

VID SPECIALIZED UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

THE PARABLE ABOUT THE TALENTS IN MATTHEW 25:14–30: EXEGESIS
AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE USE YOUR TALENTS PROJECT IN THE
SOUTH WEST SYNOD OF ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE
YESUS

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ABSTRACT

This master thesis is situated in the field of New Testament studies and has its focus on the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30: Exegesis and its application to the use your talents project in the South West Synod (SWS) of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The question of research is: What is the use of talents according to Matthew 25:14-30? And why are the congregations of the SWS not efficient in using talents for social and economic transformation of the community? With the method of exegesis in Matthew 25:14-30, and with empirical analysis, this thesis seeks to answer the research question. The main focus is to find out how the parable of talents is appropriately understood exegetically and how it is applied and practiced in the SWS congregations. One of the two large chapters, chapter 2, analyzes the text in Matthew in order to find the historical message and the meaning of the text with special emphasis on how the use of the talents is understood exegetically in the pericope. The next large chapter, chapter 3, analyzes how the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is understood and applied practically in the congregations of the SWS. As the next step, chapter 4 seeks to compare the exegesis with the empirical analysis, and to analyze the texts historical, theological and ethical aspects with the understanding and practice of the congregations of the SWS.

The findings of this thesis are that in the historical context of the parable, the master (ὁ κύριος) and slaves (οἱ δούλοι) relation was based on the legally acknowledged lordship which benefits the faithful slave, but in the congregations' historical context, the master is considered and experienced to be hostile and exploitive to his slaves, as the master expressed in the NT by the Greek word δεσπότης (e.g., 1Tim. 6:1), and that the monetary value of one talent was about 6,000 denarii, which is analogous to today's \$ 800,000, but this is not known to the congregations in the SWS. This shows that the parable needs an appropriate interpretation in order to communicate its message to the congregations in the SWS. Theologically, the word "gained" (ἐκέρδησεν) in Matthew 25:16-17, meant losing one's privilege for the sake of the wellbeing of others, but in the congregations it has been understood as the increasing of the talents for the effective servant: this also needs to be corrected. The exegesis of Matthew 25: 18, 24-25 finds that the third servant buried his talent because he had a wrong attitude to God. Regarding this view, the empirical analysis verified that the wrong attitude to God in the

disciple occurs in the primary evangelism approach which lacks to focus on practical aspects of faith, and this indicates that evangelism and use of the talents must be integrated to ensure the holistic nature of the church. This thesis also finds that it is appropriate and important to focus on the eschatological aspects of the text (Matthew 25:24-30) to enhance the use of talents in the congregations, whereas only the moralizing approach is strongly emphasized in the ‘Use of your talents’ project. Finally, this thesis finds some practical relations of using talents and helping the needy, and disciplining the church members based on the exegesis of Matthew 25: 16-17, 28, 31-46 and the empirical analysis.

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“Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (1 Cor. 1:9).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
NT	The New Testament
OT	The Old Testament
SWS	South West Synod
DASSC	Development and Social Services Commission
ED	Economy Development
DMT	Department of Mission and Theology

Chapter 1: Introduction and Method

1.1 The Background for Choice of Theme

Biblically, salvation inseparably encompasses both the spiritual and physical needs of the human being. Hence, keeping the holistic essence of the church mission has been critical and challenging in the churches ministry throughout the centuries. Often, “Spirituality” has been understood in terms of word, not as part of deed. Thus, attempts have been made to balance the two in order to achieve holistic ministry of the church.

The Latin American liberation theology of the twentieth century was the movement which ignited the churches to look for their prophetic role for the oppressed. By reinforcing this notion J. Andrew Kirk argues “Due to its global strategy, the church’s activity is beyond that of saving souls; it includes the legitimate function of creating the kingdom of justice on earth”.¹ Conversely, the Enlightenment thinking influenced the Western Christians to separate the physical and social needs of humans from their spiritual needs.²

In the Evangelical sphere, there were movements to reinforce the holistic nature of the church. In this regard, the international congress on world Evangelization in Lausanne (Switzerland) in 1974 accomplished the Lausanne covenant, which deals directly with “the nature of evangelism” and “Christian social responsibility.”³ Robert Moffitt defines it in the following way: - “The development is the mission of the local church. It is nothing less than the obedient response of the church to both the Great commandment and Great commission. This definition of development is thus a view of holistic ministry.”⁴

Initially, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) was founded by the joint effort of missionaries and indigenous people. Evangelistic and development works were fully expensed

¹ J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology: An Evangelical view from the Third World* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1979), 5.

² Robert Moffitt. “The local church and Development.” Page 237 in *The church in Response to Human need*. Edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden. Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

³ Tite Tienou. “Evangelism and Social Transformation.” in *The church in Response to Human Need*, 175.

⁴ Moffitt, “The local church and Development”, 237.

by donors.⁵ However, following the termination and declining of external funds from mission partners, the church faced a critical economic crisis. Hence, the 17th General assembly of EECMY, which was held in 2003 had dealt the matter and made decisions to teach the congregations, so that they should carry out both the spiritual and social activities of the church.⁶

South West Synod (SWS) is one of 29 synods of EECMY. The synod was established in March 1990. Currently, the synod has about 450,000 members and 710 congregations and 300 preaching centers.⁷ Though, the General Assembly of EECMY had initiated the congregations to take part in the social and economic aspect, the congregations in SWS were hesitant to play a vital role; rather they looked for financial support from abroad. It is believed that congregations developed the dependency syndrome.

While SWS was teaching the congregations to fulfill the holistic ministry, the project called “USE YOUR TALENTS: the congregation as primary development agent” was introduced in 2013. Sigurd Haus, the project leader of use your talent knowledge development project, defines the notion of ‘use your talents’ as follows:

The essence of ‘use your talent’ is to start at the congregation and to go into the community- using what we have here and now. The goal is, first and foremost, to fulfill God’s commandment to “love your neighbor”. Use your talent is about how congregations can work to fulfill the commandment. It is about how congregations can fulfill their holistic ministries.⁸

Use your talents approach bases on the biblical text Mathew 25:14-30. It undertakes that the congregations have members with God-given talents. By briefing the use of talents according to Matthew, the approach tries to describe the Biblical meaning and purpose of the talent, so that

⁵ Esayas Emene. “Becoming Self-Reliant: Experience of South West Synod in Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.” Page 98 in Use Your Talents: the congregation as primary development agent. Edited by Sigurd Haus. Oslo: Digni, Arbins, 2017.

⁶ Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus 17th General Assembly, Addis Ababa, 2003.

⁷ Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus – Department of Mission and Theology- statics data of the year 2015.

⁸ Sigurd Haus. “Use Your Talents knowledge Development Project.” Page 18 in Use Your Talents: the congregation as primary development agent. Edited by Sigurd Haus. Oslo: Digni , Arbins, 2017.

the congregations should look to what they have and reconsider the role of the church in transforming the spiritual, social and economic situation of the community.

I have been involved in the use your talents project since 2013, and I have experienced that the congregations are active in evangelization but unenthusiastic in fulfilling the physical need of humans (caring for sick, feeding the hungry, and so forth). Therefore, the most important reason for choosing this theme for my master thesis is my interest in Biblical studies, so as to do exegesis on the text and to analyze the application of the text in SWS congregations to enhance the involvement of congregations in the human physical need by using their talents.

1.2 The Theme and Goal of the Thesis

The theme of this thesis is the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14–30: exegesis and its application to the use your talents project in the South West Synod of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The main goal is to find out how the parable of talents is appropriately understood exegetically and how it is applied and practiced in the SWS congregations.

In writing on this topic, I am interested to know what the parable of talents according to Matthew is and what Biblical message it can communicate. Furthermore, I want to know how the parable is understood and practiced on the grass root level.

This topic is not new; some people made a research on “use your talents”⁹, but my research differs by doing an exegesis of the text and tries to understand how the Biblical understanding of the text is perceived in the local context. I have chosen this topic because the parable of talents is accepted as the Biblical base for the project “uses your talents: the congregation as primary development agent.”¹⁰

The project anticipates creating a better economically sustained and socially integrated community by the talents given to congregations. I hope my thesis may contribute in briefing the Biblical and theological understanding of talents, their proper application and give knowledge to

⁹Beatrice Nekesa Johansson. “Use of Talents: A way to Transform and Develop Communities in Kenya Through Congregations.” Master Thesis in Diakonia and Christian Social Practice. VID Specialized University, Oslo. 2017.

¹⁰Haus, Use Your Talents: the congregation as primary development agent, 17.

the congregations that they have social and economic responsibility and accountability to their respective community.

1.3 Question of the Research and the Delimitation of the Research

1.3.1 Question of Research

I have indicated in the back ground discussion above, the congregations in SWS are not effective to engage in economic and social activities as the church decided in the 17th General Assembly, rather congregations are looking for external supports. The use your talents project which is grounded on the parable about talents according to Matthew, initiates the congregations to have primary role in developing the community. However, the result is unsatisfactory. Based on this observation, I want to do a sound biblical interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30, and to analyze its interpretive meaning with the understanding of readers in my respective context.

Thus, my question of research for this thesis is: What is the use of talents according to Matthew 25:14-30? And why are the congregations of SWS not efficient in using talents for social and economic transformation of the community?

I want to examine the biblical, theological, missiological and cultural factors that might affect the congregations in understanding and applying the talents.

1.3.2 *Delimitation of the Topic*

In the textual part (Matthew 25:14-30), I will focus on repeated key words or phrases (e.g, talents, making trade, having profit, burying, reward and punishment) and the role of characters in the text (master; and servants). Because to understand, how “the use of talents approach” is perceived and practiced by the local context, grounded on the empirical analysis, findings could be described as part of this thesis. Based on the detailed analysis of the text (Chapter 2) and the empirical findings (Chapter 3), biblical and theological problems which affect the holistic nature of congregations will be analyzed and proper solutions recommended (Chapters 4 and 5).

1.4 METHOD

This thesis involves both exegesis of the parable about the talents and an investigation of its practical application in my own context,; hence, it needs a kind of interdisciplinary approach. I have preferred different approaches because the way which I want to understand the text is doing exegesis whereas I intend to know how the text is understood and applied in the local context by doing empirical analysis (field research).

For such combined work, I could not find the method which exactly fits. Socio-rhetoric method somehow relates to this work. This approach presents five steps, namely; inner texture, inter texture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture.¹¹ However, none of the steps clearly define how to analyze the exegetical work with empirical findings. Therefore, I have decided to use different disciplines in my research thesis.

1.4.1 *Method of the Exegesis*

In the textual part my method is traditional exegesis. On the exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30, I will try to incorporate the steps that have been taught as a method in the NT exegesis lectures in VID Specialized University, Stavanger.

Accordingly, I will start the exegesis by textual criticism and make a translation of the text. Then, I will discuss on the contextual delimitations, and it is about the broader and immediate contexts of the text. After examining the textual unit, how the text is structured in the section and the form of the text will be dealt. Background texts and the parallel texts of synoptic Gospels will be dealt with as an integral part of the exegesis. Furthermore, the historical context of the text will also be described.

Finally, I will do the detailed exegesis focusing on the theme of this thesis in correspondence to the structure of the text. In the detailed exegesis, I will use literature to find the meaning; hence,

¹¹ W. Randolph Tate, *A Hand Book for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide To Methods, Terms, and Concepts* 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 412. According to W. Randolph Tate, Vernon Robbins defines socio-rhetoric method saying, “It is a textually based method that uses programmatic strategies to invite social, cultural, historical, psychological, aesthetic, and theological information into a context of minute exegetical activity.”

the information in literary and historical discussions will also contribute in finding what the text means.

1.4.2 Method of the Empirical Analysis

My thesis seeks to examine the Biblical understanding and application of SWS congregations in ‘use your talents’ which is based on Matthew 25:14-30. Therefore, I will do the empirical analysis on the focus groups. These focus groups are the SWS management team, the congregation pastors and Arba Minch seminary teachers, and Mafo congregation leaders. I selected ‘Mafo Congregation’ from 710 congregations of the synod, because Mafo is the only model congregation having the holistic nature of the church and I wanted to investigate ‘why’ this congregation has become effective.

Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy, in the book “Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture”, propose the interdisciplinary approach to this kind of hermeneutics.¹² This approach anticipates the interaction that takes place between the biblical text and the modern socio cultural context in the hermeneutical process, considers the Biblical texts normative, and the modern context is willing to be questioned and modified by the Biblical text.¹³ This book suggests three steps to interact the Biblical texts with questions to the socio cultural context. I prefer them to investigate how use of talents is understood and practiced contextually.

Firstly, I prepared key questions based on the text and I distributed them for above mentioned focus groups to be filled and returned back. These questions were focused on the theme, characters of the text, and repeated words which will be dealt in the exegesis. Secondly, I had discussions of each group based on the questions. This had given opportunity to the group, to grasp what the texts means and to relate it to how the text has been and is interpreted in their socio cultural context. Finally, the group inquired why the text is less practical with ethical aspects and suggested ‘what’ the congregations should do to make best use of talents.

¹² Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction of Interpreting Scripture 2nd Edition* (Nashville: Tennessee publishing group, 2002), 383.

¹³ Ibid... 380.

1.4.3 Method of how to Analyze the Exegetical Work and Empirical Findings

In addition to exegesis, my thesis undertakes the application of the text contextually. Hence, the method I considered as relevant for the analysis of exegesis with empirical work is narrative criticism. Thus, I preferred narrative criticism, because Socio-rhetorical method allows interdisciplinary approach in biblical hermeneutics. According to Tate, Clarence Walhout argues that, narrative criticism, seen as an analysis of the narrative content, with the content of relationships between Authors, texts and readers, is an appropriate method.¹⁴ Thus, Tate described five steps for applying how to make narrative hermeneutics, and I have selected three of these steps best matching to my thesis in order to analyze the text and empirical work.¹⁵ These steps are numbers 1, 3 and 5.

