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HOW DO WE RESPOND TO GOD'S CALLING?

Let's look again at the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.

For *the kingdom of heaven* is as a man traveling into a far country, *who* called **his own servants**, and delivered unto them **his goods**. (Matthew 25:14)

This parable deals exclusively with **members of God's Church**. They are "His own servants". This parable starts out with the point when people have repented, been baptized, and they then receive God's spirit. So **at the start of this parable there are no unconverted people** in the picture. At the start of this parable all of these "servants" are converted members of God's Church. They are obviously "converted" because all of them are pictured receiving a certain amount of God's spirit. And it is God's spirit that "converts" our minds.

That is the setting for this parable.

Context-wise this parable is preceded by the Church of God looking forward to Jesus Christ's second coming (the parable of the ten virgins). It is followed by a section that discusses things that will happen after Christ's second coming, with some people inheriting the Kingdom of God, and with a considerable number of other people eventually ending up in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41). So the context shows that this particular parable deals with something that will happen after Jesus Christ has returned.

The "goods" God "delivered" to these members of God's Church in this parable refer to God's holy spirit. The measure of the holy spirit given to each of these "servants" at the time of their repentance and baptism is expressed as "talents". Not all repentant people receive the same amount of holy spirit.

Note that "talents" does not refer to what we today would call "talents", meaning specific skills or abilities. In this parable "talents" does not refer to musical talent or artistic talent or a sporting talent or a specific work skill, or people skills, etc. This parable is not about "our" talents at all. It is about "talents that belong to God", and which God can also take away.

In this parable the **"talents" refer to the initial measure of holy spirit** that God gives to an individual at the time of repentance and baptism and the laying on of hands.

Let's consider the next verse.

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. (Matthew 25:15)

We are here talking about people who have repented and who look to God to give them His holy spirit. The Greek word here translated as **"ability"** is "dunamis", and this Greek word actually means **"power"**. It is the root for our English word **"dynamic"**.

So here in verse 15 we see something extremely significant! We see that different people repent to different degrees.

When an individual comes to real repentance, then God the Father has committed Himself to give that person a measure of God's holy spirit. That "measure" is represented by "**one talent**". That is God's commitment ... one talent for repentant individuals. If we repent then God is committed to giving us "one talent" of holy spirit.

Now "a talent" was **a large amount**. Without arguing about how many pounds or shekels there were in a talent, the point is "a talent" was enough money to cover a person's living expenses for **a whole lifetime**. It was a very large amount of money. We are not talking about "a penny" or even "a pound"; we are talking about "a talent". A talent was a very generous large amount of money.

The point is this:

We should never feel sorry for an individual who has received "only" one talent. Yes, one talent is obviously less than two talents and five talents; but one talent was enough money to generously cover a lifetime of expenses. A talent represented a huge amount of wealth. Furthermore, there is a reason why some receive only one talent.

Let's note that God has committed Himself to very generously reward real repentance by **making a great amount of power available to the repentant person**. Nobody who really repents is ever short-changed by God. So never feel sorry for those who received "only" one talent, and never feel envious of those who may have received two or even five talents. Any one of us, including me, will have our hands full trying to make the best use of just one whole talent from God. But **an initial deeper repentance** on the part of an individual is obviously an advantage for that individual.

Now let's note the more obvious point about this parable, the one that always immediately gets our attention.

While God is committed to give to every repentant person one whole talent, God in fact chooses to give some repentant people two talents or even five talents right from the start. **Why does God do that?**

Why does God **right from the start** give greater portions of His holy spirit to some people than to others? Is God being partial to some people? Is God really being fair in giving to some repentant people more holy spirit than He gives to other repentant people?

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF REAL REPENTANCE

We should understand that not all repentance is equal! And here I am speaking about real repentance. **Not all real repentance is equal!** I mean the type of repentance that God accepts and rewards with the free gift of His holy spirit.

Worldly repentance doesn't even enter our discussion here. Worldly repentance is obviously not accepted by God. A selfish, feeling-sorry-for-oneself type of repentance is never acceptable to God. An emotional feeling type of repentance ("give your heart to the Lord", etc.) is not real repentance, because the minds of such people are never really changed. Our discussion here is limited to real repentance, and it excludes those things that God can identify as fake repentance.

