

## Articles and Sermons :: Talents & Tares

### Talents & Tares, on: 2013/5/18 0:48

There is a growing move to explain the condition of many churches in the West in terms of the parable of the wheat and tares and neglecting in the process the parable of the talents. It is said that the wheat are believers, and the tares are unbelievers. Apart from the remedy which is presented to deal with this problem, there are a number of difficulties which arise from this way of explaining the condition of many believers today. Simply saying that those who have little or no fruit in their lives must mean that they are unbelievers is well short of the full council of scripture on what makes for a believer.

The parable of the talents is another passage of scripture which is used to "prove" that unbelievers have come into the churches and therefore explains a lack of fruit in their lives. In this explanation the steward who is given one talent is presented as being not only an unbeliever because of his attitude, but the fact that he was cast into outer darkness, "proves" he is an unbeliever.

Whilst this article is not intended to address the claim that there are "unbelievers in the midst" it is intended to demonstrate that the parable of the talent, at least, has nothing to do with unbelievers. As for the parable of the good seed (often called the parable of the tares) it is of necessity that I have to refer to its meaning here, though I address that subject in another article "The Wolf, The Wheat & The Tares". The principle concern in this article is that of the parable of the talents therefore.

#### Talents

It is often said that the talent in Mathew chapter 25 means ability, however the word ability is also mentioned in that same verse from Mathew chapter twenty five. So we read "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey (v15).

Clearly the two words "talent" and "ability" appear separately and therefore cannot have the same precise meaning. They are in fact two different greek words in the original language. The talent mentioned in verse fifteen carries the same kind of meaning as "money" or "coinage" carries, because although actual money is not intended, the talent is "like" money. It is of itself something having value and the ability to increase its value. On the other hand the "ability" referred to in this verse speaks of the moral character of a person.

The three amounts of talents given indicates not only "quantity" but it is also a reflection of the moral character of the person to whom the talent is given. In short the Lord does not give five talents to one who does not have the moral character to profit from one talent for his master, but instead gives the five talents to the one who will profit for the master according to five talents. On the other hand everyone has sufficient moral character in Christ to profit from at least one talent, for the Lord's sake. All the Lord asks of us is that we labour according to who we are in Him at the very least, and return some benefit from the "talent" or "talents" which the Lord gives.

This then brings us to the question of what ability is. It is a measure of the blessing of God in our lives. Faith, gifts of the Holy Spirit, upbringing, ability to obey God, ability to be faithful to God, obedience to authority and perhaps many other such things. Ability is at very least that which God invests in us throughout our lives in order to serve Him when He calls us to the vineyard to labour, in order that we might be profitable servants. As this investment is to God Himself it is predicated on the gift of eternal life. Like money, it is able to grow and multiply if it is put to use even in the smallest way. In short the talent is ability worked out through a life relationship with God and therefore it is a responsibility and a duty to God Himself through Christ (the Master) to whom we have to give an account. It is evidence that we are servants of the Master and it is a requirement to serve the Master. It is also the basis for heavenly rewards. Ability on the other hand points to who we are in life, but especially who we are in Christ.

#### Eternal Life

Eternal life is the thing given which when received also comes with a calling of God and faith equal to that calling. Jesus said "whosoever cometh unto Me from his inner parts shall flow rivers of living water". This flowing is either free of hinderance and therefore profitable, or else it is mixed with brackish water and produces a limited effect or else the

cistern is stopped up completely because of a hard heart. This latter case was true in the parable with the servant who received the one talent. Of course if this is true, that the essential thing given which produces increase, is eternal life, then the servant with the one talent is not a false convert but simply a lazy servant. That raises a few questions!

I would ask how can an unbeliever be a steward of the kingdom of heaven? Others ask "How could a servant that received 'eternal' life be referred to as lazy, wicked, and be thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth?" This is a much easier question to answer than how can an unbeliever be a steward of the kingdom of heaven! It isn't possible to please God without faith. But the idea behind the talents does definitely emphasise stewardship and therefore the "increase" must be according to what is given. If no life is given how can one become a steward at all?