Firstly, I will analyze the social and historical setting of the text and the Author, and compare it with the contexts of the congregations to examine factors in use of talents. Secondly, I will analyze what the text means to the original audiences (purpose of writing), and how it is understood in the SWS congregations. Finally, I will address the question about what ethical concerns are reflected in both the text and in the congregation.

¹⁴ Tate, *A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide To Methods, Terms, and Concepts*, 278.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*...280-282.

Chapter 2: Exegesis of Matthew 25: 14-30

2.1 The Text

2.1.1 Textual Criticism

In the critical apparatus of Nestle-Aland 28th revised edition, there are variant readings indicated in verses 14-30. I will comment on one of the most important cases in this pericope. It is found in the transition from verse 15 to verse 16. The adverb εὐθέως- immediately- is the last term in verse 15, surrounded by the preceding verb ἀπεδήμησεν and the following verb πορευθείς; hence, the adverb can be either connected to the preceding or to the following verb. This implies either that the master left to his journey immediately after having given the talents to his servants, or that the first servant immediately took action with the talents given to him. Most witnesses insert the conjunction ‘δέ’ as follows: ‘εὐθέως πορευθείς δέ’ (κ2, A, C, D, K, L, W and Majority text), hence, implying that εὐθέως is linked to the preceding ἀπεδήμησεν. However, a few Greek witnesses, supported by the early versions it and as, position the conjunction before πορευθείς and this presupposes that the temporal adverb goes with the following text. The same understanding is the most likely for the witnesses without any inserted conjunction δέ ,(κ* B, further, supported by the Old Latin b and g1). Thus, with this reading by the prominent Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, there is strong evidence that Jesus is saying that the first servant immediately set to work.¹⁶ Hence, there is no point in the master’s departing immediately; there is much point in the servant’s setting to work.¹⁷ This usage of εὐθέως elsewhere in Matthew supports this view (Matthew 4:20, 22; 20:34). Therefore, the presentation in the Greek NT text is traditional division of verses and, it is Fathers association of ‘immediately’ with the master’s journey.¹⁸

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 628.

¹⁷ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (London: United Bible Society, 1971), 63.

¹⁸ W.D. Davies, F.B.A and Dale C. Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVII. Vol. III* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 406.

2.1.2 Translation of the Text

(14) For it is like a man leaving home on a journey, he called his own servants and delivered to them his possessions. (15) And he gave to the one five talents, to the one two, to the other one, each according to his own ability, and went away. (16) Immediately, having gone, the one who received five talents worked on them and gained other five. (17) Likewise, the one with two gained other two. (18) But the one having received one went away, dug a hole in the ground and buried the money of his master. (19) But after a long period of time the master of those servants comes and he settles the account with them. (20) And the one having received the five talents brought five more talents, coming forward, saying; Master, you have given me five talents. See, I have gained five more talents. (21) His master said to him, Well done, you good and faithful servant, you were faithful with small things; I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the happiness of your master. (22) Also the one having received two talents coming forward said, Master you have given me two talents. See, I have gained two more talents. (23) His master said to him, Well done, you good and faithful servant, you were faithful with small things; I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the happiness of your master. (24) But the one having received one talent coming forward, said; Master I knew that you are a hard person, harvesting where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter. (25) And being afraid, I went away and buried your talent in the ground. See, here you have yours. (26) But his master replied, said to him, You evil and lazy servant, you knew that I harvest where I haven not sown and gather where I have not scattered. (27) Therefore, you should have given my money to bankers and having returned, I would have received my own with interest. (28) Therefore, take from him the talent and give it to the one having ten talents. (29) For everyone who has, it will be given and it will be abundant, but from the one who does not have, it will be taken from him. (30) And throw the worthless servant into the darkness outmost. There will be bitter crying and grinding of the tooth.

2.2 Interpretation

2.2.1 Introduction

Here, my point of departure is to do exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30. In order to grasp the setting of my pericope in the literary context, I will examine the immediate and the broader contexts. Then, I will structure the text and deal with the form of the text to analyze the movement of the story as well as the function of the text. Likewise, I will try to investigate about the background texts and parallel texts which might contribute to understanding the parable. Under the historical context, I will try to present the historical context of the Gospel according to Matthew and try to present what social and cultural setting is reflected in the parable about the talents, and this might help to understand the parable contextually.

Finally, after presenting the over view of the text, I will try to do the detailed exegesis of the text. In doing the exegesis my main goal is to read the message out of the text. So, that I may correctly perceive, and analyze with the empirical finding as I will present in chapter three.

2.2.1.1 Contextual Delimitation

2.2.1.1.1 Immediate Context

Here, the point is to determine that the given text is self-contained or not, and to identify the limits of the textual unit. As to me, the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is self-contained. In verse 14, the pericope begins by introductory phrase Ὡσπερ γὰρ. Because the transitional conjunction γὰρ is one of the timid words, the translation in Greek brings it first of the sentence and hence the translation is ‘for it is like.’ This beginning corresponds to the opening phrase of the parable of wise and foolish virgins in 25:1. Similarly, the pericope makes a conclusion in verse 30 with the typical Matthean formula concerning “the outer darkness” or “the weeping and gnashing of teeth” (cf. 8:22; 22:13; 24:51).¹⁹

The parable relates to the preceding context (25:1-13), that the story starts rather abruptly with ‘for it is like’ without any explanation of it signifies. But since the story follows on a parable

¹⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13. Vol. 33A* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 733.

explicitly said to refer to the kingdom of heaven in 25:1,²⁰ and the new parable seamlessly joins the watch statement of v. 13 with ‘like’ (ὡσπερ).²¹ This theme of watchfulness is developed by the parables of the two servants (24:45-51), by the parable of wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13), and the talents (25:14-30). All the three contribute to the picture of what constitutes responsible behaviour in preparation for the coming of the Son of Man.²² This parable, however, unlike the last suggests what that readiness must be. It is not to be passive waiting but in getting on the job and making of the most of the opportunities entrusted to us.²³ Hence, this coheres with Matthew’s eschatological teaching which is not intended primarily to satisfy curiosity concerning the future, but rather to motivate the church to appropriate conduct.²⁴

Likewise, the succeeding context (25:31-46), relates to the parable about talents with its theme of reward and condemnation. As the two profitable servants rewarded and as the one who buried his talent punished in the parable (vv. 21,23, 28-30), the Lord rewards those who have good merits (vv. 31-40) and punishes those who had lived only for their own benefit (vv. 41-46). Thus, as Daniel J. Harrington S.J, says “this parable leads into the judgment scene in Matt 25:31-46 in which the Son of Man acts as a judge for “all the Gentiles.” Therefore, the Matthean parable of talents clearly concerns the coming of the Son of Man and how one should behave in anticipation of it.”²⁵

2.2.1.1.2 Broader Context

In determining the broader unit of Matthew, scholars are inconsistent. The reason was that “Matthew contains too large a variety of structural elements.”²⁶ However, regarding the broader context, scholars commonly base on geographical setting of Jesus’s Ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem and the five major teaching discourses marked by the statement “when Jesus had finished all these sayings” (11:1; 26:1). Donald A. Hagner follows the above mentioned pattern

²⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 626-627.

²¹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2005), 247.

²² Daniel J. Harrington, S.J, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series*. Vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 353.

²³ D. A. Carson, R. T. France J. A. Motyer and G.J. Wenham (ed.), *New Biblical Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1994), 937-938.

²⁴ T.D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (ed.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 267.

²⁵ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 354.

²⁶ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*. Vol. 33A, li.

and I found plausible of his broader outlining of Matthew as a whole and, I liked his classification of the unit in which my pericope resides. The book has divided into sixteen units and each unit has sub-topics. Here, I will present the main units of the structure, but I will present the sub- divisions in which Matthew 25:14-30 is found (numbering is my own).²⁷

- | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|
| I. | The Birth and Infancy Narratives | (1:1-2:23) |
| II. | The Preparation for the Ministry | (3:1-4:11) |
| III. | Galilean Ministry | (4:12-25) |
| IV. | The First Discourse :The Sermon on the Mount | (5:1-7:29) |
| V. | The Authoritative Deeds of the Messiah | (8:1-9:38) |
| VI. | The Second Discourse: The Missionary Discourse | (10:1-11:1) |
| VII. | The Negative Response to Jesus | (11:2-12:50) |
| VIII. | The Third Discourse: Teaching in Parables | (13:1-58) |
| IX. | Further Ministry and Confrontation with the Religious Authorities | (14:1-16:20) |
| X. | The Turning Point: The Announcement of the Cross | (16:21-17:27) |
| XI. | The Fourth Discourse: Life in the Community of the Kingdom | (18:1-35) |
| XII. | On the Way to Jerusalem: Increasing Confrontation | (19:1-20:34) |
| XIII. | The Last Days in Jerusalem | (21:1-22:46) |
| XIV. | Castigation of the Scribes and Pharisees | (23:1-39) |
| XV. | The Fifth Discourse: The Destruction of the Temple and the End of the World (24:1-25:46) | |
| | A. The Prophecy of the Destruction of the Temple and the Disciples Question’ (24:1-3) | |
| | B. The Beginning of Birth Pangs | (24:4-8) |
| | C. Persecution and Proclamation before the End | (24:9-14) |
| | D. Instructions to Flee from Jerusalem | (24:15-22) |
| | E. The Claims of Pseudo-Christ’s and False Prophets | (24:23-28) |
| | F. The Return of the Son of Man | (24:29-36) |
| | G. Time of the Return of the Son of Man | (24:37-44) |
| | H. The Faithful and Wicked Servants | (24:45-51) |
| | I. The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins | (25:1-13) |

²⁷ Ibid ... *Vii-Xii*.

- J. The Parable about Fulfilling Responsibility (25:14-30)
- K. The Last Judgment (25:31-46)
- XVI. The Story of Jesus' Death and Resurrection (26:1-28:20)

According to the above presentation, the parable about talents is part of the broader unit of the fifth discourse of Jesus which describes the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world (Matthew 24:1-25:46). It is the third successive parable in this unit following parables in 24:45-51; 25:1-13 and its function is as I have mentioned under immediate context, using one's talents responsibly and productively to be prepared for the Parousia.

2.2.1.2 Structure and Form

2.2.1.2.1 Structure

For this section, I have accepted the structure made by Davies and Allison having some adjustments of my own.²⁸

Scene I. The master entrusts property to servants (vv. 14-15)

1.1. The master calls and entrusts property (v.14)

1.2. The master entrusts the servants different amount of talents each according to their own ability (v. 15)

Scene II. The servants carry out their business (vv.16-18)

2.1. The making a trade and gaining a profit (vv. 16-17)

2.2. The burying of the talent (v. 18)

Scene III. The master settles the accounts (vv. 19-30)

²⁸ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 401.

3.1.The master rewards those who made a trade and gained profit (vv. 19-23)

3.2. Punishment for the one who buried his talent (vv. 24-30)

3.2.1. His explanation- his fear of master (vv. 24-25)²⁹

3.2.2. His condemnation by the master (vv.26-28)

3.2.3. The master's explanation of his action (vv.29-30)

3.2.3.1.Giving to those who have, removing from those who have not
(v.29)

3.2.3.2.The ultimate judgment of the evil and lazy slave (v.30)

2.2.1.2.2 Form

As part of the Gospel according to Matthew, my working pericope is a pure parable.³⁰ Some agree that, the parable about talents is an exhortation to Christians or disciples to work diligently in the present and to avoid laziness and fear in the face of the Son of man's coming.³¹ Supporting this view, Hagner argues that in relation to other parables (24:45-51; 25:1-13), this parable is not only directing the reader's attention to the surprise of sudden return of the master, but more directly it stresses to the servants conduct during the time the master has been away.³² As I indicated under immediate context (2.2.1.1.1), constant watchfulness is the theme of the three successive parables. But the parable about talents differs that its emphasis is about Christians that

²⁹ In my structuring of the pericope, from 3.2.1, I have followed the structuring of Grant R. Osborn. He presents sub sections for the punishment scene which might help me in doing the exegesis. Grant R. Osborn, *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament: Matthew* vol.1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 923.

³⁰ The pure parable is a story which has developed out of a simile or a figurative saying. Two things, events or situation (image and reality) which are similar, are compared, so that the known may elucidate the unknown. The image depicts a typical event or circumstance. It "is taken from the reality which is accessible to everyone, and points to things which happen every day, to situations..." Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 747.

³¹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol.1, 354.

³² Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28 volume 33B*, 733.

they have received gifts according to their ability (v.15), and that it is what they make of those gifts which counts at the last judgment, is something new.³³

Conversely, pointing to climax of the story that it ends up by the punishment of wicked and slothful servant (vv. 24-30), Davies and Allison argues that the parable is more warning than encouragement without eliminating the positive elements ('enter into the joy of your lord').³⁴ Since the verbs enter (εἰσελθεῖ) (Matt. 25:23) take away (ἄρατε) and give (δότε) (Matt. 25:28) are imperatives which dominate the parable, for me the parable discloses warning rather than exhortation.

In determining its form, the other aspect of this parable is its allegorical feature or symbolism. Accordingly, Davies and Allison presents the symbolism as follows:

The master is Jesus. His slaves represent the church, whose members have received various responsibilities. The master's departure is the departure of the earthly Jesus. The long time of the master's absence is the age of the church. His return is the *parousia* of the Son of man. The rewards given to the good slaves stand for heavenly rewards given to the faithful at the great assize, and their joy is that of the messianic banquet. The punishment of the evil slave represents those within the church who, through their sins omission, condemn themselves to the eschatological darkness.³⁵

Hence, the parable about talents communicates the church's responsibility in using God's gift here in this world and also discloses the consequence of productive and unproductive use of the responsibility in the Parousia. However, in the study of this parable, some argue that the moralizing approach ('use of talents to the best of your ability'), does not take into account the eschatological horizon (the return of the master and the accounting).³⁶

³³ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 402.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Volume 1, 355.

