



## Exposition

# The Parable of the Talents

Eve Stanley

**A**CCORDING TO Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, the modern English use of the word 'talent' has led directly from the common (mis)understanding of the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. It seems to be widely accepted amongst our community that the talents represent our individual 'gifts', and that the parable is about how we put those skills into use in the ecclesia. The flaws in this interpretation must be fairly obvious to the discerning believer when the following is considered.

To start with, a talent is a sum of money, and nowhere in Scripture is money (riches/wealth) equated with personal ability. It is more likely to be connected with wisdom or redemption (see Prov. 8; 23:23; Col. 2:2,3). The man travelling into a far country represents the Lord Jesus Christ, who is to be our judge at the time of his appearing. Are the talents that he distributes our differing skills and abilities which he then judges how well we have used them? This is not likely to be a correct interpretation. Our skills and abilities are ours via our genes, our background, our education, our environment, our experiences, our personal interests—all these are in the control of our heavenly Father but all can be exercised enthusiastically without any recourse to faith in God.

What is it, then, that the Lord Jesus gives us that can be equated with the talents in this parable? The talents given "to every man according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15) more than likely represent the price paid for redemption, the saving grace that has been extended to each and every one of us. Why, then, is there a differentiation in the amount given to each man? It is surely nothing as superficial as depending on how skilful a person happens to be. Is the man with one talent to be eternally condemned because of the lack of use of his one skill? Is it not just as likely that the man with five skills would bury his talents? There must be some significance in this.

I believe that an answer can be found in Luke 7:41-47. In this incident Simon the Pharisee answered the Lord correctly when questioned over the two debtors; the man who has been forgiven the most is the one who loves the most. The Lord Jesus then said: "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (v. 47). The amount of grace extended to the men in the Parable of the Talents directly relates to their sins forgiven (or, it can be argued, to their *awareness* of sins forgiven). The measure of grace which we experience is directly connected to the debt that has been forgiven us.

The man who has five talents worth of forgiven sin (or grace) duplicates the amount of mercy shown to him towards others in his own life, whereas at the other extreme the man who buries his one talent worth of sins forgiven has shown no mercy at all to fellow men because he is unaware of the extent of his sinful nature. He therefore has not experienced the profundity of God's mercy. It is the believer who perceives accurately the heights of God's grace and the depths of his own sins who will "keep His commandments", which are "That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 Jno. 3:22,23). The parable of the talents is about faith in the redeeming power of Christ to transform us, and the outworking of that faith in our lives. The man with five talents who makes another five talents has a deep understanding of the grace of God working in his life and fully appreciates what has been done for him. His works are a natural outworking of this philosophy, and an abundance of spiritual wisdom results.

The man with one talent buried in the ground could easily be outwardly very active in the ecclesia, but without the correct motivation for his works they are meaningless. He lacks understanding of God's grace and what has been

achieved for him. He has an abysmal lack of perception of his own sinfulness. He is fearful of his Lord, and his life has been totally unfruitful. He has buried in the earth his one hope, the grace that was shown to him, and he has not reciprocated that love at all: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Mt. 25:45). Along with the rest of the goats, he shall "go away into everlasting punishment" (v. 46).

The Lord Jesus gave us one commandment (1 Jno. 3:22,23), the teaching of which shows itself in many of his parables. The ability to re-

spond in faith to the love of Christ is what we will be judged upon. What our works comprise of is not actually important (Eph. 2:8-10); the question that matters is, Have we manifested the love of Christ in the outworking of our faith? And of course only our heavenly Father and His Son know the answer. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 Jno. 3:10,11).



## Principles, Preaching and Problems

# Higher criticism and the Bible

## 5. The book of Isaiah—predictions of the future

David Green

**A**S POINTED OUT at the commencement of this series, it is not the idea of higher criticism that is a problem for Bible students, but rather the views of the type of critic who denies the full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. The attitude of that kind of critic is summarised as follows. The "modern theory proceeds on the assumption that prediction of the distant future is impossible, that the predictive element in prophecy is to be reduced to the minimum, and that the prophet is to be thought of as a man of his own day and age, who spoke to the people of his own day of matters of urgent and immediate concern to them".<sup>1</sup> Emphasis is placed "on the contemporary scene and the distant future is minimised or ignored". Applying this theory, the critics teach that the book of Isaiah has evolved over a considerable period of time, and is a compilation of the writings of a number of different prophets.

Because the Biblical material has been studied from a sceptical and prejudiced point of view, the learned critics will only see what they expect to see. They will be convinced of their results and confirmed in the futile thoughts of their darkened minds (Rom. 1:21, NKJV).

### Higher critical opinions regarding Isaiah

Taking details from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,<sup>2</sup> we are told that present-day higher-critical thought about the book of Isaiah is that it is composed of three main sections, of different dates and authorship, as follows.

The **first section** consists of chapters 1-39, and belongs to the historical period stated in Isaiah 1:1, apart from some later additions such as chapters 24-27, which are dated to about 500 B.C., and chapters 33-35, dated to during or after the exile.

The **second section** is called Deutero-Isaiah, consists of chapters 40-55, and is considered as having been written in Babylon prior to and after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus. Here an anonymous prophet in exile looks forward to the deliverance of his people and their return to the land of promise. In its final form it is considered to be as late as the fifth century B.C.

1. *The Unity of Isaiah*, O. T. Allis, Tyndale Press, 1951, preface, p. iv.
2. Fifteenth edition, 1994, vol. 6, p. 402, "The Book of Isaiah", and vol. 14, p. 939, "Biblical Literature".