

# The Parable of the Talents



*Matthew 25:14-30; Luke  
19:11-27*

*Year A Proper 28*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part   ▲ = medium sized part   ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
▲	<b>Jesus</b>	▲				■			▲
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲		▲			●
▲	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲		▲		●			▲
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲					●	
●	<b>Nathanael</b> - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life		▲					●	
▲	<b>Matthew</b> - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		■					▲	
▲	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus			■					
▲	<b>Mary Magdalene</b> - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past				▲		●		
▲	<b>Thomas</b> - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts				▲		▲		
▲	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room				▲		▲		

## Scene 1

Jesus , John , Judas

*{Jesus teaches the disciples.}*

**Jesus** The kingdom of heaven is like a man about to travel to a far country, and he divided all his money to be managed by his servants, to each according to his ability: five minas to one, two to another, and one to a third. Then he left - as I do now, to go pray in the woods for a while. While I'm gone, think about what you would do with the money if you were each of the servants, and try to guess what each servant actually did, and when I return, we'll discuss it.

*{Jesus exits.}*

**John** How about if we divide into groups, and each one can tackle one of the servants?

**Judas** *[impatiently]* Really, John? Are we really going to do this?

**John** *[weakly]* It's what the rabbi asked.

**Judas** We're going to sit around discussing the end of the world and money management?

**John** What else is there to do?

**Judas** *[angrily]* We're supposed to be organizing a revolt! If it's even possible any more. We've lost all our possible allies, and maybe even the support of the people since we disappeared from public view.

**John** Wait a minute. This parable may be more relevant than you think. He's used it before, remember? The man who goes on the journey is going because he's supposed to be crowned king of another country. That could be precisely about the rabbi coming to Jerusalem!

**Judas** *[ominously]* Okay, I'll listen to what he has to say. But by your own accounting of things, he's changed the parable for today. *He left out the part about the man being crowned king!* I'll go along with another day of Bible School lessons, but I hope they include an explanation for that omission.

## Scene 2

James , Matthew , Nathanael

*{James, Matthew, and Nathanael discuss the servant with the five minas.}*

- James** All right! We've got the most money to start with. The master trusts us the most. But that makes our position the most dangerous. If we blow this much money, we'll be in worst trouble than anybody else.
- Nathanael** Maybe we should just put it in the bank and not try anything risky.
- Matthew** That would be the worst thing we could do! When you have this much money, you *have* to do better.
- James** What do you mean, "have to"? Who says? The rabbi didn't give us any specific instructions.
- Matthew** I guess it depends on how realistic the parable is going to be. In the real world, if I had five minas to invest any way I liked, I could double it in a year, and my boss would fire me if I did anything less.
- Nathanael** You money people are always talking about sure things! But any investment can fail. What makes you think you're immune?
- Matthew** The fact that I have five minas. Not one, not two, but five. Banks are for people who only have one, and investments that might fail are for people with two. When you've got five? There's no reason not to make out like a bandit, and no reason to take any risks.
- James** Are you saying the financial system is rigged?
- Matthew** Welcome to the kingdom of this world! Those who have, get more. Those who have less, eventually lose it.
- Nathanael** Dude, you're lucky you're with us. When *our* kingdom comes, all those rich slobes are going to hang on crosses!
- Matthew** *[solemnly]* I'll personally cut the wood.
- James** So our job is easy. We just double our money with no risk!

**Matthew** Yup. It's the team with two talents that has the hardest job. The team with just one should just put it in the bank like Nathanael said, but the one with two is going to have to take some risks.

### Scene 3

Joanna , John , Judas

*{John, Judas, and Joanna discuss the servant with two minas.}*

**John** Wow. Two minas. In ten years of fishing, I don't think my family earned that much. I don't even know how to think about it!

**Judas** *[dryly]* I'll bet Joanna does.

**Joanna** *[earnestly]* Yeah, that was roughly our net worth. But boy, was it hard to achieve. We probably took about ten years to build it up.