Conversely, the sensationalistic speculation about the end time paralyzes people with the fear of stereotyped picture of God and turns away from any kind of productive study of prophecy.³⁷ Therefore, in doing exegesis on this parable, my attempt is to address both aspects (use of the responsibility in the church as well as the eschatological reward or punishment).

2.2.1.3 Background and Parallel Texts

2.2.1.3.1 Back ground Texts

The parable about the talents has no direct quotation or allusion from the Old Testament. One of the striking similarities is described in 3 Baruch 12-16, where three groups of angels bring baskets of flower which represents the ‘merit of righteous’, whom the angels oversee. The first group has full basket. The second group has baskets half full. The third group has empty baskets. Both the first and the second groups of angels are given rewards for the righteous they represent. But the third group is instructed to punish those without merit.³⁸ However, as Davies argues it is difficult to conclude as background of the parable. Thus 3 Baruch depends upon our parable or perhaps the texts are variants of a common folk-motif.³⁹

2.2.1.3.2 Parallel Texts

The parable of minas in Luke 19:12-27 is parallel to this pericope. Even though, there are distinctive wordings of Luke (vv. 12, 14, 15a, 25, 27), and no verbatim agreement in some similar expressions, servants either in Matthew or in Luke have given money with the same basic theme of trading with their master’s money.⁴⁰

³⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 819.

³⁸ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 404.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid ... 403.

But, the source of both parables is most debatable. In terms of the source, both parables are not Q texts. Because in neither Matthew nor Luke does our parable appear in a context of Q material.⁴¹ Therefore, determining the source of these parables is subjected to speculations.

In this regard, Hagner argues that, unless Jesus spoke two similar parables, both passages go back originally to the same parable and differences happened early in the process of transmission.⁴² Contrarily, Luz argues that the parable in Matthew comes from special material and that of Luke is an independently transmitted variant. As to him, the similarities of both parables show that the wording of the story is already relatively stable in the oral tradition.⁴³ I support the prior position, because the similarity of the parables is much more convincing than differences, that they might have the same origin.

The dialogue scenes of Matthew 25:24-28 and Luke 19:20-26 are in agreement with wording, even there are within the agreements differences that can hardly be explained as redaction.⁴⁴ I found the direct parallelism in between Matthew 25:29 and Luke 19:26, which says “For the one having many will be given and will have abundance, but of him not have and one he has will be taken from him.”

In spite of some variations, there are analogues very significantly parallel in between Matthew and Luke. Hagner notes the similarities: the going of a man (but in Luke a “noble”) on journey (but in Luke “to acquire a kingdom”); the calling together of his servants (but in Luke “ten,” although only three report (Luke 19:11-21)).⁴⁵ Likewise, in Matthew the servants are entrusted with ‘talents’, which are large, amount of money whereas in Luke they are entrusted with minas (pound) quite small amount.⁴⁶ In Matthew, the amounts vary from servant to servant; in Luke they all received the same amount of money. Regarding the variation of the amount, Morris says that the story in Luke teaches that all the servants of God have one basic task, that of living out

⁴¹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 248 “Q is the symbol to denote a source containing the matter common to Matthew and Luke but not in Mark”.

⁴² Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 733.

⁴³ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 248.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 733.

⁴⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 626. 1 mina is equal to 100 denarii. Whereas, 1 talent is comparable to 6000 denarii (1 denarii was a day’s wage, cf. 20:2).

our faith; the parable in Matthew starts with fact of different gifts to be found in God's servants and brings out the way they use (or do not use) those gifts.⁴⁷

2.2.1.4 The Historical Context

2.2.1.4.1 The Historical Context of the New Testament Book to which the Text Belongs

Regarding the place of composition of the Gospel according to Matthew, there is no consensus among scholars. Palestine, perhaps Caesarea, and Alexandria are suggested, but most commentators agree that a place in Palestine (Syria) is likely.⁴⁸ The issue of recipients is not as such disputable as the content of the gospel clearly points the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as well as it presents Jewish thoughts. Raymond Brown argues that the gospel of Matthew is definitely written to Jewish, but also takes in Gentiles, saying "Matthew was addressed to a once strongly Jewish Christian church that had become increasingly Gentile in composition."⁴⁹

The authorship of Matthew is most debatable. The external testimonies stand a strong support in Matthew's authorship whereas it is not well proven internally, from the text itself.

Externally, from early in the second century the unanimous tradition of the church supports Matthew as author and it is evidenced in Papias.⁵⁰ Though, the title "according to Matthew" was a later attachment in the second century,⁵¹ and it was unanimously accepted over a large geographical region.⁵² According to Leon Morris, Gundry dates that the statements of Papias before A.D 110 and he understands to mean that "John the elder and apostle ascribes the first gospel to the Apostle Matthew."⁵³

The Gospel does not indicate Matthew as the author of the gospel, but his calling to be an apostle while he was tax collector (9:9; 10:3), his existence among the apostles during Jesus's ascension

⁴⁷ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 626.

⁴⁸ Ibid... 11-12.

⁴⁹ Raymond E. Brown. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 213.

⁵⁰ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13, volume 33A*, lxxvi.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Craig S. Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997), 31.

⁵³ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 13.

(Acts 1: 13) which implies his involvement in apostolic mission, and as Keener argues the gospel's presentation of dialogue with contemporary Jewish thought and skilled in traditional Jewish interpretations of OT,⁵⁴ indicate that Matthew as a Jew took part in the authorship.

Even though, the tradition of the church favors Matthean authorship, it is objected that the whole tradition derives from, and is thus dependent up on, the testimony of one man, Papias (as recorded in Eusebius).⁵⁵ Those who reject the authorship of Matthew argue that the name Matthew ascribed to the gospel because Matthew was prominent either among the twelve or in the early church.⁵⁶ Some have optimistic stand in Matthean authorship by pointing particular materials in the gospel (e.g., in the formula quotations or the material underlying the five discourses) as they are originated from Matthew (Matthew was a tax collector and therefore would necessarily have had literary skills. He would have known Greek.)⁵⁷ And then, a disciple of Matthew had translated and adapted these materials, and combined them with Markan and Q traditions.⁵⁸ The dependency of Matthew on the gospel of Mark as a source was opposed, since Mark was not in the apostolic band. However it is agreed that Peter was associated with Mark in the writing of his book.⁵⁹

According to Keener, the evangelical commentators like R.T. France, and D. A Carson, support the authorship of Mathew based on the influence of Matthew in the gospel.⁶⁰ But others, like Leon Morris, Donald A. Hagner, and John Nolland accept the unanimous witness of the church tradition in Matthew's authorship, but because of no proof in the text and the uncertainty of church tradition to some- how, they concluded that the authorship of Matthew is disputable.

In my opinion, the later position is preferable. I cannot reject the reality of Matthean influence in the text, if Matthew is recognized as an author, his use of OT and Jewish thought which is reflected in the text. The church tradition that of second century which stands in support of his

⁵⁴ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 32.

⁵⁵ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13 .vol. 33A*, lxvii.

⁵⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid ... 14. "The ancient traditions unanimously regard as Matthew written in Hebrew or Aramaic, however, the existence of the Gospel in good idiomatic Greek and having no indication that it was a translation of Semitic origin is point of debate." See Nolland Page 3.

⁵⁸ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13 .volume 33A* xxvi. "Q is the symbol to denote a source containing the matter common to Matthew and Luke but not in Mark" Morris, Page 13.

⁵⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 15.

⁶⁰ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 32.

authorship is not deniable as to me. However, since all the evidences are external and no witness of Matthew's authorship in the text, it is difficult to conclude as the gospel is written by Matthew. Thus, it seems correct to me to take the reality of dispute in the authorship of Matthew.

In determining the date in which Matthew was written, scholars mainly make two main benchmarks. The destruction Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the date of the Gospel of Mark was written.

The signals for destruction of Jerusalem are indicated in Matthew, especially Matthew 22:7 and 24:1-2. However, these texts are interpreted in two ways in determining the date. Some argue that "the texts wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, from which it has been concluded that he wrote after the city had been over thrown."⁶¹ Likewise, they assume as Mark was written after the fall of Jerusalem of which Matthew used as a source. Thus, they concluded as Matthew was written between 80s or 90s.⁶²

The above position was objected. Because the language in Matthew 24:15-22 is not of marking to record what happened, rather events on the text convey the future.⁶³ Mark would have been written around A.D.65, thus Matthew would be dated at the earliest in the 70s.⁶⁴

Determining the date is difficult. However, events on the indicated texts clearly anticipating what to come, not what happened. And the dependency of Matthew on the gospel of Mark as a source was mostly believed, thus I support the later position.

2.2.1.4.2 Historicity and Historical Context of the Textual Unit's Content

As it is mostly agreed, many aspects of the parable about the talents according to Matthew discloses the social setting of the first century. In the antiquity, the number of slaves a person owned was a sign of status, and wealthy homes would have dozens of slaves. Some slaves were highly educated and were doctors, teachers, accountants, and some others were workers for every

⁶¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 9.

⁶² John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publisher, 2005), 14.

⁶³ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 16.

⁶⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 8-9.

function in a home, even for folding napkin for dinner.⁶⁵ The wealthy landowners often entrusted their property and affairs to trustworthy servants.⁶⁶

The custom of entrusting possession to the servants was apparently familiar to the Jews including Matthean Christians (Matt. 21:33-41).⁶⁷ By that time, slaves in the Roman Empire could earn wages and bonuses and could acquire property; hence they would have more incentive to look out for the master's property than slaves in many cultures do.⁶⁸ However, the servants have a clear understanding that both the money and the profit earned belonged to their owner.⁶⁹ Hence, in this parable, the talent employed in Palestine (1 Macc. 11:28; Matt. 18:24) was the Attic talent, which Alexander had made the lawful standard throughout his empire and which afterward maintained its supremacy. It was not a coin, but money of account: was divided into minas (Luke 19:13-25).⁷⁰ And the motive of the master in entrusting his property to his servants is to determine who were capable of assuming even more responsibility.⁷¹

Thematically, both the parable of minas and the parable of talents cohere to each other. (See the discussion of the parallel texts in 2.2.1.3.2). However, the historical setting of the Lukan parable is different, because, the parable in Luke alludes to the story of the accession of Archelaus in 4 B.C. Upon the death of his father Herod the Great, Archelaus travelled to Rome to receive the kingdom (Luke 19:12), but the Jews sent an embassy after him to protest against his appointment (Luke 19:14), and when he returned to Judea he slaughtered many (Luke 19:27).⁷²

The best way to make money quickly in the antiquity was dealing in commodities or speculating in land. However, banking interest was also an alternative way to make money with the possibility of at least a modest profit (v.27).⁷³

Regarding burying of the talent or money, some say that it was reckoned good security against theft.⁷⁴ Others argue that in rabbinic sources burying money is explicitly praised as a safe way to

⁶⁵ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 909.

⁶⁶ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 806.

⁶⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 354.

⁶⁸ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 600.

⁶⁹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 251.

⁷⁰ John D. Davies (ed.), *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), 405.

⁷¹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 354.

⁷² Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 402.

⁷³ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

preserve things, in crass distinction from keeping money in a cloth.⁷⁵ However, the action of the third servant in this parable was not in line with the above mentioned reasons. It was neglecting to obey his master (v. 24). This might have happened because in those days in Palestine the rulers, the owners of the large estates, and the financially powerful often were Gentiles.⁷⁶

On the other hand, in the parable, based on the understanding and action of the third servant, some argue that in the Matthean setting, the parable about the talents contrasted the enterprising and successful Jewish-Christian missionaries (the first two servants) and the fearful and/or lazy Jewish movement that we call “formative Judaism” (the third servant).⁷⁷ Thus, the servant who buried his talent is symbolized with the movement in Judaism after A. D. 70 that sought to preserve the Jewish patrimony by building a “hedge” or “fence” around the Torah.⁷⁸ This approach to the parable sees it as part of Matthew’s attack on the Jewish opponents (Pharisees and Scribes) for their failure to preserve the proper apocalyptic spirit.⁷⁹ The word of God is entrusted to them, but like the third servant, they had frustrated the operation of the divine word by self-seeking and careless neglect of God’s gift.⁸⁰

As to me, the social reality of the first century in which the master entrusts the property to his slaves seems clear. However, the symbolism of the third servant with the failure of Judaism is uncertain. As Davies and Allison argues that, Jesus spoke the parable not to outsiders, but to insiders, to emphasize responsibility. His focus was the obligation incumbent up on those confronted by the presence of the kingdom in his ministry.⁸¹ Even though, the parable depicts the social reality of the first century, Jesus had addressed his disciples to fulfill their responsibilities while anticipating for his second coming.

⁷⁴ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 407.

⁷⁵ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

⁷⁶ Ibid ... page 253.

⁷⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 355.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “By that time Matthew and his Jewish readers found themselves in difficult position. Thus, they had to defend their faith by showing its continuity with the OT scripture, i.e. to affirm the old, while at the same time acknowledging the unprecedented character of what had now occurred in Christ- to affirm the new.” Alexander et. al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 262.

⁸⁰ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 403-404.

⁸¹ Ibid.

2.2.2 Exegesis

2.2.2.1 Overview

The theme of the pericope is motivating the church for the proper conduct (use of talents) in anticipating the Parousia. This theme is elaborated in three scenes. The first scene (vv. 14-15) characteristically presents the kingdom of heaven as the master who had entrusted his property to his servants. Away on a journey as a reference to Jesus's ascension the master summoned his servants and had given his property. The master's possession is specified as talents (money). However, the manner of entrusting the talents differs from servant to servant. The master recognizes the capacity of each servant, and he delivers each one based on his own ability.

In the second scene (vv. 16-18) the servants carry out their business. Since the servants had counted responsible for the work by their master, they need to do the business that they had been entrusted. Thus, this part of the pericope calculates the outcome of the three servants in carrying out their entrusted business in the absence of their master. Practically two of the servants operated their business and doubled the talents that had been delivered to them. On the contrary, the third servant neglected the responsibility and, he had kept his gift as it is by burying it in the earth and remains without any profit.