#### Wheat & Tares

The scripture clearly tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a field in which a man sowed good seed. Whilst the man was sleeping his enemy came along and sowed tares amongst the wheat (Mathew 13:24-30). The traditional interpretation of this parable has been to claim that the tares are unbelievers and the field must be therefore the same as saying the church. Apart from the fact that this view is in direct contradiction to the explanation which the Lord gave Himself, what to make of the idea that a tare fully means a person who has not been given the opportunity to profit the kingdom of heaven, is fundamentally a challenge to me.

In thinking about the tares therefore it is possible to say that whilst they may choke the growth of the wheat somewhat, and to that end may actually harm the kingdom work; yet when the wheat itself begins to bear fruit the tares will become visible (v26). It is also important to realise that both of the two successful stewards achieved a 100% increase in their efforts and service. If the steward with the one talent can be simply explained by being said to be a "tare", and likewise if a tare is always the same as an unbeliever, then the question as to how an unbeliever could receive a stewardship to Christ has to be asked. It seems to me that tares and lazy servants are not synonymous, and so to confuse tares with lazy servants is misleading to say the least of it. At the same time to claim that the lazy servant is a "saved believer" and that all tares remain "ardent unbelievers", also leads to some difficulties. Yet if we grasped the fact that the two stewards were successful, as well as remembering that tares do exist and that they may have an ill effect, the real question has more to do with how the two stewards succeeded despite the reality of tares choking their growth. Clearly the lazy steward did not choke the growth of the two faithful stewards. The distinction to make here is a profoundly simple one. The two successful stewards produced an increase by one means alone; they lived a crucified life hidden in Christ. What makes for a lazy servant is another thing altogether. Similarly what makes for a tare is yet another thing as well.

All who have believed into Christ have both the ability and the means to profit for the Lord. Yet many brethren do not profit even in visibility. Apart from our own personal attitude to the Lord, one thing which may harm our growth and subsequent profitability may well be tares amongst the wheat. As the tares cannot be removed without damaging the wheat, so there must be an answer to how the wheat successfully produces an increase. Apart from this, as I say this parable of the talents is not concerned with unbelievers. Yet I have seen that increasing numbers of brethren have come to view the churches in the time we live, in the West at least, as being somewhat lazy. This is described or else explained by those who are not lazy, as a problem of wheat and tares. In short the tares are unbelievers in the midst. Again if by this it is intended to mean that the lazy servant is an unbeliever, it would have to be said that many many believers in the West are not after all believers. But this is of course where things are going anyway because a distinction is being pressed by the Lord Himself. The best view of this which I have seen presented, appears to be to avoid the issue all together and focus on the "remnant" of faithful stewards who are then said to be the "true" church. This way one can avoid any discussion about lazy servants or else tares.

This does not sit well with me fully either, even though I do believe in a remnant who by God's hand alone are able to serve Him faithfully for the ultimate benefit of the many, including those who by reason of believing false doctrines produce no fruit, yet I reject any notion that anyone who is truly born again will be overlooked by God and Christ for the whole of their lives, and will not be given a clear and visible opportunity to serve the Lord and to repent of past laziness, sin and self interest. Just to make my position or understanding clearer, I also believe in eternal security of those who are truly born again. And I don't comprehend being born again as so mystical and abstract a thing that it is possible to exclude everyone who takes the name of Christ, but has little outward evidence of a new life in Christ. I base my understanding primarily on what someone is in fact able to believe in the day I live in and according to the day I live in. I do not judge things according to another day. This distinction is very important. On the other hand I hate the saying "once saved always saved" because it is profoundly misleading and makes ruin the fuller understanding of what

salvation means. I prefer instead "you have been saved with an eternal salvation" because this speaks of the centrality and the beginning of what salvation means; which is the gift of eternal life.

After these things!

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15).

Given that all agree that the consequence of being a tare or a lazy steward is either being burned or else rejected, it seems reasonable to give a short consideration as to hell itself. It may well be that there are many in hell at any given moment if we had the power and ability to look into its dominion. One thing is for sure however, Hell is empty when it is cast into the lake of fire. Whereas those who are found in hell, at the time of the Great White Throne after the 1000 year kingdom, are those who are said to be in the second resurrection. They are those who are dead, whether of the dominion of the sea, of hell or death itself (Revelation 20:11-15).

