord. So let's glorify Him in our lives.

Finally, here's a challenge to us. What about this verse. Christ said:

Matthew 5:16

*“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

你们的光也当这样照在人前，叫他们看见你们的好行为，便将荣耀归给你们在天上的父。

How is it possible to let our light shine before men, in this way: that people may see our good works, and never glorify us, but glorify our Father in heaven? Mother Teresa did a lot of good works, which the world saw, but look what's happened to her. She's recently been made a saint in the Roman Catholic church. All those supposed good works that she did have ended up pointing to herself, not God. And that's the problem with worshipping saints, as Roman Catholics do. They end up glorifying the saint, not God.

So, how can we live godly lives, doing good works and yet not pointing to ourselves but glorifying God alone? That's our challenge. That's true humility. But how we do it, I've no idea. We need the Lord.