In the third scene (vv. 19-30) the master settles the accounts. This part of the pericope deals with the master's return after a long time (a reference to Jesus' delay of the Second Advent), and the master settles the account which he had entrusted to his servants. In the accounting, those who efficiently accomplished the given responsibility get the reward of entering into their master's happiness (a reference to the Messianic banquet) and will have entrusted more responsibility. On the contrary, the non-profitable and negligent servant who misunderstood his master, and his commission could be punished severely (the darkness outmost).

2.2.2.2 Detailed Exegesis

In this section, I will make the detailed exegesis following the structure I have made above. In the first scene (vv. 14-15), will focus on the masters entrusting property to servants based on their ability. Likewise, in the scene II (vv.16-18), I will try to do exegesis to disclose about the

servants business in the absence of the master. Hence, in the scene III (vv.19-30), the exegesis tries to verify how the master settled the accounts with servants and at the end I will try to summarize the exegesis.

Scene I. The master entrusts property to servants (vv.14-15)

1.1 The master calls and entrusts property (v.14)

For it is like a man leaving home on a journey, he called his own servants and delivered to them possession of him.

In verse 14, the implicit subject of the abbreviated introduction “for it is like” is the kingdom of heaven (cf. 25:1).⁸² Because in the phrase ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (the kingdom of heaven shall be like...) in 25:1, the verb ὁμοιωθήσεται is in indicative future passive, the coming of the eschatological reign of the kingdom of God is implied. As George Eldon Ladd says, the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” occurs only in Matthew, where it is used thirty-two times and it is a Semitic idiom, where heaven is a substitute for the divine name (Luke 15:18). In the rest of the New Testament, the phrase “the kingdom of God” is used.⁸³ In fact, the kingdom of heaven is realized by the presence of Jesus (Matt. 4:17). But the phrase “for it is like” in verse 14 indicates the final realization of the kingdom of God by Jesus’s second coming. This was part of Jesus’s answer for the question of his disciples regarding the destruction of the Temple and the end time: ‘Tell us when this will be, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?’ (Matt. 24:3b). (See the broader context in 2.2.1.1.2).

The kingdom, then, is likened to a man living home on a journey (ἄνθρωπος ἀποδημῶν).⁸⁴ According to Luke the kingdom is presented as a noble man who went into a far country...

⁸² Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 404. Some argue that Matthew used the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” because of the Jewish sensitivity to the use of the name “God”. Alexander et. al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 127.

⁸³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 61.

⁸⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 627.

(19:12). Moreover, the man was obviously a man of resources (ὑπάρχοντα) which shows the large amount of money (v. 15).⁸⁵

Thus, the man (ἄνθρωπος) in verse 14 is about the master (ὁ κύριος) who is mentioned ten times in this periscope. Κύριος, more often means Lord and, carries with it overtones of legality and acknowledged authority of lordship.⁸⁶ However, there is another word in Greek, δεσπότης, formed from *demos*, house and, *potis*, lord means the lord as owner and master in the sphere of family and public life, where lordship sometimes entails severity and implies the earthly lord as opposed to a slave (1Tim 6:1, Titus 2:9).⁸⁷ Similarly, the word οἰκοδεσπότης, is also literally master of the house, or householder (Matt. 24.43); figuratively, of God or Christ in NT figures and parables, as in charge of God's spiritual family (Matt. 10.25). And this word is frequently found in connection with ἄνθρωπος, man, (Matt.13:27; 20:1, 11; 21:33).⁸⁸ But, in this verse the master (ὁ κύριος) implies the legal and acknowledged lordship relationship with the servant, no hostility feeling (δεσπότης).

In the phrase he called his own servants (ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους), the servant/slave is; one of the key words which is found five times in this parable.⁸⁹ However, some argue that here the noun δούλος normally signifies “slave,” but that can scarcely be the meaning here, for these men were able to enter financial arrangements involving quite a large sums of money.⁹⁰ However, the slaves were not just house hold slaves or agricultural workers but highly skilled business experts.⁹¹ Contrarily, some put emphasis on the fact that they were his “own” servants (τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους); he did not choose some external financial house, but entrusted his money to those who were his own.⁹²

I support the later position, because as I discussed under Historicity and Historical context of the textual unit’s content (2.2.1.4.2), in the antiquity the servants in the household were included of

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 1975, 509.

⁸⁷ Ibid “δεσπότης, sometimes used to suggest the function of Jesus as the one who commands and exercises power and influence.”

⁸⁸ Ibid_510.

⁸⁹ “out of the 124 instances of doulos, 30 are in Paul, 30 are in Matthew and, the rest in the other NT books” Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 595.

⁹⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 627.

⁹¹ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 923.

⁹² Ibid.

highly educated and skilled servants, as well as uneducated or less skilled ones. Moreover, the phrase ...and delivered to them his possessions (καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ) confirms that they were servants in the household. As I already mentioned, in the antiquity there was custom of entrusting possessions to the servants.

Thus, some textual units in Matthew disclose the reality of entrusting possessions to servants. Principally, the parables of Jesus depict the attitude of the position of the slaves. Accordingly, slaves are put in position (Matt. 24:45), with exclusive owes and absolute obedience to their masters (Matt.8:9). No one can serve as a slave to two masters (Matt. 6:24). Likewise, the master could use his unlimited power over his slave- for good (Matt. 18:27; 25:21, 23) or unmerciful punishment up on who were guilty of some fault (Matt. 18:34; 25:30).⁹³ Therefore, in this verse, he delivered (παρέδωκεν) the verb occurs in indicative aorist 3rd person singular from (παραδίδομι), which means “to hand over” and implies the entrusting of the master to his servants to fill an enormous range of functions, including positions involving onerous duties, political influence, and relatively high social esteem.⁹⁴

Theologically, all interpreters relate the master to Christ, who in this periscope is denoted *kyrios*, which carries legality and acknowledged authority of lordship, rather than *despotes*, which expresses the arbitrariness where lordship entails harshness. Apparently, the servants also related to the church or the disciples “οἱ μαθηταί)” Matt. 24:3.

Therefore, the master refers to the one who with his ascension has left the church and will return at his Parousia only after a long time.⁹⁵ Consequently, the time of the church is on the period of absence between the advents of Christ, the responsibility every believer has to be at work and ready for the masters return, and the accountability they will have to him.⁹⁶ However, how can the church be a church in the absence of the Lord?

In this regard, interpreters argued that Christ is distant only according to his human nature (the doctrine of two natures), but he is “everywhere in accordance with the nature of divinity. Even

⁹³ Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 595.

⁹⁴ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 405.

⁹⁵ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 259.

⁹⁶ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 923.

when the Lord is absent, the church does not live in the darkness of God's absence."⁹⁷ I think, the promise of Jesus in his ascension which says "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of this age" expresses the divine presence of God among his church working by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:20b; Acts 1:8ff). In the next verse, I will deal with the servants (the church), who had received the master's possessions (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα), namely the talent and the manner of giving them to his servants.

1.2 The master entrusts the servants with different amount of talents (v. 15)

And he gave to one five talents, to another two, to another one, each according to his own ability, and he went away.

In verse 15, the master entrusted his servants with different amount of talents (five, two, and one), based on the ability of the servants. Then, the master departed. In dealing with this verse, my focus is to examine the meaning of the talent and to analyse its symbolical meaning, and to investigate the reason why the master gave the servants a different amount of talents.

"And he gave to one five talents, to another two, to another one". In this sentence, the term τάλαντον "talent" shows that the responsibility is expressed in terms of money.⁹⁸ To understand the value of talent by today is difficult. Because the "talent" was not a coin but a unit of monetary reckoning⁹⁹ it was the largest weight in normal use (see Matt. 18:24), and when used for money it might refer to either gold or silver or copper.¹⁰⁰ Thus, some estimate that "talents" (τάλαντα) was the amount of weight a soldier could carry on his back and referred to seventy-five to a hundred pounds of gold or silver (cf. Rev. 16:21).¹⁰¹ Often, it is valued that 1 talent is approximately 6,000 denarii and this was analogues to the modern "million".¹⁰² Osborne specifies that, by the calculation there, a talent is worth \$800,000 in today's money."¹⁰³ Hence, at

⁹⁷ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 259.

⁹⁸ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 734.

⁹⁹ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 627.

¹⁰¹ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew vol.1*, 923-924.

¹⁰² Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 734.

¹⁰³ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew vol.1*, 924.

any rate the point is not the precise amount but rather that it was a huge amount of money.¹⁰⁴ Based on this understanding, five talents represent a considerable sum of money, two was not a small amount, and one was a sum not to be disregarded.¹⁰⁵ In this regard Nolland argues that a series engagement in business would be possible with any of the three amounts.¹⁰⁶

Though; the talent literally demonstrates money, the issue really at stake is not money but the stewardship of what has been given to individual disciples.¹⁰⁷ However, the interpretation of the talent is subjected to different meanings.

Firstly, in common usage today “talent” often refers to the natural endowment of a person,¹⁰⁸ or it denotes “a natural ability to do something well.”¹⁰⁹ Broadly, talents are everything that a person is and has, since indeed there is nothing that a person has not received from God.¹¹⁰ In consensus with this view, the early church interpreted the five talents as the physical senses of a person, which led to the understanding of the talents as natural gift that a person possesses.¹¹¹ On its historical setting, the parable conveys the human natural skills as Davies and Allison says; slaves could fill an enormous range of functions, including positions involving onerous duties political influences, and relatively high social esteem.¹¹²

Secondly, the talents symbolize the giftedness that is bestowed on each person who is graced with the kingdom life and with how we use our gift in service of the kingdom (1 Cor. 12:7).¹¹³ Perhaps, this retells the filling of the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manners of workmanship in the OT (cf. Exod. 35: 30-35; Dan 1:17). As Luz argues, Origen symbolized the talent as the word of God, thus he related the five, the two, and the one talent to the varying levels of understanding the scripture.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 352.

¹⁰⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 627.

¹⁰⁶ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 1014.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkins *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 819.

¹⁰⁹ Oxford Advanced English Learner’s Dictionary, 6th edition, (England: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1222.

¹¹⁰ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 259.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 405.

¹¹³ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 819.

¹¹⁴ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 259.

I support both positions. Since the parable was told to the disciples, the talents symbolically points to the spiritual gifts. However, the mission of the church can embrace both the spiritual and physical needs of a person (see the introduction in chapter one). Furthermore, the judgement scene (25:31-46), clearly expresses the responsibility of the disciples (church) to deliver the physical needs of a person. Therefore, as Wilkins concludes “all that we are- whether naturally endowed or spirit bestowed- must be employed in service of the kingdom of God. ...all our service in the kingdom is inherently valuable, whether it is in sacred or secular realms, whether it receives greater or lesser return. Our responsibility is to plan for the long haul and use our giftedness to advance the kingdom of God.”¹¹⁵

The phrase “each according to his own ability” implies that the master knows the capability of each servant. In verse 14, the servants mentioned as they belong to the master (τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους), but here, the ability seems as it belongs to the servants (τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν). This expression makes a question; can a person generate his own ability?

Different opinions have been developed in interpreting this phrase. Papists recognized this phrase as “God’s gifts are conferred according to the measure of a man’s deserving”.¹¹⁶ Likewise, some thought it as if a man does what is in himself, God grants him grace based on the work he is able to do.¹¹⁷ The above interpretations are focus that the ability bases on the persons own effort. But Thomas Aquinas opposes the above interpretation saying, the gracious God requires nothing from us, but what he himself sown in us.¹¹⁸ Thus, “each according to his own ability” implies the ability what is appropriate to an individual naturally by God (cf. Luke 6:44).¹¹⁹

I support the later position, because God gives a talent to a person as the ability that the person endowed by nature.¹²⁰

Likewise, in terms of spiritual gifts the phrase “each according to his own ability” denotes the measure of faith and grace which God had assigned of a person (Rom. 12:3, 6; Ephesian 4:7-

¹¹⁵ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 819.

¹¹⁶ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 260.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Volume 1, 353.

¹²⁰ “In my understanding, if there are two preachers or musicians, both do the same thing (the same talent) but the one preacher/singer cleverer than the other. This shows that they have different abilities.

8).¹²¹ A person who has commissioned for the work of God's kingdom has to work as faith or grace he/she received from the Lord (Rom 12: 6-8). Luz sees this as a reference to the mercy of their master. He sends them on the far journey of righteousness, but he will overburden no one, for his "burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).¹²² Finally, the master went away, (καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν), which stands for post-ester period: the Lord is gone but will come again (Matt. 21:33). The next section will deal with what the servants did after the departure of the master.

Scene II. The servants carry out their business (vv.16-18)

As I tried to show in the exegesis above, the first scene expresses that the master entrusted his possessions based on the ability of the servants while departing. In this second scene, I will make an exegesis concerning the work of all the three servants in the absence of their master.

2.1 Making a trade and gaining a profit (vv. 16-17)

Having gone immediately, the one who received five talents worked on them and gained another five. Likewise, the one with two gained another two.

Verses 16 and 17; disclose the business carried out by the first two servants. My point of departure here is to examine what is the work done and to investigate what gaining signifies.

As I argued in the textual criticism, the adverb "immediately" (εὐθέως) comes in the beginning of verse 16 according to the witnesses. Consequently, it indicates the proper urgency with which the first disciple goes about his business.¹²³ As Luz suggests, it is an indication of obedience: always, from the very beginning, it is important to be ready for the master.¹²⁴ The conjunction "likewise" (ὡσαύτως) in the beginning of verse 17 elucidates that the second servant acted immediately to do his business as the first servant did. Therefore, both the two servants began their business as soon as the master entrusted the talents to them.

¹²¹ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 406.

¹²² Luz, *Mathew 21-28*, 256.

¹²³ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 734.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

As to me, getting immediately in to the work (urgency) is one of the important characters of obedient servants in anticipating the Parousia. The reason is that nobody knows the day or the time in which the Lord comes (Matt.24:42-44). Whereas, delay (cf. χρονίζω), taking a long time to do something is the personality of an evil servant (Matt. 24:48). Hence, watchfulness to do the business in time is the theme of the eschatological narratives (Mark 13:3-37; Matt. 25:13).