**Judas** I guess if we're going to play this game, we should take your process as our answer. How did you and Chuza generate your two minas, and what are you doing with it right now?

**Joanna** We built it up slowly, through dozens and maybe hundreds of small investments where we thought we had enough information. I can't count the number of times we rejected a promising opportunity because we just didn't feel we knew enough about it.

**Judas** I imagine being the stewards of Herod's house must have helped.

**Joanna** It did, but not in the way you might think. We never received any favors or inside information from Herod or from any aspect of our work, but...I'm not sure how to put it. Just being in the place we were, to have the status that we did, seemed to help. People - I mean people with money - seemed to want to help us get to where they were.

**John** It almost sounds like a country club where they vote to let you in or out.

**Joanna** Exactly!

**Judas** *[darkly]* And what would have happened if the vote had gone against you?

**Joanna** I don't know. I really do think we won those bets because of our

thorough preparation, but who knows? Maybe we would have mysteriously lost more of them. Or maybe some of those opportunities might not have come up in the first place.

**John** It sounds so...broken. So fallen. Nothing against *you*.

**Joanna** I know. It's the world I renounced in the hope that we would replace it with a kingdom of...well, something better, anyway.

**John** You know, I wonder if we're going about this wrong. The rabbi's parables often end up illustrating how the Kingdom we preach is different from the kingdom of this world. Maybe the servant should donate the two minas to charity, or found a hospital in his master's name, or something like that. Or at the very least, maybe we shouldn't be so worried about not doubling it.

**Judas** [*suddenly intent*] No! I think we should play the game straight, and that our answer should be Joanna's: thorough preparation in combination with good connections. I'm sure that's the answer he's looking for, but it's also a message he needs to hear himself!

#### Scene 4

Mary , Peter , Thomas

*{Thomas, Mary, and Peter discuss the servant with one mina.}*

**Mary** I'm glad we only have one mina to manage. We have the least to lose.

**Thomas** I'm not so sure about that. The reason we have only one mina is that we're the worst servant. The master trusts us the least, and probably likes us the least. If his favorites lose *their* money, he'll be quicker to forgive them, or maybe they'll just be demoted to our place, but if we lose ours, there's nowhere to go but out the door!

**Mary** [*anxiously*] Oh, you're right! Maybe we should just put the money in the bank. That way, we'll earn some interest at least, and we won't risk losing it.

**Peter** No, no! We have to be bold! See, this is our chance to lift ourselves up. We've got nothing to lose, right? We should double down on the first live bet we see, and then double down again if we get the chance!

**Thomas** *[with a chuckle]* I like that thinking. Do or die! What do you think, Mary?

*{There's a long pause while Mary thinks it over.}*

**Peter** Come on, Mary! "No guts, no glory!"

**Mary** But I don't want glory. I just want to be safe and happy.

**Thomas** Well, maybe the third servant is neither. Maybe he's constantly worrying that one more slip up, or even just a downturn in the economy, will cost him his job. And maybe he's hates being looked down on as the worst servant. Maybe the only way to safety and happiness for him is to rise just a little in the eyes of his master.

**Mary** Okay. *[with some sadness]* And maybe the household would be better off if the servant failed. Maybe the master only gave him a job out of charity, and it's a good thing that now, he'll either make himself useful to his master or give his master a reason to fire him.

**Peter** *[earnestly]* Atta girl! That's the spirit!

## Scene 5

Jesus , John , Judas

*{Jesus returns and the discussion resumes.}*

**Jesus** So the man returned and called his servants to give an accounting of their stewardship. The first servant said, "Behold, from the five talents you put in my care, I earned five more." And the man said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a few things, and now I will make you a ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

**Judas** *[to John]* It seems Matthew was right. That's what it took. Maximized profit.

**John** I guess it's not so bad if you look at it allegorically. We all have to maximize the gifts God has given us.

**Jesus** The second servant said, "Behold, from the two talents you put in my care, I earned two more." And the man said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a few things, and now I will make you a ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your

lord." Then the final servant said, "Master, I knew you were a hard man, reaping where you never sowed, so I kept your money safely buried away, and look! here it is, every cent, totally intact!" But the man said to the servant, "Fool! If you knew I was such a hard man, reaping where I never sowed, you should have realized I wouldn't be satisfied with this! At the very least, you could have put the money in the bank for the interest!"