So note!

Not all repentance is equal because of all the people who do repent in a way that is accepted by God the Father, **some people repent in a way that is far more convincing to God** than is other people's

repentance. And I don't mean convincing to the minister who is doing the baptizing. I mean far more convincing to God, who is never fooled.

At repentance we are required to make a commitment to God, a commitment to change the way we will use our minds, a commitment that God is able to identify. And while they do make a real commitment to God, for some people that commitment is not quite as firm, not quite as solid, not quite as resolute, not quite as uncompromising as it is for other people. **That distinction is something that God can recognize!** And that distinction is something God responds to.

It is because all of these people have made a commitment to God, that God is bound to give them "one talent" of His holy spirit (see Acts 2:37-38). But if their commitment to God was firmer and more resolute and more uncompromising, then God would be willing to entrust to them two or three or four or even five "talents" of His holy spirit. **That is the point in this discussion.**

Some people's repentance is on a higher level than the repentance of other people who also come to a real repentance.

It is **their level of commitment to God** that causes God to decide whether to only give them the minimum amount of one talent, or whether to give them two or even five talents. That is what Jesus Christ's statement "**to every man according to his individual power** (dunamis)" tells us.

The "power" here refers to the person's own level of commitment to God. That commitment is the power!

In effect, **God evaluates the degree of repentance** of every individual. The stronger and more resolute a person's commitment to God is at the time of repentance, the more God is willing to give to that person. **The stronger the initial commitment, the greater the odds are for long-term success.** For God to be willing to give two or five talents to an individual is a reflection of God's belief that with that particular individual **the odds for success are indeed greater.** With greater odds of success God is willing to make a greater investment, as seen by God entrusting two or five talents to such persons, instead of only one talent.

God is obviously making a greater investment in a person to whom God is willing to give five talents or two talents, when compared to the person to whom God is only willing to initially entrust one talent. We need to recognize that when God hands out "talents" of His holy spirit to different individuals, then God is making specific investments in those individuals. Every talent that God hands out is an investment for God.

For example, when God tells us that **David** was a man after God's heart, then that tells me that David's initial character and attitude caused God to initially bestow five talents on David, rather than just one talent. God was willing to make a greater investment in David. Similarly, when we consider the Apostle Paul's initial spontaneous repentance and commitment (see Acts 9:3-6) to God, it seems clear to me that God also initially gave **Paul** five talents rather than just one.

On the other hand, I suspect that when **Ananias** and his wife **Sapphira** came to repentance, they were very likely in the one talent category (see Acts 5).

We should also recognize that even when God does make a greater initial investment in someone, that still isn't a guarantee that this investment will pay off. For example, I suspect that God also made greater investments than just one talent in both **King Saul** and in **King Solomon**. God's initial investment in Saul is presented in 1 Samuel 11:6, which says "And the spirit of God came upon Saul ...". Similarly, it seems clear to me that God initially made a huge investment in the individual we know as

Satan, and that investment didn't pay off either.

So a greater initial investment by God is not a guarantee for success, but it does reflect God's greater expectations for success, when compared to lesser initial investments, indicated by "one talent".

Individuals who receive that one talent into soil that is rocky and shallow, or soil that is totally engulfed by thorns and weeds are less likely to produce good results.

So back to our parable.

THE MIND MUST CHANGE

As soon as Christ had handed out all the talents, i.e. the holy spirit, to His servants, He immediately departed on "His journey". So as soon as we have received God's spirit, from one particular perspective **we are on our own**. Now it is up to us to live the Christian life by putting "the talent" God has given us to use. The way we live from then onwards, what we say and do and think, will reflect whether we are actually putting that "talent" to use, or whether we are burying it.

If after baptism nothing changes regarding how we fulfill our duties and commitments and obligations, if our priorities continue to be the same ones we had before baptism, if our perspective on life continues to be the same as it was before we came into God's Church, if we continue to think and reason in the same way we did before baptism ... then there is the possibility that we have buried "the talent" God gave us when we repented. If our friends and acquaintances in the world don't see any kind of change in us, if they don't "think it strange that we don't run with them to the same excess of riot" as before (see 1 Peter 4:4), then we have probably buried that talent.

The main purpose for which God gives us His holy spirit when we repent is **to enable us to change the way our minds work**.