The beginning of the millennial kingdom corresponds to the master who went on a long journey, returning to establish his visible kingdom, after which kingdom, those who have had no part in this kingdom are then judged according to their works. Those whose names were not written in the Book of Life were cast into the lake of fire for eternity. In short according to Revelation chapter twenty, hell is not the eternal resting place of the wicked. It is the lake of fire. Just as the dead who are in the sea are not eternally bound up with the ocean, neither those who are held by the dominion of death are eternally bound up with death. It is the second death that is eternal, and the eternal place of the wicked. Hell and Death are eternal, yet they are themselves cast into the Lake of Fire.

The Gospel of the Kingdom & The Gospel of Grace

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed; Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should turn again, And I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not. Mathew 13:10-17

We know that the context of the parable of the sower is how the hearer received the Gospel of the Kingdom, as well as the subsequent outcome (Mark 4:3-8). So when Jesus says to the disciples that "to him who has, much more will be given, and from him that has not, even that which he has will be taken away", He is talking about a heart that hears and receives the gospel of the kingdom. It has to be comprehended that the Gospel of Grace was not yet revealed, and would not be comprehended until the apostle Paul, to whom this gospel was entrusted; was in finality of Paul's ministry, preached both to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles. Even then the outworking of salvation by grace, through faith, is the kingdom of heaven.

Israel received through Christ Himself, both forgiveness of sins, where it was sought, as well as all the benefits of having Messiah present with them. This included raising the dead, casting out unclean spirits, healing the sick and hearing the good news. Yet this was the Gospel of the Kingdom and was not yet the Gospel of Grace as preached by the apostle Paul. It was that which came by the Law and the Prophets, even Christ. It has to be said that the gospel of the kingdom does speak of the grace of God through Christ Jesus, because Christ was crucified from before the foundation of the world as far as the eternal knowledge of God is concerned. Yet the gospel of the kingdom was first preached whilst Christ was yet in the flesh. It is only after the Lord's death and resurrection that Christ became a life giving spirit. We see this in the scripture which speaks "The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a

life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). It is only after death and resurrection that there would be a new covenant which was written in Christ's own blood and this would herald the Gospel of Grace. This parable of the sower has been presented as pertaining to the Gospel of Grace, yet this contradicts the very words of the Lord Himself, and the reason as to why He began to speak in parables at this time. The gospel of the kingdom which John the baptist proclaimed could not fully become the gospel of grace until Christ Himself had fulfilled all the righteous demands of the Law. In strict adherence to the circumstance in which the Lord began to speak in parables it is necessary to understand both the parable as well as the explanation in its context first. If we cannot comprehend this we may never truly understand the scriptures.

Under the New Covenant there is no possibility that Jesus will remove from anyone the opportunity or power to believe in Him if they turn to Him in a repentant heart. Even though a veil still remained over Israel many of Israel believed in Christ after the resurrection, beginning on the day of pentecost. After the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the Gospel of Grace would never be hidden from anyone fully and would be preached unto the ends of the earth. Whereas in Israel in the Lord's day the Gospel of the Kingdom was hidden fully at a certain point in time in fulfillment of a prophecy of Isaiah (10:9-11).

This passage above (Matthew 13:10-17) is the explanation to the question as to why Jesus began to speak in parables to the people of Israel. The explanation is from verse twelve and then from verse thirteen to verse seventeen. "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given". This reality is revealed, in another place in the Lord's words "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you" (John 15:16). There is another scripture which cannot be of any less importance to this understanding and corresponds to the moment Jesus rode into Jerusalem from the mount of Olives on an asses colt, "saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes (Luke 19:42). These words were expressly spoken in response to Pharisees who said to the Lord, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples". To make the point emphatic Jesus said "if you had known this day, even you the things which make for peace" as He set His face to Jerusalem. The Pharisees had already been cut off, and Israel could only comprehend as it was given to individuals by reason of the Father, now the Lord is saying to Israel directly "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes (Luke 19:42).

In Mark 3:22 we read of the moment when the Pharisees, now on the Mount of Olives, blasphemed the Holy Spirit, by saying "He hath Beelzebub, and, By the prince of the demons casteth he out the demons". It is directly after this blasphemy that Jesus stopped speaking plainly and began to speak in parables instead. The first of which parables was the parable of the sower according to Mark 4:3-8. This parable is spoken to a multitude who is gathered by the sea of Galilee and is therefore in an open place where anyone could have come to listen freely. This included the Pharisee, now cut off from life. In this context, Jesus says when asked about why he had begun to speak in parables, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven" (v11-14). Returning in this sense is both personal to the pharisees who blasphemed the Holy Spirit as well, as can be seen in many other instances of the Jews generally and even the people in the end.