The phrase, “he worked on them” (ἠργάσατο ἐν αὐτοῖς), implies that it is the slaves and not the talents who do the “work” by contrast, in Luke 19:16, 18 it is the minas.¹²⁵ This means, that the slaves, not just the money, are on job. In this way Matthew marks the personal investment of effort involved in the effective use of the money.¹²⁶ Here, the subject for the work is the servant, but what does the work done by the servant contribute for the increase of the talent?

In verse 16, the verb ἠργάσατο is in indicative aorist middle 3rd person singular from ἐργάζομαι. Hence, ἐργάζομαι intransitively does mean work, be active, or of business practice trade (Matt. 21:28).¹²⁷ As I already noted under historical context (2.2.1.4.2), the business carried out here might refer to the making of money by speculating in land.¹²⁸ Integrating this view, Luz argues that in Greek ἐργάζομαι (to work, be active) can have the nuance “to earn money.”¹²⁹ Though, it is difficult to be sure what the servants did for the increment of the talents, as Morris argues, what matters is that they worked and this signifies that they put the talents to good use in some way.¹³⁰ Some regarded the trade as the work for Christ (cf. 9:37-38; 10:10), and of the “good works” (5:16) that the Christians are to do.¹³¹ In the history of interpretation it designated as deepened understanding of scriptures, asceticism, the practice of the word, good works, or, frequently love.¹³²

Likewise, in the NT, this verb denotes activities in a quite general sense (cf. Luke. 13:14; Matt. 21:28). But, in John’s Gospel the word group is especially used to illustrate the unique activity of

¹²⁵ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 256.

¹²⁶ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 1015.

¹²⁷ Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978, 1147.

¹²⁸ Speculating is to invest money in ways that could produce a large profit but that also involved a lot of risk.

¹²⁹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 256.

¹³⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 628.

¹³¹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 256.

¹³² *Ibid* ... 260.

Jesus, which is inextricably bound up with the working of God, the Father (John 5:17). Jesus understands his working as the fulfillment of his divinely appointed mission (cf. John 9:4).¹³³

In fact, in its theological usage, the deal in this word is intensive, Paul condemns the work as a way of salvation (Rom. 3:20) to fight against the Judaic misunderstanding of human works as a way of righteousness. But in terms of faith in action, he also recognized that in the day of judgment, God will “render to every man according to his works” (Rom.2:5f) without any regard of a person; and not only will the works of the heathen be judged, those of Christians too (1 Cor. 3:11f.; cf. Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23).¹³⁴ I think, contextually, the judgment based on the ethical dimension in the eschatology (25:31-46), reveals the reward of those Christians who practiced faith in action and, as Hahn argues, it expresses the punishment of “the practical aberration of a dead orthodoxy which rests on mere confession” (Jas. 2:22, 24).¹³⁵

In doing the business, both servants gained (ἐκέρδησεν). Here, ἐκέρδησεν is a verb indicative aorist active 3rd person singular from κερδαίνω which means to gain, derive profit or advantage.

Accordingly, the servants gained (ἐκέρδησεν) 100% profit of their original capital. Just as the first servant turns five into ten, so the second turns two into four.¹³⁶ Both had done well; both had doubled the amount entrusted to them.¹³⁷

However, the NT is critically opposed to normal economic orientation of profit in so far as profit is looked for out of selfish motives. Anyone who is out for gain and whose view of life is dominated by the profit-motive falls into an arrogant self-centeredness, thus into sin (cf. Matt. 16:26; Jas. 4: 13).¹³⁸ But theologically, gaining signified as losing one’s privilege for the sake of others wellbeing (Phil. 2:5ff; 3:8). Paul conceives of his missionary commission as a ‘gaining’ (1Cor 9:19, 22). Matthew 18:15 exhorts people to encourage, and so “gain”, the brother who has

¹³³ Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, 1152.

¹³⁴ Ibid 1151.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 406.

¹³⁷ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 628.

¹³⁸ Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, 137.

fallen into sin.¹³⁹ Therefore, whatever the profit one has might be, it “gains” when it brings a contribution for the kingdom of God.

In terms of eschatological message, Jesus expects his disciples to spend the same effort in working for the kingdom.¹⁴⁰ Even those who have lesser abilities in the church are still expected to use their talents for the glory of God and to expand the kingdom.¹⁴¹

2.2 The burying of the talent (v. 18)

But the one having received one went away, dug a hole in the ground and buried the money of his master.

The first two servants invested in their talents (vv. 16, 17). But verse 18 expresses that, the third servant with one talent, dug a hole in the ground earth and buried his talent.

I have mentioned that in the antiquity burying of money happened as for the security reasons (see the historical context of textual unit 2.2.1.4.2). However, none of the reasons in the ancient world could fit to the action of the third servant in this parable. What makes it difficult to find the cause behind the act of this servant is that Jesus says nothing about his reasoning at this point, but simply that he hid the money (ἐκρύψεν τὸ ἀργύριον). Anyway, he refrained from the labor of buying and selling, working and making profit.¹⁴² Hence, it is important to note at this point the absence in v. 18 of ἐκέρδησεν, “gained,” in contrast to vv. 16, 17.¹⁴³ So, keeping the money in this way meant that there was no possibility of loss, but it also meant there was no possibility of gain.¹⁴⁴ However, what is the motive of this servant in burying the talent entrusted to him, and why is his action reckoned as negative?

The ancient law viewed merely wrapping money in a napkin, however, as disrespecting its safety altogether (Luke 19:20).¹⁴⁵ Therefore, some argue that Matthew in contrast to the Lukan parable, may have introduced burial in the ground because a napkin would be no hiding place for a talent,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 924.

¹⁴¹ Ibid “The expansion of the kingdom here denotes the already realized, not the coming.”

¹⁴² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 628.

¹⁴³ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 735.

¹⁴⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 628.

¹⁴⁵ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 601.

which weighed so much. So then, the action of the third servant was neglecting responsibility.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, Luz says that the readers already know from Jesus' earlier instructions that in living with him it is important to bear fruits (7:15-20; 13:18-23). Hence, readers sense that the third servant in this story is going to play the negative role.¹⁴⁷ Differently, it also assumed as a reason why this servant buried his talent that it was the smallest amount compared with others.¹⁴⁸

Of course, it is hard to find a real reason of burying. But, I support the first and the second positions that this servant is not willing to take responsibility and that he knew the master demanded fruit from him. However, the burial because of the size of the talent is not certain, and as I already noted in the exegesis of verse 15, one talent is substantial. Moreover, verse 24 implies that this servant has negative knowledge about his master which might led him to bury his talent.

Spiritually, as Morris says, this servant was like one who had no gift at all, but it was he himself who made thus. In this he is a picture of all those in the church who for any reason refuse to use the gifts of Christ in his service.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, burying talent can mean that although one does not sin one also does not produce any righteousness deeds and that one thinks only about one's self and not about others.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps, in this way the unproductive servant look like the selfish ones as described from vv. 41-45. So, as the third scene makes clear (vv. 19-30), those productive servants will get reward (vv. 19-23), but the one who buried his talent will be punished severely (vv. 24-30).

Scene III. The master settles the accounts (vv. 19-30)

In the first scene (vv. 14-15) the master had entrusted the talents and gone away. The second scene (vv. 16-18) exhibits what the servants had done with the talents that they had received in the absence of their master. The third and the final scene (vv. 19-30), portrays the return of the master and the settling of the account. Accordingly, the master rewards those productive servants (vv. 19-23), and punishes the servant who had buried his talent (vv. 24-30).

¹⁴⁶ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 407.

¹⁴⁷ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 256.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 628.

¹⁵⁰ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 260.

3.1 The master rewards those who made a trade and gained profit (vv. 19-23)

19. But after a long period of time the master of those servants comes and he settles the account with them. 20. And the one having received the five talents, brought five more talents, coming forward, saying; Master, you have given me five talents. See, I have gained five more talents. 21. His master said to him, Well done, you good and faithful servant, you were faithful with small things; I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the happiness of your master. 22. Also the one having received two talents coming forward said, Master you have given me two talents. See, I have gained two more talents. 23. His master said to him, Well done, you good and faithful servant, you were faithful with small things; I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the happiness of your master.

In this third scene, the master returns ‘after a long period of time’ (μετὰ δὲ πολὺν χρόνον), an “allegorical addition of Matthew” which clearly implies the delay of the Parousia, which was also the topic of Matt. 24:48; 25:5.¹⁵¹ If Matthew’s readers received the Gospel at the earliest in the late sixties, the phrase ‘after a long time’ could only have taken comfort from the acknowledgement of the length of time.¹⁵² This could fit my position, as Matthew would be dated at the earliest in the 70s (see, The historical context of the New Testament book to which the text belongs in 2.2.1.4.1).

However, contextually ‘after a long time’ signifies that the servants had had sufficient time to work with the money.¹⁵³ This implies that there is no reason to accuse the master for the time constraint. Hence, after giving adequate time for the work, the master comes and settles the account with them (cf. 18:23). Luke briefly explains the settling of the account saying, “when he returned, having received the kingdom, he commanded these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading” (Luke 19:15). So, “settling account” is a commercial phrase for settling the books, both in terms of the extent to

¹⁵¹ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 407.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 735.

which each one has fulfilled his duty and the remuneration due each one.¹⁵⁴ Hence, this is obviously a figure for the eschatological judgment.¹⁵⁵

Beginning in v. 20, one by one the servants ‘come before’ (προσελθῶν) the master (cf. vv. 20, 22, 24). The words spoken by the first two agree verbatim (vv. 20b, 22b) except for the number of talents gained. There is a report of the amount ‘entrusted’ (παρέδωκας) and then the amount ‘gained’ (ἐκέρδησα).¹⁵⁶

The entire response of the master (v. 21) is repeated verbatim to the second servant (v. 23).¹⁵⁷ The master starts his response by the phrase ‘well done’ as a mark of approval. This is something the master understands and approves.¹⁵⁸ Then, he salutes the servants, ‘good and faithful’ which is an expression that approves both the character and diligence of the servants, they had accomplished everything that the master expected (excellent and trustworthy servants).¹⁵⁹ Matthew refers to a faithful (πιστέ) servant who is also “wise” in Matt. 24:45; good (ἀγαθῆ) modifies the servant only here in Matthew (cf. “good man” in 12:35).¹⁶⁰

Moreover, the master appreciates the servants because they were faithful with small things (ἐπὶ ὀλίγα, vv. 21, 23). According to Morris, this phrase connotes that the master was a very rich man. Even though, the five talents are a considerable sum, the master can speak of it as no more than a few things.¹⁶¹ But for Hagner, ὀλίγα ‘little’ here is ironic, given the large sums of money in question, but it also emphasizes the contrasting greatness of the divine generosity in eschatological blessing.¹⁶²

As to me, both interpretations are possible views. Indeed, whatever the servant has is small as compared to the master’s richness and also, the eschatological blessing is incomparable with the success here. But, contextually, faithful with small things can be compared with the promise; “I will put you in charge of many” which refers to having an opportunity to owe ten (eleven) or four talents v.28, or according to Luke, having an authority over ten cities or five cities (Luke

¹⁵⁴ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 925.

¹⁵⁵ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 735.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 629.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 735.

¹⁶¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 629.

¹⁶² Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 735.

19:17, 19). Therefore, Jesus' saying, "you were faithful with small things; I will put you in charge of many" encounters the principle that only those proved in small leadership positions would be prepared for bigger ones (Luke 16:10).¹⁶³ In other words, the faithful servant will be rewarded with a position that will give him more scope for the use of abilities that he has shown he possesses. Once again Jesus is teaching that the reward for good work is the opportunity of doing further work.¹⁶⁴

In addition to having bigger work opportunity, the faithful servants are also invited to "enter into the happiness of their master" (vv. 21b, 23b). As Keener argues that, the Aramaic word translated into Greek as "joy" can also mean "feast" or "wedding feast", purely Greek-speaking readers would lose very little; the term 'joy' can connote a banqueting with master (cf. Matt. 25:10), and the context of the preceding parable supports this interpretation.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps, this saying refers to the happiness of prosperous life. But for Christian readers (both in the first century and in the present), however, the language cannot fail to connote the joy of eschatological blessing (cf. Heb. 12:2), just as the judgment of the wicked servant (v. 30) points to eschatological judgment.¹⁶⁶

In verses 20-23, both servants reported their achievement with different quantity, whereas the master responded with identical reward. Perhaps, someone can ask, why is the same reward for different accomplishment?

The master's similar reward implies that God rewards not the size of the achievement but the good intention.¹⁶⁷ Based on this thought, what is valued is not one's accomplishment in a quantitative sense but the fidelity of one's commitment, as mirrored in one's whole-hearted activity. And this recalls the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16).¹⁶⁸ Perhaps, the one with lesser talent might be rewarded greater as Jesus admired the poor widow who gave very small coins compared with others (Mark 12:42-44). Therefore, disciples might be rewarded in the eschaton, not based on the number of works that they have performed. Rather, the Lord will reward each

¹⁶³ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 600.

¹⁶⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 629.

¹⁶⁵ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 600.

¹⁶⁶ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 735.

¹⁶⁷ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 260.

¹⁶⁸ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 408.

according to his commitment to work with his talent, irrespective of whether it is bigger or lesser.

3.2 Punishment for the one who buried his talent (vv. 24-30)

As part of settling of the account, in verses 19-23, I have presented the exegesis of the reward of industrious servants. In this section (vv. 24- 30), I will try to do an exegesis as the master settles the account with the third servant who buried his one talent. The points here to be discussed are the misunderstanding of the third servant which might lead him to bury his talent (vv. 24-25), his condemnation by the master (vv. 26-28), and the master's action (vv. 29-30).

3.2.1 The misperception of the servant about the master (vv. 24-25)

24 But the one having received one talent coming forward, said; Master I knew that you are a hard person, harvesting where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter.