So when those servants in this parable who had received five talents and two talents doubled that initial investment "by trading", this means that their minds changed in significant ways. **They "traded away" Satan's way of thinking** and reasoning and prioritizing for God's way of using their minds in all these mental processes.

That is what "trading" represents in this parable. We "trade" the natural way of using our minds for God's way of using our minds. We exchange one way of thinking for another way of thinking. It is our minds that must be renewed.

And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed **by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

I don't know this for sure, but I suspect that the great majority of people who come to real repentance end up being in the "one talent" group. Most of us were probably in the "one talent" group at the time when we repented and were baptized. We did repent, but it took us a fair amount of time to get to the point of making our commitment to God. The longer it took us to come to our initial repentance, the less likely it is that God at that time would have given us more than just one talent.

Very few of us, and I myself am not in that number, made a resolute and unconditional commitment to God only 15 seconds after God had "called us", which is the way the Apostle Paul responded to God.

Paul's "Lord, what do You want me to do?" response (see Acts 9:6) is very likely the fastest way any carnal person has ever responded to God. His spontaneous response to God made Paul an excellent candidate for "five talents". His was a very powerful repentance.

But most of us probably took weeks or months, and in some cases even years of exposure to God's truth, before reaching the point where we were willing to commit unconditionally to God. That would imply that initially most of us were very likely in the "one talent" category, just based on how long it took us to come to real repentance. Keep in mind that one talent represented a very great deal of wealth. That's probably all we could handle at the time of our repentance and conversion.

This is not to say or imply that most "one talent" people don't make good. As already mentioned earlier, kings Saul and Solomon were very likely given "five talents" when God first started working with them, and they didn't turn out right, as the Bible clearly tells us. There is no indication anywhere as to what fraction or percentage of "one talent" people end up burying that one talent. But I do believe that "one talent" people are at higher risk of burying what God has given us instead of using it, when compared to those people (Moses, Abraham, Elijah, etc.) to whom God gave more than one talent right at the start.

Here is what all of God's people need to clearly understand about "trading" with God's talent and also what it means "to bury" God's talent.

"Trading" with God's talent refers to changing the way our minds work, changing how we think and reason, changing our perspectives and our outlook. **"Burying"** God's talent refers to **an unwillingness to change** the way our minds work, an unwillingness to change the way we think and reason. Burying that talent refers to a desire to maintain the status quo in the way we use our minds. "Burying" God's talent refers to being comfortable with the way our minds have always worked, and not seeing any need to change that way of thinking.

The differences between these two types of responses to God at the time we receive God's spirit demonstrate different degrees of repentance. These differences reflect the difference between "good ground" on the one side, and "stony ground" and "thorny ground" on the other side.

When we receive God's spirit after repentance and baptism some of us (e.g. Paul) drastically change the way we use our minds, and some of us change very little in the way we use our minds. This is not something that can be predicted with unerring certainty, whether the way we would subsequently use our minds would or would not change a great deal. That's where our free will enters the equation. Sometimes the result is unexpected, as for kings Saul and Solomon for example. With them the result was not at all what God had expected.

The problem always lies with the human mind which is totally free to submit to God or to resist God. God's side of this process is always guaranteed. God is "not willing that any should perish" (see 2 Peter 3:9). And God will indeed finish the good work He has started in us (see Philippians 1:6). God will always do His part. The real issue is always whether or not we will do our part, whether or not we will willingly change the way our minds work, for us to be in joyful submission to God.

THE ONE-TALENT SERVANT

But he that had received one went and **dug in the earth**, and hid his lord's money. (Matthew 25:18)

"His Lord's money" represents the initial measure of God's holy spirit that the man had received. And

holy spirit is not something we can bury under two feet of soil. So in real terms what did this man actually do?

When he received God's spirit, this man **refused** to let God's spirit exert any kind of influence on his way of thinking. And when God's spirit initially caused his conscience to feel bad in certain situations, he suppressed those twinges of conscience. He did not allow his way of using his mind to be changed by the influence of God's spirit.