As was pointed out this saying "that they may see and not perceive, and while hearing they may not hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven" is a prophecy of Isaiah 10:9-12.

He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive; Their ears dull; And their eyes dim; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.' Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant; Houses are without people; And the land is utterly desolate; The Lord has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

Also we see that the words spoken in Luke chapter nineteen conclude with this same prophecy, including the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of Israel in 70AD. It is clear therefore that the whole of the prophecy, which is given in part by Christ to the disciples in private, is given to Israel in full, in public, and concerns both the pharisees as well as Israel itself. From the point when the Pharisees blasphemed the Holy Spirit, Jesus spoke only in parables in public. And the condition for being able to believe in Him from this point onwards became "let him who has an ear, hear". Or "eyes

to see". Now on the mount of Olives as Jesus rides into Jerusalem He hides Himself completely from everyone. Even the disciples are told that they must not reveal that Jesus is the Christ once they enter Jerusalem.

In John Chapter ten although Jesus speech is not said to be a parable nevertheless it is hidden from "the Jews" who were gathered to listen to Him. In verse six it is written that Jesus spoke in a figure of speech and in verse twenty four "the Jews" asked the Lord to speak to them plainly. The Lord's speech gave rise to a schism amongst the Jews some saying that Jesus had a demon and other bearing witness of the Lord's works, which could not possibly be the fruit of demonic power. Here in this verse alone is the proof of the outworking of what it means to have eyes to see or ears to hear. Jesus is asked, whilst standing in Solomon's Portico to come right out with it and to say clearly whether He was the Christ or not. To which Jesus says, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:25-30).

The reality of Isaiah's prophecy is that it had to do with both the Pharisees' blasphemy as well as the blasphemy of other Jews of no rank and in generality it had to do with Israel. It was worked out in everything which the Lord spoke after the Pharisees blasphemed the Holy Spirit and it was fulfilled all the way to its fullness in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel in 70AD.

#### Talents or Tares

Today we have not heard the words "repent for the kingdom is at hand" we heard "Christ crucified for sin and raised for our justification, repent, believe and be saved". This is the gospel of grace. Only then do we begin to comprehend that there is such a thing as the kingdom of heaven and only then can we begin to labour towards it. The parable of the talents speaks of the kingdom of heaven, which being presently far off, yet is near at hand because the deposit which brings forth eternal life is already ours if we have believed. It is in us, as in an earthen vessel. This deposit is the gift of eternal life, but its outworking and fullness is not yet visible, unless we are broken and the seed or deposit is released to increase it will prove to be unprofitable save for ourselves. The kingdom is also far off, even as the Master is far off, in that we are crucified with Christ, buried with Him in baptism, raised up with Him, ascended into heaven in His train and seated in Him at the right hand of the Father in heaven. For those who believe into Christ after the cross are more full than those who heard these words of Matthew chapter thirteen, as well as all the parables of the kingdom which followed immediately thereafter. They too would have to wait until Pentecost before they would find their release into the reality of labouring for the kingdom. It is only after Pentecost that it becomes possible for the issue of tares to become manifestly clear.

The actual explanation of the parable of the sower is given from verse eighteen onwards:

"Hear then ye the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the way side. And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth. And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Matthew 13:18-23

The preceding verses from verse eleven to verse seventeen were not an explanation of the meaning of the parable itself, they were rather an explanation as to what necessitated the speaking in parables and the condition of those who necessitated it. Verse twelve "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath" speaks of the condition of the hearers who although they had Christ, were yet unable to believe in Him. This does not speak to the multitude of Israel, though it does concern the multitudes of Israel. It is rather spoken to the disciples in private and as I say is an explanation of the condition of Israel. If we then look at the actual meaning of the parable which the Lord gives we can easily see that it has nothing to do with belief or unbelief in Christ Himself crucified for sin, which is the basis of eternal life, but is in keeping with the gospel of the kingdom and has to do with attitudes and faithfulness of those who labour in its power. "For the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of words but of power". This message is not a matter of words, but a matter of power. The gospel of grace on the other hand is a matter of words and power because it is the proclamation of good news. It is faith by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The gospel of the kingdom is concerned with power and walking by faith in the power of the

kingdom for the sake of the kingdom come, which kingdom will become visible when King Messiah, the Christ of Israel Himself appears in visibility. For where the King is, there is the Kingdom.