25 And being afraid, I went away and buried your talent in the ground. See, here you have yours.

I have noted in my exegesis of verse 18 that the third servant buried his talent because of the negative knowledge about his master. Likewise, Wilkins argues that the wickedness of this servant primarily stems from his attitude to his master, which in turn has led him to laziness and bad stewardship.¹⁶⁹ His attitude is reflected as he knows that the master is a hard man, who harvest where he has not sown and gather where he has not scattered seed (v. 24), and as a result he was afraid to do business and buried his talent (v. 25).

In verse 24, this servant starts his report by addressing the master as κύριε, as the two productive servants did (vv. 20, 22). It seems that he acknowledged the legal authority of the master as I discussed the exegesis of verse 14. But his explanation that the master is a hard man implicitly indicates the master as δεσπότης, meaning that the lord as the master is cruel and it implies an earthly lord who is severe to a slave. Perhaps someone ask why this servant did like this.

¹⁶⁹ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 807.

In this case, Davies and Allison argues that the fact that slave calls the master ‘Lord’ is perhaps an indication that the servant belong to the church, a fact in any case clear from the broader context. We have here the same situation as in Matt. 7:21-23: the tongue says ‘Lord’ but the deeds do not.¹⁷⁰ Since, this parable was addressed to the disciples, the third servant might represents the disciple who seems to worship the Lord, but is unpractical in his deeds (cf. Jas 1:26-27).

This servant reflected his attitude about the master saying “I knew that you are a hard person” meaning strict, harsh, cruel, and merciless.¹⁷¹ Why does he conceive the master as a hard man? For Morris, it is defensive to forward his excuse that he failed to do anything with his talent. Thus, Morris argues that if this servant knew that his master was a hard man, he knew also that he had been expected to something profitable with the money entrusted to him.¹⁷² Likewise, Luz defends that what the third servant says to the master sounds unfair. Because the Matthean churches know from their own faith experience that the master is not a “strict Lord” who is badly concerned for the interest he will earn; he is “kind,” his “yoke is gentle” (11:28-30).¹⁷³ Hence, I think the saying ‘hard man’ is simply what this servant fabricated about the master to defend not to be accountable for his laziness.

Continuing his defense, the third servant explains what hardness means “You harvest where you have not sown and gather where you did not scatter”. This phrase connotes that the master had the habit of enjoying a crop on which he had expended no labor or he had not gone through the hard work of using the plough and plying, but profited from it.¹⁷⁴ This is just by failing the master’s trust, he insults the master.¹⁷⁵

Often, misunderstanding of God leads to disobedience and disobedience results with fear in one’s life (Gen 3:1-10), as to me, this is echoed in this servant, when he says: “And being afraid, I went away and buried your talent in to the ground (v. 25). Here, this servant was afraid to take a chance on losing the money and so hid it. If he had put the money on the market and lost it, he

¹⁷⁰ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 409.

¹⁷¹ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 926.

¹⁷² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 630.

¹⁷³ Luz, *Mathew 21-28*, 257.

¹⁷⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 630.

¹⁷⁵ Keener, *Matthew: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 601.

would expect severe punishment and perhaps be sold anew into slavery.¹⁷⁶ Finally, he returned back his one talent to his master. This implies that fear does not free a person for forward-looking behavior; it leads instead to a defensive attitude that bears no fruit.¹⁷⁷

The explicit problem with the wicked servant is his attitude about his master. This is the way many people deal with God. Their wrong attitude about God (God is unconcerned with our fate, etc.) results in disobedience to his calling.¹⁷⁸ Thus, our perception of God is so important in determining our action.

3.2.2 The condemnation of the servant by the master (vv.26-28)

26 But his master replied, said to him, You evil and lazy servant, you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered. 27 Therefore, you should have given my money to bankers and having returned, I would have received my own with interest. 28 Therefore, take from him the talent and give it to the one having ten talents.

Verses 24-25 disclose the wrong attitude of the third servant towards his master which might lead him to unproductiveness. Next, in verses 26-28, the master replies to his wrong attitude and condemns his unfruitfulness.

In verse 26, the master calls the third servant “an evil and lazy servant” (πονηρὲ δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὲ). As the master appreciated the industrious servants saying, “good and faithful” (vv. 21, 23), in contrast, here he calls the third servant “evil and lazy”.¹⁷⁹ It was an evil thing to receive money from his master and fail to use it,¹⁸⁰ and the servant was evil because of his bad stewardship, which the second adjective ὀκνηρὲ, “lazy”, makes plain (cf. ἀχρεῖον “useless” in v.30).¹⁸¹ Moreover, he deliberately misrepresented both his master and himself. He falsely accused his master of being cruel. Instead of admitting his guilt, he acts as if the master should

¹⁷⁶ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 926.

¹⁷⁷ Luz, *Mathew 21-28*, 257.

¹⁷⁸ Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 820.

¹⁷⁹ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 409.

¹⁸⁰ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 736.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

have given him credit for having been so cautious and for having returned the entire talent intact.¹⁸²

After declaring the servant's wickedness, the master confronts the attitude of the evil servant, "You knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered." By saying so, the master is not saying that he really is the kind of man he has been said to be, but saying that if the third servant really thought that he was like that, he would have acted in a different manner.¹⁸³ Perhaps this different manner could be giving the money to bankers in order to get interest (τόκῳ, in v. 27). According to Osborne, "banker" here most likely refers to the money changers, who charged a fee for their services.¹⁸⁴ Of course, it is prohibited to charge interest from Jews, but allowed from Gentiles (Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20). In this verse, Jesus is not violating the OT law, perhaps he is pointing to make a valuable service of exchanging a variety of forms of currency for those in Palestine coming from the Diaspora.¹⁸⁵ Hence, the blame in this servant was that he was not effective to get an interest with his talent using the possible opportunity.

Finally, the master condemns this servant ordering to take from him the talent and to give it to the one who has ten talents (v.28). In this verse, the conjunction "therefore" (οὖν) shows that the master is not acting in arbitrary fashion. But he is reasonable to take his talent, because the man has had the money for a long time (v.19) and has shown that he has no intension of making any use of it.¹⁸⁶ However, practically the removal of the talent from the third servant implies a denial of any second chance.¹⁸⁷ I think, losing the talent happen, when the wicked servant is not wanted by the church because of his failure (cf. Matt. 18:15).

Likewise, giving to the one who has ten talents implies that he knows how to use the talent profitably, thus it should be given to him.¹⁸⁸ In this case, Osborne argues that, it is the demonstration of the bountiful grace of God in rewarding the faithful slave and that this would never have happened in this world and relates entirely to the incredible grace of God, who

¹⁸² William, Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), 882.

¹⁸³ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 631.

¹⁸⁴ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew vol.1*, 926.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 633.

¹⁸⁷ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 1019.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

rewards us far beyond all human reason.¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Nolland says that, the giving to the one who already has ten talents and has been promised control of an immensely greater fortune is only symbolic.¹⁹⁰

But I suspect to accept both positions, as I did an exegesis of the phrase “I will put you in charge of many” in vv. 21, 23, the increasing of the talents implies the opportunity of the faithful servant for better use of his talents in this world or in the church. As I noted earlier, the incredible blessing in the eschaton is indicated by the phrase “Enter into the happiness of your master” in verses 21, 23. Thus, receiving an additional talent in this verse is not symbolic or an indication of the blessing in the coming world.

In addition, in verse 28 there is a subject to whom the command is given to take the talent from the wicked servant and to give it to the one who has ten. Davies and Allison argue that this implicit subject is an angel.¹⁹¹ Conversely, Hendriksen argues that it refers to the other servants present at the scene, as in Luke 19:24.¹⁹²

I support the latter interpretation, because this verse describes losing, and gaining talents which takes place in this world. Thus, I do not think there could be the deal of talents in the coming world in which angels operate. Perhaps it refers to the church’s authority here in this world (cf. Matt. 16: 18-19).

3.2.3 The master’s explanation of his action (vv.29-30)

3.2.3.1. Giving to those who have, removing from those who have not (v. 29)

For every one who has, it will be given and it will be abundant, but from the one who does not have, it will be taken from him.

¹⁸⁹ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 928.

¹⁹⁰ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 1019.

¹⁹¹ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 410.

¹⁹² Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 883.

Scholars mainly agree that verse 29 is not part of the parable. It is a pre-Matthean tradition, which deals with human deeds that will be rewarded in the judgment.¹⁹³ Here, probably is Jesus' parenthetical explanation of v. 28. It is a logion repeatedly mentioned in the other texts (cf. Matt. 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luke 19: 26; Gospel of Thom. 41).¹⁹⁴ As I discussed under parallel texts, v. 29 is a verbatim correspondence with the Luke 19:26 (see, parallel texts in 2.2.1.2). Hence, this verse works as an explanatory sentence or a concluding comment by Jesus rather than as part of the parable proper.¹⁹⁵

But if this verse should not be considered contextually, this saying carries an inconsistent message to the parable. Accordingly, it does not perfectly fit the parable, because the wicked slave is deprived not because he had little but because he did not multiply what he had.¹⁹⁶ Likewise, it communicates that the rich gets richer, and the poor gets poorer while loosely connected to the parable.¹⁹⁷ Here, one might ask, what does Jesus here actually justify taking from the deprived in order to give it to the abundant?

Morris argues that in this verse Jesus is laying down a principle of spiritual life. Anyone who has a talent of any kind and fails to use it, by that very fact forfeits it. By contrast, anyone who has a talent and uses it to the full finds that the talent develops and grows.¹⁹⁸ In other words, faithfulness provides more blessing; unfaithfulness results in loss even of one's initial blessings.¹⁹⁹ Hendriksen elaborates this point more compressively as follows:

In the light of the entire context and of other passages- such as 10:39, 16:26; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9: 23-24, and John 12:25-26- one soon discovers the true meaning. It is this: the man who through diligent use of the opportunities for service given to him by God has by divine grace surrendered himself to the Lord, to love and to help others (Luke 10:29-37; Gal. 6:10; 1Thess. 5:15), and who in so doing has enriched himself, shall by continuing in this course become more and more

¹⁹³ Luz, *Mathew 21-28*, 257.

¹⁹⁴ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 928.

¹⁹⁵ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 1019.

¹⁹⁶ Davies and Allison, *A critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, vol. III, 410.

¹⁹⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Volume 1, 353.

¹⁹⁸ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 633.

¹⁹⁹ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol. 33B*, 736.

abundantly rich. On the other hand, from the person who has become poor, because he has never given himself, even whatever little he once had shall be taken away.²⁰⁰

In this verse, “For to everyone who has, it will be abundant, but from the one who does not have, it will be taken from him,” the future passive verbs, will be give (δοθήσεται), will be abundant (περισσευθήσεται), and will be taken away (ἀρθήσεται), imply God as the acting subject.²⁰¹ And the phrase “it will be abundant” indicates that the reward in the final judgment is a gift that far exceeds what the people earn with their deeds.²⁰² In contrary, the phrase “but from the one who does not have, it will be taken from him”, refers to the loss of the wicked servant of what he has. Hence, the punishment of the unproductive servant does not end up by taking off his initial gift, but there will be final and everlasting punishment, as it is described in the next verse (v. 30).

3.2.3.2 The ultimate judgment of the evil and lazy slave (v.30)

And throw the worthless servant into the outmost darkness. There will be bitter crying and grinding of the tooth.

Verse 29 makes clear the spiritual principle which is based on a long stand logion. It makes clear that the fruitful servants get abundant blessing which refers to everlasting life, whereas the unfaithful servant loses his original talent. Not only that, in verse 30 the punishment is extended up on the unfaithful servant. As I noted in verse 29, here also the master by implication Jesus continues commanding to take action upon the wicked servant. But the subjects to whom Jesus is commanding to “throw” ἐκβάλετε- verb imperative aorist active second person plural- indicates implicit persons. Since this punishment takes place in the end time, there will be no human participation (church) in implementing the punishment. But Matthew clearly states that angels take part in gathering the faithful to the eschatological blessing, as well as throwing the sinners into everlasting punishment (13:49; 24:31; 26:53).

²⁰⁰ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 883.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Luz, *Mathew 21-28*, 257.

God punishes the third servant because he is worthless (τὸν ἀχρεῖον). By his deed, this evil and lazy servant has proven himself to be ἀχρεῖος, (useless, worthless, of no value). He has shown himself to be devoid of any redeeming value for the master and so is not just fired but totally condemned.²⁰³ Shortly, this servant became the one who did not acquire any interests for the master (cf. v. 27).²⁰⁴ He is like salt which has lost its savour and, as a result, is thrown out (Matt. 5:13).

Then, the wicked servant is ordered to be thrown into “*the outmost darkness*” and there will be “*bitter crying and grinding of the tooth.*” These are the words already familiar from 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13 of the darkness and the horrible pain of hell. Once again it is clear that Matthew, who only intimates in figurative language the joy of heaven, uses quite drastic language in his much more elaborate reference to hell.²⁰⁵ According to Harrington, the outmost darkness is the expression alludes to condemnation at the last judgment, so is the opposite of “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21, 23), and “bitter crying and grinding of tooth” implies the frustration of those excluded from the master’s joy.²⁰⁶ Grinding of the teeth was also the destiny of the wicked servant in 24:51. Therefore, as Hendriksen summarizes in this point, everything should be done with a view to the day of reckoning that is coming. “How this wish, thought, word, or deed, will look on the day of the final judgment?” is the question that should constantly be asked (see Matt. 25:19; cf. also Matt. 25:41-45; Eccles. 12:14; Luke 12:47, 48; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor.5:10; Rev. 20:13).²⁰⁷ This eternal damnation in terms of not using one’s talent teaches us, not only committing murder, adultery, theft, etc. is wrong, but so is also omitting good deeds to the glory of God (cf. Matt. 25:18, 26; 25:41-46; James 4:17).²⁰⁸

Thus, as the disciples await the return of the Son of Man, they must teach that industriousness of discipleship is a testimony of one’s love and trust of Jesus as Lord. But their perseverance should not come from a self-advancing motivation. It should be demonstrated in serving others as Jesus did (Matt. 20:20-28).²⁰⁹ For those who in the guise of serving Christ actually live for themselves,

²⁰³ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 928.