In short: having accepted the basic teachings of the Sabbath and the Holy Days and tithing and only eating clean animals and clean fish, etc., **he was content with everything else in his life**. He did not perceive any need to change the way he was using his mind. He did not perceive a need to change any aspects of his character and his personality. And when initially God's spirit did try to prod his conscience into changing, he "buried" those thoughts which had been generated by his conscience. He in effect "seared his conscience with a hot iron", the principle of 1 Timothy 4:2.

To him coming into God's Church meant that he had to just change a few of his beliefs (like the Sabbath for Sunday, the annual Holy Days for Christmas, etc.), but **without actually changing himself**. His focus was on avoiding "transgressions of the law", but he wasn't concerned with changing bad character traits and **bad ways of using his mind**. He had no desire to look inwardly at himself, like Job and Paul had done.

So while in this parable Jesus Christ pictured this man as burying the talent he had received, this picture of burying the talent only represented **the man's unwillingness to let God's spirit lead him into renewing his mind**, to lead him to a godly way of thinking. He wasn't prepared to accept a different way of thinking based on a different set of values with totally different priorities. That's not what he was looking for. **He was only looking for a set of beliefs that would make him acceptable to God.**

All the changes he did make were shallow and superficial, but those changes had no effect on his motivations and his priorities and his way of using his mind. Because he was on stony ground or amongst thorns, therefore he had no real depth of convictions. With him everything was shallow.

Here is the point we need to understand.

This one-talent servant didn't fall short because he didn't work hard in his daily life. He may well have been a hard worker. He fell short because **he refused to let God's spirit help him to change his way of using his mind**. Thus he did not really have any valid excuse. There was nothing that could justify why he had refused to allow God's spirit to lead him to a godly way of using his mind. He had chosen "to bury" the opportunity to change.

At his initial repentance he had made certain changes, and he had been sincere. That is why God had accepted his repentance and then granted him "one talent" of His holy spirit. But this servant had not accepted that the changes he had made in coming into God's Church were supposed to be nothing more than **the initial first few steps** on a path that would require many more changes along the way, regarding how he would use his mind.

Taking the first few steps was very good; but those steps are only the beginning of a journey that would require many more additional steps before reaching the final destination. And the gift of one or more talents of God's spirit enables our human minds to take those additional steps. But it also requires the willingness of our own minds to take those additional steps (the principle of 1 Corinthians 9:17 and Philemon 1:14).

Without our willingness to take whatever steps God's spirit may reveal to our minds, those additional

steps will never be taken. All this particular servant had done is what was required of him; **he had done nothing more than his duty**. But that means that he was still an "unprofitable servant" (see Luke 17:10).

So this servant did not have any valid excuse for his action of "burying" God's spirit. Let's consider how this servant then approached Jesus Christ.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew You that You are an hard man, reaping where You have not sown, and gathering where You have not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid Your talent in the earth: lo, *there* You have *that which is Yours*. (Matthew 25:24-25)

The real reason he had not produced any growth is because **he had refused to let God's spirit influence his thinking**. He had simply not been willing to change. He had also been thoroughly lazy. But he is not prepared to take the blame for his lack of changing. And so he ends up **finding fault with God**. He claims that God's supposedly unfair ways of dealing with people are the real reason why he didn't change. He viewed God as a harsh slave-master. He doesn't seem to understand that **finding fault with God will ensure that he himself will end up in the lake of fire**. We can't just insult God and expect to get away with that.

But he believes that it is not his fault that he didn't change. No, it's God's fault because God is so mean. That is this servant's perverse line of reasoning. In his own eyes he is just an innocent victim of God's supposed unfair treatment, or even a victim of unfair treatment by the ministry.

We need to recognize that this servant's line of reasoning is completely false. None of it is true. And the accusation he levels at God Himself, that God is supposedly extremely selfish, is perverse. This servant is expressing Satan's view of God.

What this tells us is that **at this stage**, which is at the end of his life, **this particular servant is no longer converted**. He doesn't really have God's spirit any longer. He lost it when he "buried" it. He can't actually give it back to God because it returned to God long before the end of his life. But this servant himself doesn't actually realize this, and so he thinks that he is "giving it back" to God.

Even though this servant had in verse 25 said "lo, here You have that which is Yours", Jesus Christ still gives the instruction "take therefore the talent from him ..." in verse 28. In practice the holy spirit was taken from him when he decided to bury it, even as God's spirit "departed from Saul" after God had chosen Saul's replacement (see 1 Samuel 16:14).