In the same way from verse twelve again we read "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." The first "hath" here points to the one who amongst those who believed in Christ, would also receive an increase. This increase is the knowledge of the kingdom, which the disciples were elected and chosen to know, and the "hath not" points to the one in the multitude who did not believe in Christ. Finally the "from him shall be taken away even that which he hath" points to Christ Himself hiding Himself from Israel because though He was come to them, they rejected Him. So the Lord hides Himself from this time onwards.

The meaning of the talents represents that which is the increase of eternal life, in short the talent is the means by which it is possible to labour towards an increase of the kingdom of heaven. The fuller meaning of the wheat and the tares on the other hand is more to do with bearing fruit in one's personal life. And whilst this is also reflective in the end to an increase for the Lord, the tare which does not bear fruit, is not the same as a lazy servant whose attitude is more synonymous with wickedness than one whose conduct is always sinful.

#### A Reminder

In reflection of what was said earlier the ability which each believer has to make use of the talents given "is a measure of the blessing of God in our lives. Faith, gifts of the Holy Spirit, upbringing, ability to obey God, ability to be faithful to God, obedience to authority and perhaps many other such things. Ability is at very least that which God invests in us throughout our lives in order to serve Him when He calls us to the vineyard to labour, in order that we might be profitable servants. As this investment is to God Himself it is predicated on the gift of eternal life. Like money, it is able to grow and multiply if it is put to use even in the smallest way.

In short the talent is ability worked out through a life relationship with God and therefore it is a responsibility and a duty to God Himself through Christ (the Master) to whom we have to give an account. It is evidence that we are servants of the Master and it is a requirement to serve the Master. It is also the basis for heavenly rewards. Ability on the other hand points to who we are in life, but especially who we are in Christ." What this means to me is really very simple. No one who is an unbeliever could ordinarily labour towards the kingdom of God. So then we are left with the only possible thing to say about the wicked and lazy servant!

#### Outer Darkness & Saved Yet As Through Fire

The answer to this question will make for a wicked and lazy servant or a faithful and obedient son. Such a day in which we live when the kingdom of heaven is at hand makes this parable all the more important to understand soundly. All too often the issue of eternal life is fudged due to how this meaning of the parable of the wheat & tares, as well as the parable of the talents is presented. The tares are burned, which speaks of fire, and the wicked and lazy servant is cast into outer darkness, which speaks of hell. Yet it is written "the Father in heaven has delighted to give us the Kingdom".

I have to say straight forwardly that I really don't believe we need to concern our selves as believers with eternity. If we had not been saved with an everlasting salvation then the scriptures would not tell us that we are saved with an everlasting salvation. Yet it does, and not just once, but many times. What we need to concern ourselves with I believe is the coming kingdom of heaven. The parable of the talents is concerned with that fact and that fact alone. This parable also shows that the opposite to being in the kingdom of heaven for the believer or steward means "outer darkness." Yet the darkness will pass away even as these heavens and this earth will pass away. When the nations of the earth have become the kingdom of heaven, heralded by the cry of an angel, so also after 1000 years the kingdom will pass away, heralded by armageddon. Yet as it has been said eternal life is Christ in us and all those who believe in Christ. It is not eternity which should concern us but the coming kingdom! I will expand on this more fully and provide all of the scriptures which I believe demonstrate what I have shared, at the end of this article.

Just to conclude this section however, it needs to be considered that there is no issue of temptation with the wicked and lazy servant, in fact he clearly shows that he has not lost anything at all. If he had been walking in some continuous sin, recklessly in disregard of the gift of life, he would be a great deal more than diffident at the Lord's appearing, he would be truly afraid. As it is his confidence is astonishing. His wickedness is evident in his attitude even before the Lord. Not only this he absolutely makes it clear that he knew the Lord. He says "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed." Not only does this man acknowledge that he knew the

Master, but the Master Himself confirms it by saying 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.'