²⁰⁴ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Vol.33B*, 736.

²⁰⁵ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 257.

²⁰⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina series* Vol. 1, 353.

²⁰⁷ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 884.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* vol.1, 928.

the pay back has eternal ramifications. Such people lose not only their reward, but their eternal destiny.²¹⁰

2.2.3 Summary of the Exegesis

The detailed exegesis of the parable about talents has made known the importance of being practical in using our God given talents while anticipating the second coming of the Son of God.

Firstly, Christ is depicted as the trustworthy Lord who entrusted his property to his own servants by implication to the church in his departure (ascension). Thus, whatever we have here belongs to him; and we are stewards of his property. Since, our opportunities and abilities belong to God; we need to use them with absolute obedience to the Lord (Matt. 25:14; Luke 16:1-2; 1Cor. 4:1-2). However, God overburdens no one; he gives his talent as the servant endowed the ability by nature, or as he assigned the grace to the person (Rom 12:3, 6; Eph. 4:7). Accordingly, since not all men have the same ability, therefore not all have the same, or an equal number of opportunities. In the day of judgment the number (of opportunities for service, “talent”) will not matter. The question is only; “Have we been faithful in their use?” see Matt. 25:15, 19-23, 26; also 7:24-27.²¹¹

Secondly, the parable discloses the work of the church in the post-ester period. In this period the disciples (church) are to trade and gain profit in the talents they had been given. Though the talent literally means money, it denotes the personal investment of the disciple for increment of his talent. On the other hand, it is about the stewardship of what has been given to individual disciples. Thus the ‘trade’ signifies the effective use of the God given gifts, natural and spiritual (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 6:19-20, 9:9-10; 1Pet. 4:10). However, having gain theologically signifies when one benefits the kingdom of God in one’s increment of talent (1 Cor. 9:22; Phil. 2:5-9). Consequently, the faithful servants appreciated of their performance and their reward connote of upgrade in their work and entering to the everlasting life (Matt. 25:21, 23, 34-40, 46b; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

²¹⁰ Wilkins, Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary series*, 807.

²¹¹ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 884.

Thirdly, the parable depicts the one having buried his talent. However, burying the talent can mean no possibility of loss, but it also means that there was no possibility of gain, just keeping the God given talent as it is (Matt. 25:18). The third servant buried his talent because of the wrong attitude he had developed about his master (Matt. 25:24-25), and his disobedience to fulfill his responsibility created fear of not using his talent.

In the day of settling the account, the master announces the unfaithful servant an 'evil and lazy servant', which implies the disciple who does not show his faith in action. This wicked servant loses his position in serving the kingdom of God here in this world (Matt. 25: 28), and finally the destiny of this servant ends up in hell.

Therefore, the parable about the talents successively presents the manner how the individual disciple receives gifts and the way how to practice on it responsibly. Accordingly, the first scenes (vv. 14-15), discloses the entrusting of talent, the second scene shows the need to work diligently in the given gift (vv. 16-18), and the third scene exhibits the settling of responsibilities in the end time (vv. 24-30).

Chapter 3: The Empirical Analysis of the Application of Matthew 25:14-30 in the South West Synod of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

3.1 Introduction

I have noted in the background discussion (1.2. Theme and Goal of the Thesis), that my main goal of doing this research is to find out how the parable about talents is appropriately understood exegetically and how it is applied and practiced in the congregations of the south West Synod (SWS) of Ethiopian Evangelical church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Based on this frame, I did an exegesis in chapter two in order to understand what the parable about the talents is according to Matthew and what biblical message it can communicate.

In this third chapter, I am going to present the empirical analysis of the application of Matthew 25:14-30 in the SWS. As indicated earlier, the purpose of this task is to find out how the parable is understood and applied practically on the grass root level. For the empirical work, I have selected the groups: (1) the SWS management (including both ordained and lay people with different professions), (2) Arba Minch Theological Seminary teachers and congregation pastors, and (3) leaders of the Mafo congregation as a special group.

During the summer of 2018, I undertook a small field study, firstly, by distributing a questionnaire to the above selected individuals in the SWS. These persons were asked to give written answers to the questions, but I also planned to invite them for meetings after I had read and analysed the written responses in order to collect supplementing information and secure a correct assessment of their actual responses to the questionnaire, and such meetings took place.

Actually, for Mafo congregation leaders, I did only the group meeting, because some of them are not trained to respond to such questions in written form. In addition, I was interested to know why this congregation became typical in use of talents among the congregations in the SWS, and I sought to see their practical works. Thus, in the group discussion with them, I wanted to know the impact that helped Mafo congregation to be effective in use of talents.

The questioner contained six questions based on the parable about talents in Matthew 25: 14-30 to be addressed to the focus groups in order to find out how the use of talents is understood, and practiced in the congregations.

In the end, 22 persons had participated in this field research. These were SWS management (9 persons), Arba Minch Seminary teachers and congregation pastors (7 Persons), and Mafo congregation leaders (6 persons). Hence, I will try to present what each group responded for the given questions, and the outcome of the group discussion.

3.2 South West Synod Management

3.2.1 Answers to the questionnaire

Question1. How do you understand “the parable about talents” in the Gospel of Mathew 25:14-30? What is a talent? and what is the purpose of Jesus by telling this parable?

In this question, primarily I wanted to know how my local context understands what the talents mean. In this regard, my informant 1 stated that “talents encompass all the gifts, be a natural or spiritual that we have been endowed with from God. The knowledge (inherent potential) and skill are from God and all of these are talents.”²¹² The Bible expresses that the source of the talent is God saying, “all the good gifts and perfect blessings are from the Father of light, Jas. 1:17.”²¹³ Contextually, the talent refers to the money which we give value whether it is a small or big amount, but symbolically the parable teaches us the earnestness of our God given gift and shows the effect of using or rejecting to work on them.²¹⁴ More precisely, the talent signifies all our property, money, skill, knowledge, natural resources (land, water, air), and different kinds of Spiritual given from God.²¹⁵ Likewise, my informant 2 says, “the parable about the talents symbolically refers to the Spiritual gifts given to all people from God, and it carries the message that everyone has a responsibility to work on it, or it is all about stewardship.”²¹⁶ On the other hand, as my informant 1 says, “The parable about talents communicates God’s expectation of us to bear fruit and lead our productive life by maximally exploiting our knowledge and skill, and

²¹² Informant 1, 4 July 2018.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Informant 3, 1 July 2018

²¹⁵ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

²¹⁶ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

effectively delivering our responsibility for the organization we are working for. Likewise, it refers our accountability for what we have received from God.”²¹⁷

Question 2. The two servants who had been entrusted with five and two talents made a trade and doubled their talents. What do you understand about making trade and gaining profit with the talents?

We have seen in the answers to question 1 that, my informants understood the talents to be a both natural and spiritual gift of God, and the message of the parable is using the talents responsibly for growth of the kingdom of God. However, the parable expresses that two of the servants made a trade and gained a profit. According to the understanding of this group, trade is understood as our activity or exercise with our talents for productivity.²¹⁸ It also denotes, giving service faithfully,²¹⁹ or putting the talent into use.²²⁰ Though, the responsibility requires sacrifice, trading with the talent denotes to be faithful stewards to pay costs to accomplish our entrusted duties.²²¹

Thus, gaining is understood as working with the talent to have multiple numbers of results from the asset.²²² Further, gaining also denotes our faithfulness and obedience in using our talents for the growth of the kingdom of God.²²³ But my informant 1 suggests that “gaining” is promotion of a servant for his or her effective use of the talent.²²⁴ In terms of spiritual gifts, my informant 5, recognizes “gaining” as the increase of the spiritual gifts in the individual for building the church (1Cor. 14:12).²²⁵ This means that God upgrades the gift of the effective servant for higher responsibility.

²¹⁷ Informant 1 and 2, 4 July 2018.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

²²⁰ Informant 2, 5 July 2018

²²¹ Informant 1, 4 July 2018.

²²² Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Informant 1, 4 July, 2018.

²²⁵ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

Question 3.What does it mean for you to bury the Lord’s talent in the ground? What led this person to bury his talent?

The members of the synod management looked at burying of the talent from different perspectives. Some argued that burying of the talent symbolically refers to unproductive use of God given resources like time, knowledge, skill, and spiritual gifts.²²⁶ Some others argued that burying the talent implies ignorance to help the needy and using the resources self-centred, and this entails living only for your own sake and dying without benefiting others.²²⁷

On the other hand, burying can signify disobedience or negligence to work on the given gift.²²⁸ However, regarding the reason for burying the talent, some assumed that the third servant was disappointed of being offered less talent than his colleagues, and also that he was afraid of losing it by working on it because he had only this sole talent.²²⁹ Likewise, this informant added, this servant pretends burying as the best way of keeping the talent, because he did not want to pay the cost of working on it.²³⁰

My informants described some practical examples of burying of God given talents. Thus, my informant 3 says, if a minister who is blessed with a talent of teaching and then turns out to be lazy for preparation and prayer, he will lose the chance of teaching, and, consequently, as a result he misses to equip people for the kingdom of God.²³¹ Some others included as burying of talent corruption which mainly happens in developing countries saying, “In the developing countries, leaders have been entrusted to administer the resources by their people; however, the majority of the leaders are engulfed with corruption.”²³² In the same way, some of the leaders in developed countries are not free of burying. While people are dying of poverty in other poor countries, they have accumulated big amount of resources, and do not share sufficiently.²³³

²²⁶ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

²²⁷ Informant 1, 4 July, 2018.

²²⁸ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²²⁹ Informant 1, 4 July, 2018.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Informant 3, 1 July 2018.

²³² Informant 1, 4 July, 2018.

²³³ Ibid.

Question 4. In the parable, the master rewarded those two servants who traded and gained, conversely he severely punished the one who buried his talent. How do you understand the reward and the punishment or what is the reward and punishment?

Almost all of my informants realized the reward as entering into the happiness of the Master, which refers to having eternal life (2 Cor. 5:10).²³⁴ However, some viewed the reward as having more opportunity to serve in the talent here in this world and the everlasting life after Jesus's second coming (Matt. 25:31).²³⁵ Likewise, the punishment is recognized as losing his/her spiritual gifts, or losing position from any responsibility. More importantly, punishment indicates the eternal damnation, eternal judgement (cf. v. 30).²³⁶

Question 5. If you think that this talent is a God given ability to congregations, then what could be the “trade” and “gaining” for the congregations? Are the congregations effectively making the “trade” and “gaining” the profit? If your answer is yes, how? If your answer is no, why?

My informant 1 perceived the “trade” and “gaining” of the congregations as preaching the gospel, sending missionaries, and diaconal service.²³⁷ In support of this view, my informant 3, presented trade and gaining as the holistic service of the church, namely preaching the gospel to win souls for Christ and helping the needy (Matt 22:37-39).²³⁸ In contrary, my informant 5, stated that trade and gain of the congregation as income generating of the congregation to get money. He elaborated that congregations are more focused in the spirituality, whereas less attention of involving in secular business.²³⁹

All the group members agreed that all the congregations in the SWS are not effective in trading and gaining, because when Christianity was introduced initially, the focus was introducing the eternal life by faith through grace, but the practical aspect was not emphasized or exercised well.²⁴⁰ In the beginning, missionaries never taught the people about gifts as one of practical demonstrations of our salvation. Often grants were coming from abroad that crippled the holistic

²³⁴ Informant 2 and 3, 5 July 2018.

²³⁵ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

²³⁶ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²³⁷ Informant 1, 4 July, 2018.

²³⁸ Informant 3, 1 July, 2018.

²³⁹ Informant 5, 3 July 2018.

²⁴⁰ Informants 1 and 6, 4 July, 2018.

approach of the people.²⁴¹ Another factor nowadays is the tremendous fabrication of Christian medias which have highly promoted prosperity teaching that emphasizes earthly blessing by inquiring spiritual power, but not giving attention to loving the neighbour.²⁴² In addition, the theological view of work, being voice for voiceless, and fighting against corruption has not been taught strongly as part of Christian life.²⁴³ Therefore, a holistic view and practice in the congregations is still weak and confronted with problems.

Question 6. What are your proposed solutions to maximize the talent mapping of the congregations?

My informants agree that the congregations in the SWS have an immense potential and that they can really reach the needy people and address poverty among them as well as in their respective communities.²⁴⁴ However, the challenge they all raised is the importance of training. Thus, some argue that the training should focus on issues of salvation, not only the liberation of souls, but as it includes physical aspect. In doing so, it will motivate sharing what we have to others, rather than being dependent on others.²⁴⁵ Others propose that the biblical teaching should undertake awakening the congregations as they are potential rich with talents, and there is a strong need of using talents.²⁴⁶ Pointing to the urgency of the use of talents in our context, my informant 4 suggested that it is important to establish “use of the talents” notion as part of the church structure.²⁴⁷ Likewise, my informant 5 suggested the need for regular Biblical teaching about using our God given talents in Sunday worship programs, and in Sunday schools.²⁴⁸ Differently, my informant 3 thought that the problem of using of talent in the congregations is related with the lack of understanding among pastors and evangelists regarding using talents. Thus, he proposed that the training could be focused on them until they become change agents.²⁴⁹

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Informant 3, 1 July 2018.

²⁴³ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²⁴⁴ Informants 1 and 6, 4 July, 2018.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²⁴⁷ Informant 4, 1 July, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Informant 2, 5 July 2018.

²⁴⁹ Informant 3, 1 July 2018.

3.2.2 Additional points from the group discussion

The Synod Management had a group meeting on July 9, 2018. Out of 9 management members 8 participated. It was so relevant and interesting. The discussion lasted for 6 hours. However, here I will try to describe additional points that had not been addressed in the questionnaire.

This group related the talent with the command that God had given the responsibility to Adam to subdue the land (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, for them talent means any of the resource (natural and spiritual) that are endowed from God. According to this group, the initial talent comes from God, and it develops by working on it. Since, God has giving talent with his own purpose, there will be a time when God counts what he has given either to reward or to punish the servant to whom it was entrusted.