In this regard here is what we should understand:

God is preparing exactly 144000 positions to be filled at the time of the first resurrection. So exactly 144000 individuals must have God's spirit at the time of Christ's second coming. A certain number of people have already been assured of their place in the first resurrection (Noah, Abraham, David, etc.). So today there are less than 144000 positions available. Now when God today in our age gives His spirit to a repentant believer, then **God has a specific position in mind** for that specific believer within that group of 144000.

Now that person could somewhere along the line reject God's truth and leave the Church. In that case God would select a replacement for that person, to fill the position God originally had intended for the person who has left the Church.

In this situation here is what we need to understand:

Two people can never at the same time be heading for the same "crown"! By "two people" I mean: **person #1** who originally repented, received God's spirit, and was then selected by God for one very specific "crown", but who then later rejected God's ways, and **person #2** who was then selected by God to replace person #1 for that very same specific "crown", after person #1 had rejected God's calling.

This concept is extremely important to grasp.

There are exactly 144000 crowns that will be given out by God. To illustrate this concept, let's **totally hypothetically** say that God has called "**person #1**" to receive **crown #125750** out of the 144000 crowns available. If this person then leaves the Church, then God will select a replacement for "crown #125750". That replacement (i.e. person #2) does not have the opportunity to receive "crown #125749" or "crown #125751" or any other crown. That replacement only has the opportunity to receive "crown #125750" and no other. That's what Jesus Christ was referring to when He said "I go to prepare a place (a position) for you" (John 14:2), that He would prepare a very specific crown for every individual who is called for an opportunity to be in the first resurrection.

In this situation: **these two individuals can never both have God's spirit at the same time.** Person #2 can only receive God's spirit after God has taken His spirit away from person #1. The replacement person can never receive God's spirit as long as person #1 still has some of God's spirit within his mind. Two people who were both given the opportunity to receive "crown #125750" can never both have God's spirit at the same time.

So when it becomes clear that God has given His spirit to "a replacement for someone who has rejected God's ways", then that is proof that God has taken His spirit away from the person who is being replaced ... and **that becomes irreversible!** The first person can never get back the position that God has given to someone else.

It can never be that person #1 repents and that God then says: okay, I'll put you back on the track for crown #125750 ... but wait, when you rejected My ways I then selected a replacement for crown #125750, to replace you. God cannot have two people both at the same time heading for crown #125750.

Can you follow?

That is why we are told that at the time God gave His spirit to David, at the same time God took away His spirit from Saul (see 1 Samuel 16:13-14). These two men were chosen for the same "crown", and **only one of them at a time could have God's spirit.** The fact that here David is mentioned in verse 13 and Saul is only mentioned in the next verse is inconsequential. Already in verse 1 God had said regarding Saul: I have rejected him.

When a replacement is selected by God, then God's spirit will leave the individual who is being replaced ... if God's spirit hadn't already left earlier.

I mention this to clarify what the parable of the talents is actually showing us.

While the parable shows the talent being taken away from the one-talent servant at the end of his life, in practice **it was taken away earlier.** It was taken away earlier, at the time when this servant "buried" his talent, and at which time God had chosen a replacement for his position within the 144000. The very latest God's spirit was taken from the one-talent servant was when God had selected a replacement for that one-talent servant. And that was then also the time when God's spirit was given to the replacement.

That is what the story about kings Saul and David is showing us.

In our parable Jesus Christ then showed that this servant was "wicked and slothful" (Matthew 25:26). The servant had in fact been unwilling to change. It is "wicked" or "evil" to accuse God of wrong doing, which is what he was doing. He was also lazy. His fault-finding attitude towards God was totally perverse.

For this man his response to God's calling was his problem. And for that response he is going to be in the lake of fire. His initial response had been acceptable, and so God had initially given him a one talent measure of the holy spirit. But he had not been willing to do more than the bare minimum that was required of him. Having come into God's Church and having received God's spirit, **he stopped changing.**

WE MUST BE WILLING TO DO MORE THAN IS OUR DUTY TO DO

God has called us into His Church, and we must respond to God and to that calling by being willing to change.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence to make your calling and election sure:** for if you do these things, you shall never fall: (2 Peter 1:10)

"Give diligence" means that we must put out effort. If we "bury" God's spirit, then we are obviously not giving diligence. Once God has called us and given us His spirit, then we need to seek to change in ways that will be pleasing to God. We not only have to change our actions and conduct, but we also have to examine **our attitude** towards God, and **our character traits** and **our personality traits**. We must continually change so that we become more like a person "after God's own heart", like King David had been.