#### Outer Darkness

There are three references to "outer darkness" in the scriptures...in Matthew 8:10, 22:13, 25:30. All three have to do with the Lord's servants, all three have to do with the kingdom of heaven. There are numbers of uses of the term "darkness" and they all have real meaningful context if we have a mind to see it. As with so many revelations in the scriptures the term darkness has one central characteristic and meaning and then many applications.

It does not require great wisdom to know that the sun has set and the darkness of the night has come. It simply requires one to look into the brightness of the day and see that it has gone, and that darkness has taken its place.

☼ ☼ ☼

Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him and burns up His adversaries round about. His lightnings lit up the world; The earth saw and tremble

☼ Psalm 97:2-4

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7

Here is one kind of darkness and here is the centrality of what darkness means throughout scriptures. Even when the term is used to describe all that which is darkness, it simply means that the True Light does not shine in that place. Whether it is the hearts of men, or in the world or in hell, or death or a nation, it is the same meaning in centrality. It means where the light of God does not yet shine or from where the light of God is withheld or where the light is rejected. In the case of the Psalm 97:2 the light shines perfectly behind the clouds but from without, even the light cannot be comprehended except that God reveals Himself. Clearly there is no lack of light in the presence of God. All is Light in His presence. So it is very easy to see that whilst God Himself is Light, He is hidden to those who will not seek Him out or else who do not receive His witness. The hidden reality of God Himself means that all who walk outside of His Light and life are in darkness as well. (Luke 11:35).

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:5).

This is also darkness. It is the darkness of the world and the darkness of not comprehending the Light.

In seeking therefore to understand the meaning of "outer darkness" be it in context of why Jesus began to speak in parables (Mark 4:3-8), or else in the reality of speaking of all men who take the name of the Lord and will one day give an account to Him when He comes in His kingdom, darkness becomes "put away from the Light, or in the case of Israel, Light is become "hidden" except to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. In the case of Israel this "hiding of the Light" ultimately meant that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an asses colt, Israel did not comprehend the time of visitation of Christ their King. Had they done they would have had peace as the passage of scripture says in John 15:16. As it was the Lord tells them in tears that their portion is become tribulation.

As to those who have believed after the death and resurrection of Christ for sin, being cast into outer darkness, is primarily at the time of the kingdom come, which is the centrality of the parable. Whether this had been the kingdom come at the hour of Christ in Israel, or at the time of the Lord's return, is in truth the same in meaning and substance. For where the king is, there is the kingdom. If we prove in the end to have the same mind as Israel had and prefer the darkness of our own selves to the Light of obedience and faithfulness, we too will suffer as they suffered when Jerusalem was destroyed and the children of Israel were killed or else scattered. For us at that time of the Lord's return, the loss of our peace will be similar to Israel, but it will also be more significantly knowing in the end that the Kingdom has come, and that we have no part in it. The "outer darkness" therefore is in contrast with the "Light of the kingdom come". It is Christ reigning in Jerusalem as King of Israel and King of kings over the nations through those who reign with Him in the Light of His countenance over all the earth; yet to have no part in it.

For those who are alive when Jesus returns in the clouds, if they are not dressed in readiness they will be perfected through tribulation. Those who have already fallen asleep will be measured according to their day. The most fearful thing will be to reject this day of coming tribulation in which we live, and to choose one's own peace, thereby to deny Christ before

men with a mind to take our ease. Therefore arm yourself with a mind to suffer even as He suffered, as it is written. If we choose to suffer as He suffered we will not only find true peace, but we will be found to have been good stewards as well at His return. If not we will be scattered without the shepherd of our souls in a day of tribulation or else in the day of visitation, which is Christ come. In this we will suffer unnecessarily (2 Peter 1:11).

When the Lord Jesus returns the kingdom will not be simply a matter of a life. The world itself will have become "the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Revelation 11:15).

The kingdom at this time has become a physical place and has a physical beginning and a physical end, measured by Revelation as 1000 years (20:2-7), so the corresponding "outer darkness" is also measured as well. Other wise even those who take the name of Christ and have believed in Him and the Father would not have eternal life. Yet Jesus said, that at believing in the Father and Him Who the Father has sent, is eternal life. Finally, where is "outer darkness" then? It is outside the kingdom, where there is no Light and it is a compartment of hell, where there is regret and suffering for rejecting the righteous demand of the Father to obey His son and to follow Him. It is prison and not the kingdom.