**John** *[anxiously interrupting]* Rabbi? The man in the parable is supposed to be God, right? If that's the case, then are you saying God is a "hard man"? That he's greedy and unreasonable?

**Jesus** I'll answer your question with a question of my own: after the man takes the one mina away from the unprofitable servant, what do you think he does with it? Discuss it while I take a walk.

## Scene 6

Mary , Peter , Thomas

*{Thomas, Mary, and Peter discuss it.}*

**Peter** That wasn't fair! We wanted the servant to take a risk with the money, but the rabbi had him do the exact opposite.

**Thomas** But the story did support your thinking. You were absolutely right about what the servant *should have* done.

**Peter** Mary was right, too. The man said the servant could have put the money in the bank. How about that, Mary? Mary?

**Thomas** *[gently]* What is it, Mary? What's wrong?

**Mary** I was just thinking about the rabbi leaving us.

**Peter** What are you talking about?

**Thomas** Mary is certain that the rabbi is preparing us for...something catastrophic.

**Peter** Seriously? Come on, Mary, you've got to have more faith! There's no way he would abandon us, and no way we'd abandon him. And together, there's no way we can lose!

**Mary** He's leaving us, and he wants us to be good servants while he's gone.

**Thomas** Well, if that's true, then he's also coming back, right?

**Mary** *[cheering up a little]* Yes. Yes, I suppose so.

**Thomas** Then let's look forward to that. Let's not bury our mina in the ground!

## Scene 7

James , Matthew , Nathanael

*{James, Matthew, and Nathanael discuss the parable.}*

**Nathanael** Maybe he hires another servant and gives him a shot with the one mina.

**Matthew** *[confidently throughout this scene]* No. He's a hard man, remember? He doesn't give people shots. And he doesn't pay any salary he doesn't need to.

**James** Then he gives it to one of the other servants.

**Matthew** Right, but which one?

**Nathanael** The one with the two minas. To balance them out a little.

**Matthew** Nope.

**James** The one with five? But you were telling us that the one with two had the harder job! He did more to earn the extra mina.

**Matthew** Haven't you heard anything I've said? This is how the world works: Those who have, get more. Those who have less...

**James and Nathanael together** Eventually lose it.

## Scene 8



## Jesus , John , Judas

*{Jesus returns.}*

**Jesus** Matthew is right! The man gave the one mina to the one who had five. And when it was said, "But he already has ten," the master said, "To those who have shall be given, but from those who have not will be taken away even that which they have!" And he cast the foolish servant into outer darkness, where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth.

**John** "Wailing and gnashing of teeth." That's very...severe.

**Jesus** *[simply]* The man was a hard master.

**Judas** *[suspiciously]* You've used that phrase before. Recently.

**Jesus** The time seems right.

**John** It doesn't seem very fair.

**Jesus** I'm glad you heard the lesson.

**Judas** *[intently]* It's a good lesson. The necessity to make use of the opportunities you're given. The catastrophic results of non-action.

**Jesus** Is that the lesson?

**Judas** *[urgently]* We've been in Jerusalem for two weeks now, and in that time, we've done nothing - except lose all our potential allies and disappear from public sight. We're burying our "mina" in the ground!

**Jesus** Some "investments" only pay after you've lost all your money.

**John** *[in concerned tones]* Rabbi? What do you mean by that?

**Judas** *[losing his patience]* That's absurd! Look, in the version of the parable you told us before, the man goes to a far country to be crowned king. And at the end, he has all those who opposed his kingship executed. Why did you take that part out? Because the people *did* try to declare you king! And it was *you* who turned them away. Why did you do that? Are we here to liberate the nation or not? Are you or are you not the Messiah?

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