Now here is one way that we can recognize that we are indeed changing to be more like God. This is something that other people can't necessarily see. But we ourselves should be able to see this about ourselves if we have been in God's Church for many years.

Picture the following situations:

- 1) You are in a discussion about issues of morality with some of your neighbors who are not in the Church.
- 2) You are listening to some of your coworkers in the office or at your place of work discussing current affairs.
- 3) You listen to ads on the radio or on TV, pushing drugs and other "health products" onto the audience.
- 4) You listen to the radio or you are watching a TV show, where two or more people are presenting their opposing views about a current affairs situation.
- 5) You see on TV some kind of march or rally where people are presenting their demands or their grievances.
- 7) You listen to some comments from listeners who phone in to a radio talk show about whatever the subject may be.

In other words, you hear **people who are not a part of God's Church** express their views and their

opinions on **the whole spectrum of life** in our modern societies. You also see how people are trying to get us to buy their products or their services. You see what priorities in life all these people in the world have.

In short:

You see **how** their minds work! You see **how** they reason. You see **what** is important to them. You see **what** is their attitude towards matters of morality. You see **what** motivates them to do the things they do. You see **how** they argue in matters where they have a self-interest. You see **what** it is that they strive after. You see **what** they are prepared to do for money. etc.

In all of these situations: can you see that, as far as you are concerned, their reasoning is simply **not logical**? Can you see that **they reject facts** that are obvious to you? Can you see that **they can't really grasp** the significance of factors that are obvious to you? Can you see that they have completely **different standards** than you do? And can you see in them **the ever-present hostility** towards any of the ways of God for dealing with every situation in life?

Can you see that their minds and your mind work in completely different ways?

Or do you find yourself in agreement with these ways of the world in many cases?

Yes, certainly, in a discussion about two conflicting courses of action you will typically reject one of those two options. But do you find that you can't really fully align with either option? Or are you fully in line with one of the two sides in such discussions on the radio or on TV, or amongst your neighbors or your coworkers?

We should understand that in most debates in this world **neither side really represents a view that God would endorse**. In most cases it is a matter of one view being considerably worse than the other, without proclaiming that "other" view to be good. At best we are likely to find that "the better view" still has certain features that aren't really acceptable before God. At worst we will see that both sides are blatantly anti-God.

It always comes back to "**the carnal mind is enmity against God**, because it is not subject to the law of God" (see Romans 8:7).

If our minds are really changing as a result of putting God's spirit to use in our lives, then we will start to see more and more of **a gulf** between how we use our minds, and how people in the world use their minds. And that difference goes across all aspects of our daily lives.

If, on the other hand, we cannot really detect such a gulf between us and the world, then our minds are still operating far too close to the carnal mind standard of Romans 8:7.

You examine your own mind regarding this matter. You don't have to tell anyone else the results you came up with. It is just a private and very personal investigation that you yourself carry out. And then you analyze the results for yourself.

If in that examination you can very clearly see a difference between the way you think and reason, the way your mind works, and the way people in the world think and reason, and how their minds work, then you are indeed putting that "talent" which God entrusted to you to work. And it is producing results. When you can see that you don't worry about the things that people in the world worry about, that for you **"sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"**, without worries about the future (see Matthew 6:33-34) dominating your mind, then you are certainly on the right track.

The person who is still enmeshed in all of this world's worries (i.e. he is the seed amongst thorns) is not really putting his "talent" to good use. **Worries have a way of burying the talent God has entrusted to us.** Worries overpower the influence God's spirit could have in our lives. So we need to be on guard against constantly worrying about things.

The way God expects us to respond to His calling is like the man who found a buried treasure, and like the merchant who found the pearl of great price.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto **treasure** hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found **one pearl of great price**, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

These two individuals are shown making great sacrifices in order to get something they perceive to be of very great value. The calling which God has extended to us is of immeasurable value. And God expects us to be willing to make some sacrifices in order to hold fast to that calling. God also expects us to have adopted a certain way of thinking.