If the Father was pleased with His Son and bore witness of it by the hand of John, speaking from heaven with a loud voice, as well at the table of His supper feast, where the Father bore witness once again of His Son, how can men say that "I knew you were a hard master, reaping where you have not sown". Yet bearing witness of Himself, Christ said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Only a wicked and lazy servant would say otherwise for no more reason than the delights of his soul and to take his ease. Rather than the true rest of Christ which is the cross unto death and obedience in all things unto His glory and praise. The one who would rather take his ease is the wicked servant.

More perfectly, if the Spirit Himself has borne witness with our spirit crying Abba Father, how can we say that we have no witness of Christ surpassing that which Israel heard at the Jordan, and the disciples heard at the supper feast? How can we say "He is a hard master", when the Father says by the Holy Spirit "you are become my children and my Righteousness in Him?" It is to despise the Father and to deny the Son. How will we find an easy entrance into His Kingdom which is His reward for His faithfulness and obedience, and not comprehend that we also must be faithful and obedient also?

Even the darkness is not dark to You,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike to You,  
For You formed my inward parts;  
You wove me in my mother's womb;  
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Wonderful are Your works,  
My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret,  
And skilfully wrought in the depths of the earth;  
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them;  
How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!  
If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand  
When I awake, I am still with You

Appear not Empty Handed before The Lord

"Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labours from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labours from the field. Exodus 23:14-16

In the above passage from Exodus we read the words "And none shall appear before Me empty-handed." We would all do well if we were to take this admonition of the Lord seriously. In this attitude we would be ever mindful of the need to please God, as well as hold to an understanding of what it will mean to be found a faithful servant in the day of the Lord Jesus. Imprisonment is a holding to account by the Lord to settle our debts to Him as stewards of His possessions (Matthew 6:12, 18:27, & 18:32). Of course any one of us could repent and turn at any time, so long as we have the day, and the Lord will forgive us our debts here and now, as He intended it to be when He died for us (Colossians 2:14). How merciful the Lord is to us!

I include passage and verse that which forms the centrality of this article. In simplicity it represents what I have personally come to believe regarding the coming Kingdom and what that means for those who are born again. Of necessity this must touch upon what eternal life means. For myself "I have been thinking on these things for very nearly three decades and have been tested and have tested the saying "once saved always saved" and found it lacking. This is because it excludes what a fuller meaning of salvation is. This must be the whole man and not simply parts. It must be spirit, soul and body. If we simply comprehend the spiritual reality of being born again, and neglect to realise that the faithless soul suffers also, we will come to an unbalanced view of salvation, and in the end we will declare "once saved always saved". No doubt this seems a reasonable thing to say for the one who has comprehended that eternal life really does mean eternal. Yet if we took the same partite view of salvation and spoke of the spirit and the obedient soul, yet neglected the body how could we say we are fully saved. It would be to shrink back from Christ as the disciples did, not yet comprehending that Christ was raised from the dead in His body, in which ignorance they thought they were seeing a ghost" (A Question of Salvation). As far as this particular effort is concerned the question concerns talents as of Matthew chapter twenty five. It speaks of one who is a believer, but also a steward. If all we ever comprehend is what we have been given freely, and do not comprehend that which is required of us also, we will in the end of this age suffer loss. How then will we say in that hour. I was saved once and am still saved, if we then comprehend that we have been foolish, lazy and wicked and finally realise our soulish tendencies to please ourselves and not obey Christ has cost us the kingdom?