Let's now continue with the last part of Matthew chapter 25.

MATTHEW 25:31-46

Right after the parable of the talents we now have a section that deals with certain things that will happen after Jesus Christ has returned.

At some point after His return Jesus Christ divides humanity into two groups: the sheep and the goats. The expression "**the sheep**" refers to all those who will eventually be in God's eternal kingdom.

At the time of Christ's second coming this term "the sheep" refers specifically to those who will be in the first resurrection, the 144000. But this expression "the sheep" also refers to those who become a part of the Family of God at the end of the 100-year period, which period will be after the millennium. The sheep are discussed in verses 34-40.

The expression "**the goats**" refers to all those who will end up in the lake of fire, which is the second death. This will also only be after the 100-year period has ended.

This account here from verse 31-46 discusses **what** will happen, **without regard for when** those things will happen. From the Book of Revelation we see that the first part of "the sheep" will be rewarded at the time of Jesus Christ's second coming. The greater part of "the sheep" will only "inherit the kingdom" at the time of the new heaven and the new earth.

"The goats" will not be sent away "into everlasting fire" (verse 41) until about 1100 years after Jesus Christ's second coming. The purpose of this account here in Matthew 25 is to show **the stark contrast** between how these two groups will be dealt with by God. So now let's look at what Jesus Christ revealed in these verses.

In practice the things discussed in these verses will take place over a period of time, rather than all these things taking place at the time of Christ's second coming. Let's look at what Christ says to both groups, and then we can draw some conclusions.

THE SHEEP

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (Matthew 25:34)

This group is made up of **all** those human beings who will eventually become a part of the Family of God. The kingdom which God has been preparing is not only for those in the first resurrection. The kingdom of God is something God desires all human beings to have a part in. That was God's intention, that none should perish.

There will be **two distinct groups** of people, who will inherit God's kingdom at two different points in time.

The first group to inherit God's kingdom will be the 144000 at the time of Jesus Christ's second coming. They are the ones who are in the first resurrection. The second group to inherit God's kingdom will be all the people from the millennium plus from the 100-year second resurrection period, who have willingly and joyfully embraced God's way of life, with God's standards and God's expectations. When this "great multitude which no man could number" (see Revelation 7:9) has become a part of God's Family, then the Family of God will be complete.

Now let's notice **why** these people end up inheriting the kingdom of God. Is it because they kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days? Is it because they tithed faithfully? Is it because they kept all of the ten commandments? What does Jesus Christ say about all of these people?

For I was **hungry**, and you gave me meat: I was **thirsty**, and you gave me drink: I was **a stranger**, and you took me in: **Naked**, and you clothed me: I was **sick**, and you visited me: I was **in prison**, and you came unto me. (Matthew 25:35-36)

These are the reasons Jesus Christ stated as to why these people end up in God's kingdom. There is nothing here about "keeping the commandments" in this statement. **Jesus Christ did not say: inherit the kingdom because you didn't kill, steal, lie, commit adultery, covet, etc.**

We need to grasp that it is our duty to keep all of God's laws, as it is the duty of all human beings at all times. But if keeping God's laws is all we do, then we are still only "unprofitable servants" (see Luke 17:10), and "unprofitable servants" will not make it into God's Family.

Let me give you an analogy:

Keeping all of God's laws is **like an entrance requirement** for being accepted into the training program for becoming a part of God's Family. But meeting that "entrance requirement" is not going to be sufficient for anyone "to graduate" into the Family of God. All the entrance requirement says is: okay, you meet the rock-bottom minimum character requirements to be accepted into the training program. So here is the course work you now need to learn, and on which you will be tested before you can graduate. And the course work consists of Matthew 25:35-36.

All of these things in verses 35-36 refer to the same thing. Do we understand that? They all refer to **an attitude of spontaneously seeking to meet the needs of other people**, whatever those needs might be. This is not an attitude that is commanded, though it obviously demonstrates **the principle** of loving our neighbor as much as we love ourselves.

The point is:

That is what God is like! God spontaneously responds to the needs of all His creatures, without needing some law to tell Him to respond to those needs. And God absolutely requires that anyone who will become a member of God's Family must possess this exact same character trait. That is the trait God calls "love".