#### Conclusion

I really don't believe we need to concern our selves as believers with eternity (Ecclesiastes 3:11). If we had not been saved with an eternal salvation then the scriptures would not tell us that we are saved with an eternal salvation (Isaiah 43:13, 45:17 Hebrews 5:9). Yet it does, and not just once, but many times (Mark 16:20, John 3:15-16, 5:24, 6:40, 6:47, 10:28, 2 Timothy 1:9 1 John 2:25). What we need to concern ourselves with I believe is the coming kingdom of heaven (Isaiah 9:7, Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:3, Acts 19:8, Acts 20:25, 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 4:1). The parable of the talents is concerned with that fact and that fact alone. This parable also shows that the opposite to being in the kingdom of heaven means "outer darkness." Yet the darkness will pass away even as these heavens and this earth will pass away. When the world has become the kingdom of heaven, heralded by the cry of an angel (Rev 11:15). So also the kingdom will pass away, followed by the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21:1). Yet as it has been said, eternal life is Christ is us and all those who believe in Christ. Eternity on the other hand will exist even for those who are in the lake of fire. Eternity and eternal life are synonymous yet different. Could we say that Satan who is to be in the lake of fire for eternity has eternal life? Or the false prophet, or the beast? We know their end because it is already written; it is the lake of fire. First the false prophet and the beast (Revelation 19:20), and then lastly Satan (Revelation 20:7) according to the order of scripture (Revelation 20:10). This order itself has to do with the coming kingdom. The false prophet and the beast are cast into the lake of fire when the kingdom commences, which corresponds to the appearing of Christ. Satan is cast into the lake of fire when the kingdom comes to an end on this earth. Then comes the judgement of the Great White Throne. Being cast into outer darkness does not correspond to eternity. It corresponds to the kingdom of heaven on earth, which is a measure of 1000 years (Revelation 20:2-7).

In this period of time which is measured by the return of the Lord Jesus and the Great White Throne, there is both the heavens and the earth, the kingdom and outer darkness; there is death and there is hell! Hell and Death are synonymous, yet speak of two dominions and two keys (Revelation 1:18). The establishment of an understanding of the Kingdom and the corresponding outer darkness are synonymous, yet speak of two dominions as well as keys.

The Establishing of the Kingdom of Heaven is given to Christ (Revelation 1:18) whereas the keys of the power of the Kingdom are given to the church (Matthew 16:19). Similarly, as with life, there is life and there is abundant life. Eternal life, which is at once Christ in us, yet for those who reign with Christ also, for 1000 years, life becomes abundant life. Abundant life is expressed in the kingdom with Christ as his priests and kings over the nations. Life is the free gift of God to all who ask, believing that He is. Abundant life is faithfulness in all that which we are given when we believed (talents)

All men born of Adam die and all men born of Christ will live (1 Corinthians 15:22) Death is a reality even for the one who

o has life in Christ and has Christ in them. As it is written "It is appointed unto men to die once then cometh judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). All will die yet not all will spend their eternity in the lake of fire, because as it is written "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Hell already exists and it was created for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:31). Today it is also the store house for tormented souls who are perishing or else are imprisoned (Luke 16:23-28). Outer darkness does not yet appear, because it cannot be comprehended until the corresponding light of Christ in full visibility appears also. Then as it is written, "we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is". To have the life of Christ yet to be cast out of the kingdom is outer darkness. It is to see Christ at His return, as those who have believed yet to be rejected by Him from His kingdom. It is written, no man can see the kingdom, nor enter therein except he be born again" (John 3:3). Yet outer darkness is not the lake of fire, though it may well be a compartment of hell. Yet even hell is not the eternal resting place of tormented souls, for it too, having given up the dead that is in it, is also cast into the lake of fire, along with death which shall also give up those yet held by its power (Revelation 20:13-14). All this is at the last judgement of Christ when those whose names are not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Howbeit that those who have life can also taste hell? Or howbeit that at the last judgement of the Great White Throne, death and hell give up they that are in them? What is hell and what is death? What is the kingdom come? What is outer darkness?

Then as it is written, those whose names are NOT written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire, wherein are the false prophet, the beast and satan. Is God the author of confusion? Does He raise the dead at the end of the age to judge their works after the kingdom of 1000 years is complete only to pronounce the second death on every soul of man which has no part in the kingdom? Or does God mock men also, and leave His wicked and lazy servant who is without the kingdom, despairing of even life itself, though he believe in Christ? Will they not be saved as it is written. "Whosoever believeth on Me, will not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). That which is set before all men, is faith in Christ crucified for sin unto eternal life, and thereafter for those who believe, it is the cross of obedience unto the kingdom. Believing, is everlasting life, it is to live and not to perish. Stewardship is seeking the kingdom of heaven faithfully and wisely, it is abundant life. It is to reign with Christ in the kingdom.

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." Matthew 10:38-42

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds." Matthew 16:24-27