Jesus Christ explained in verse 40 that all these things applied to other human beings in our environment, the people we can see, rather than Jesus Christ Himself having been hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. These statements refer to how we treat our fellow human beings.

So keeping all of God's laws meets the entrance requirements into the lifetime course that leads to salvation, the course that leads to immortal spirit life in the Family of God. Those entrance requirements focus primarily on what we say and do or don't do. But those entrance requirements are not enough to pass the final exams. **The final exams focus on having inculcated the attributes of God's character into our own minds, that we have become like God in the way we think and reason.**

God has a spontaneous outgoing concern for the needs of others. And we need to grow to the point where such an outgoing concern for the well-being of others also becomes spontaneous and intuitive for us.

This is the greatest and most important attribute that God is looking for in us. This is what God calls "love", and what in the King James Translation is called "charity", and what in the Greek of the New Testament it is called "agape". And as Paul said, **"the greatest of these is charity"** (1 Corinthians 13:13). That is what God is really looking for in every one of us.

It is the greatest because it is the determining factor for whether or not those accepted into the training program will also "graduate" into God's Family.

THE GOATS

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, **you cursed, into everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels: (Matthew 25:41)

These are all the people who end up in the lake of fire. They are cursed. The question is: **why are they cursed?** What have they done? Did they break the Sabbath? Did they lie, kill, steal, commit adultery? Did they break the ten commandments? Just what is it about them that leads to them being cursed?

Again, we have the principle of Jesus Christ equating how we have treated others with how we have treated Him. So notice the indictment against this group.

For I was **hungry**, and you gave me no meat: I was **thirsty**, and you gave me no drink: I was a **stranger**, and you took me not in: **naked**, and you clothed me not: **sick**, and **in prison**, and you visited me not. (Matthew 25:42-43)

These people may very possibly also have kept all of the ten commandments. Many may well have been Sabbath-keepers. They may even have done everything they were commanded to do.

But in spite of keeping God's commandments, as had for example a rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22, they had never embraced a genuine concern for the well-being of other people; they had never embraced an attitude of discerning the circumstances of people in need, and then trying to help with those needs. In spite of keeping God's commandments their minds were still focused far too much on

self. They have never come to really understand the mind of God, and exactly what it is that God wants from us.

It is the contrasting responses to exposure to the real needs of other people that is the deciding factor as to whether we "graduate" into God's Family, or whether we will end up in the lake of fire.

And these shall go away into **everlasting punishment**: but the righteous into **life eternal**. (Matthew 25:46)

God has called us, inviting us to join the training program. God expects us to meet the minimum entrance requirements, i.e. God requires us to keep all of His laws and commandments. And once we do that, **then the real training starts**.

A vitally important key is how deeply committed we are to God, how resolutely we repent and commit to God. That starting point has a profound impact on the rest of our lives, because it can make the difference between receiving only "one talent" of God's spirit to start with, or receiving from God more than one talent. A deeper and more committed repentance will give God a greater confidence in our chances to endure unto the end, and therefore motivate God to give us more than one talent right from the start.

And even if we start off with only one talent, it is within our ability to double that one talent fairly quickly, by becoming more firm and more dedicated to the calling God has set before us. And for that matter, even just one talent represents a vast amount of power, to which God gives us access.

The way we put God's spirit to work in our lives is by embracing every character attribute we see in God, and rejecting every character attribute that is bad in the sight of God. God's main character attribute is love, that spontaneous concern for the well-being of every other person and every other creature.

Real love is a character attribute!

It is not commandment-keeping that motivates someone to help people who are in need. Perceiving the needs of people and then helping where possible is a reflection of someone's character.

So in conclusion:

We ourselves determine how we will respond to the calling God has given us. We need to respond just like the servants who had received five talents and two talents, by actively seeking to change our ways of thinking, by actively rooting out of our characters and our personalities traits that are unacceptable to God, in addition to striving to live by all of God's laws. Motivating ourselves to spontaneously respond to the needs of other people in our environment is a major way of putting God's spirit to use in our lives.

We also need to guard against the attitude of the servant who had received just one talent, the servant who became critical of God and who refused to continue changing, the servant who was oblivious to the urgent needs of other people around him.

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