For this group the issue of “trade” and “gain” with the talent was the most debatable issue. However, they came to the conclusion that trade by the talent implies using effectively our God given gifts for the purpose that he entrusted us, whereas gain signifies benefiting others or the result. To make clear this notion they exemplified it with two individuals from congregation; the business man and the pastor. As they thought, for the business man, buying and selling, and having more capital is a trade, if it is not done by exploiting others. And it becomes gaining, when this business man works for the growth of the kingdom of God by helping the needy, paying tithe to the church and paying taxes to the country faithfully. On the other hand, the trade for the pastor is preaching the gospel and the gain should be when people come to know Christ and become disciples to Jesus Christ. In addition, the pastor has to help the needy, pay his tithe or tax to gain by his talent. Further, the group viewed burying the talent as a self-centred life that ignores supporting others.

In terms of trade and gain, as well as burying, this group had come to consensus that the trade for the congregations in the SWS consists in preaching the gospel, constructing church buildings, purchasing musical instruments, and training pastors to some extent. Gaining for the congregations mainly focused on winning souls to Christ and making disciples. However, the congregations have failed to carry out the diaconal service, and their members are not effective in fighting against corruption, promoting justice and exercising the good governance. The group

agreed that the congregations are highly influenced by the world view of the country, rather than being a light for the world. This implies that the congregations are burying the God given talents.

According to this group, the congregations are not effective in a holistic service, because of the initial evangelism approach which was mainly focused on saving souls. In the beginning of propagating the gospel, sharing what we have with those in need, the biblical concept of work, and social and political responsibilities of Christian had not been regarded as part of Christian life. Thus, this group argued that, though the congregations are able to influence the community economically and socially, and spiritually, there are street children who are subjected to suffering, there are old and sick people dying in the street because of lack of basic needs, and the youth are struggling because of lack of job opportunities. Moreover, there has been social injustice, unfair economic distribution; high corruption especially in the governmental structures, there is ethnic based hatred and even murder, and deeply rooted poverty in the community, while congregation members are fairly sharing the leadership position of the politics. Spiritually, as it is noted under question 5, the so called prosperity gospel has distorted the congregations, by the teaching about personal prosperity, but not focusing on the sharing for our neighbour in need as a way of blessing and as the way of getting reward in the eternal life.

Finally, the group discussed how to maximize the use of talents in the congregations. Accordingly, they proposed that the theological schools could have to train pastors and evangelists thoroughly, regarding how justification relates to sanctification or how salvation encompasses diaconal work (Perhaps this needs curriculum revision). Likewise, the use of talents and the diaconal work for the benefit of others specially for the needy in the kingdom of God can be briefly taught to the congregation leaders, and strategies should be designed to train each members of the church, so that Christians can influence the politics in promoting justice, fighting against corruption and become exemplary in good governance.

In order to minimize dependency notion and to promote the importance of sharing what the congregations have, and to enhance the work habit, congregations could get well-planned biblical teachings and set up bible studies (The synod has to work on developing the bible teaching which can help all the congregations in every level).

3.3 Congregation Pastors and Seminary Teachers

3.3.1 *Answers to the questionnaire*

Question1. How do you understand “the parable about talents” in the Gospel of Mathew 25:14-30? What is a talent? and what is the purpose of Jesus by telling this parable?

According to the context of Matthew 25:14-30, the parable about the talent shows the second coming of the Lord and it utters how each Christian uses his gift.²⁵⁰ Based on this understanding the talent mean the spiritual gift, and a natural power endowed from God.²⁵¹ However, the talent belongs to God, and thus, receivers are stewards not owners.²⁵²

This group suggested that the message that Jesus wanted to communicate through this parable implies that God bestowed a gift to all disciples to work on it, and the performance will be settled when Jesus returns back.²⁵³ It also signifies that the new life of the one who believes in Christ should bear fruit by being light, and salt of the world. Moreover, the new life could be blessing for the others.²⁵⁴

Question 2. The two servants who had been entrusted with five and two talents made a trade and doubled their talents. What do you understand about making trade and gaining profit with the talents?

With regard to this question my informants mainly accepted “trade” and “gain” as fulfilling the ministry. However, informant 6, regarded trade as any kind of work that someone is expected to do based on the right position, right time and right place effectively and efficiently.²⁵⁵ Likewise, he noted gaining as producing result.²⁵⁶ But my informant 8 elaborated gaining as benefiting others.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ Informant 6, 13 July 2018.

²⁵¹ Informant 7, 15 July 2018.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Informant 10, 9 July 2018.

²⁵⁴ Informant 11, 12 July 2018.

²⁵⁵ Informant 6, 13 July 2018.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Informant 8, 11 July 2018.

Question 3. What does it mean for you to bury the Lord's talent in the ground? What led this person to bury his talent?

Regarding burying the talent, most of my informants say that it is not using the given talent.²⁵⁸ Some expressed burying as denial the call of God to his kingdom,²⁵⁹ and "killing" the God given ability or gift.²⁶⁰ For the question what led the person to bury his talent, one of my informant only responded that the reason was the lack of knowledge of the third person about the talent and his master.²⁶¹

Question 4. In the parable, the master rewarded those two servants who traded and gained, conversely he severely punished the one who buried his talent. How do you understand the reward and the punishment or what is the reward and punishment?

In terms of the reward and punishment, most of my informant seamlessly viewed the reward and punishment materially and spiritually, or earthly and heavenly. Accordingly, my informant 8 understood the reward here in this world as promotion in the work and spiritually increasing with God's grace.²⁶² He further mentioned that the reward refers to the everlasting life. Hence, they regarded the punishment as losing one's position here in this world, either in the spiritual sphere or related to any secular vocation, losing acceptance in the community, and finally it denotes the punishment in hell.²⁶³

Question 5. If you think that this talent is a God given ability to congregations, then what could be the "trade" and "gaining" for the congregations? Are the congregations effectively making the "trade" and "gaining" the profit? If your answer is yes, how? If your answer is no, why?

The trade and gaining for the congregations are to preach and teach the gospel, to counsel those in problems, to reconcile those who are in conflict and to evangelize non-believers spiritually. Socially, the congregation is expected to help the needy, to handle culturally out casted, to support widows, and to work for justice and peace.²⁶⁴ More importantly, the congregations

²⁵⁸ Informant 9, 15 July 2018.

²⁵⁹ Informant 7, 15 July 2018.

²⁶⁰ Informant 6, 13 July 2018.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Informant 8, 15 July 2018.

²⁶³ Informant 6, 13 July 2018.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

should involve with the community development like constructing the roads in the area of the community, and maintaining houses for those who are poor.²⁶⁵

In the effectiveness of the congregations fulfilling the trade and gain, all my informants responded that not any of the congregations in the SWS has been effective. My informant 8 said that even the spiritual gifts are not effectively used in the congregations. As he argued, not using talents is a resulted of theological misunderstandings in the church and social discrepancies in the community.²⁶⁶ Likewise, my informant 9 argued that the economic problem occurring in the community partly are related with the congregation's reluctance to obey the great commandment.²⁶⁷

Question 6. What are your proposed solutions to maximize the talent mapping of the congregations?

To maximize the use of talents in the congregations, my informants suggested teaching and training as main tool. Accordingly, my informant 9 argued that the teaching and the training of the pastors, evangelists, and congregation leaders could focus on how to use talents in the congregations.²⁶⁸ On the other hand, my informant 8 suggested that the teaching through experience sharing from well experienced congregations or organizations is important.²⁶⁹

3.3.2 Additional points from the group

On July 18, 2018 three congregation pastors and four seminary teachers had a meeting to discuss on the questions. The discussion lasted for five hours, and they reflected in the use of the talents in the SWS congregations.

This group realized that the talent understood as the enriched potential naturally is given for every person, and it is the God given ability characteristically able to be multiplied, to be exchanged and to grow. According to this group, the talent encompasses the life which we received by Christ, and spiritual gifts endowed by the Holy Spirit. As God had given wisdom and

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Informant 8, 15 July 2018.

²⁶⁷ Informant 9, 15 July 2018.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Informant 8, 15 July 2018.

understanding to Bezalel and Oholiab to work on the tabernacle, the talent is our God given ability and skill to do any work in his kingdom (Exod. 36:1).

The parable shows the one who gives responsibility, the one who receives the responsibility and the evaluation of the accomplishment by the giver. Accordingly, the giver of the talent is Jesus Christ; those who have been entrusted the talent are his disciples. Based on this understanding, this group thought that the message of this parable is working effectively in the given talent to receive praise in the coming kingdom of God.

After having discussed the trade and gaining, this group proposed some practical examples to express what trade and gaining means. Accordingly, for the teacher, the trade is teaching faithfully and living an exemplary life for his pupils, and the gain should be enabling capable students with knowledge and making disciples of the Lord. Likewise, for the pastor, the trade is living an exemplary life for the members of congregation, further to be prayer, to put strategic planning for church ministry, coordinating people according to their talents, The profit could be making disciples, increasing the number of believers, bringing impact upon the community to exercise Christ's love, leading the congregation to practice of helping the sick, hungry and people in economic and social difficulties. For businessmen, the trade is making the business for better income, involving in the business strategically, then the profit could be opening job opportunities for jobless, supporting the needy significantly, paying tithe for the church, sending missionaries to unreached places.

This group admitted that the trade and profit for congregations are teaching the word of God, witnessing the good news to unbelievers, equipping for ministry and helping the needy. But practically, there are wealthy and very poor in the congregations, but no way of sharing. There are people with different qualifications in the congregations, but no organized way of supporting the needy; there are congregation members in political positions and in high level positions, but members often cannot be exemplary in fighting against corruption, in being just, and Christ like.

Mentioning the above problems the group tried to identify the root causes for the problems. As it is believed by the group, the teaching emphasis on salvation by grace, but less emphasis in practical life is one of the cases. Moreover, this group was interested in looking at the beginning of mission work in the SWS. All agree that in the beginning missionaries did not emphasize

practical issues, for instance giving the tithe, supporting the needy, and they did not prohibit drinking alcohol (about 40% of our congregation members use much alcohol, and as a result there are social problems, and conflicts often happen among these congregations whose members exercise drinking alcohol), and missionaries did not strongly opposed some bad cultures like the practice of slavery. Moreover, initially the church work was fully dependent on the funds coming from abroad, thus, no internal attempts were made to complement the external support.

Nowadays in our town beggars sit in front of Orthodox churches and Muslim mosques on every Sunday and Friday to receive money from people who are coming to the church or mosque, but no single beggar is coming to Protestant churches. Of course, the orthodox Christians give money for beggars by their belief to be saved through good works. However, the Protestants do not lend their hand for the poor, perhaps they are satisfied by justification by faith alone.

One of the group members shared his testimony about what the poor people think of Protestants saying, “four years ago, there was a big protestant spiritual gathering in the town. By that gathering many people came to believe in Jesus Christ as saviour. But when one of the beggars heard this news, he regretted and said, “If all people will become protestant who can feed us?” Thus, Protestantism is pictured as a religion of no concern for needy people. This shows that the congregations are burying God given talents, and it will take a lot of effort to change this situation.

According to this group, the reward for those using their talents is everlasting life, satisfaction with earthly life, and promotion and growth in capacity and abilities (cf. Matt 19:27-29). Hence, the punishment for those who bury their talent will be losing their ability in this world and everlasting damnation.

Finally, as solution to maximize the use of talents in the congregations, this group focused on the calling of the pastors. The calling of congregation pastors for ministry should have worked strongly, because change in the congregation depends on the personality of the pastor. Therefore, calling the pastor to congregations should be structurally worked from the synod to the congregation. (The constitution of the church requires that the pastor should be called for the congregation ministry in consultation with the synod leadership, but by now congregations are calling their pastors without any consultation). In addition, the synod and leaders of all levels of

the church should be morally and ethically exemplary for the congregations. Likewise, to enhance the practice of use of talents, the confirmation teachings in the congregations should be thoroughly assessed and worked out again. At the end, this group suggested that theological schools should work also in practical aspects of Christianity besides teaching in justification by grace and faith alone.

3.4 Mafo Congregation Leaders

Mafo congregation is located in a high, mountainous and badly degraded area. Population density is high so that farming land is very scarce. Livelihood of the people is under severe threat.²⁷⁰ However, this congregation is working to enhance its internal economic capacity and to transform the economic, social and spiritual situation of the community. I went to Mafo congregation on July 27, 2018 and I had a group meeting with 6 congregation leaders for about five hours including sight visiting. Thus, their responses are based on their practical experiences.

For Mafo congregation leaders, talents are different gifts from God, money, the ability to preach the gospel, and they recognized the message of the parable as accomplishing the responsibility entrusted to them from God.

The congregation leaders expressed that to enhance the economy of the congregation, (a trade for this congregation) they had constructed a cafeteria, opened shop for selling goods, constructed a bakery at the church compound, established a furniture producing machine in the town. They own 6 hectares of farming land and they have been producing barley, wheat and apples. Currently, their capital is estimated to about \$50,000 (This amount is big for a congregation in a remote area whose members are mostly poor farmers.)

On the other hand, according to the leaders, this congregation has built class rooms by their own expense for two governmental primary schools namely; Zakota and Dertsele, and they conduct students' tutorial education during every summer vacation mainly for upper primary and high school students by the expense of the congregation, and, further, they have been feeding and building houses for aged poor people. In addition, they have prepared pedestrian roads and

²⁷⁰ Galunde Waketa, presentation on experiences of SWS congregations, September, 2015.

crossing structures construction to link rural villages, and they have tried to open a public library for the students in the community. (This implies that this congregation is gaining the profit.)

In terms of spiritual work, the congregation has employed three pastors and is strongly engaged in evangelizing the non-believers. Furthermore, they have sent outreach evangelists to the place called Lisha. The people in Lisha were mostly non-believers, thus, some of the evangelists and congregation leaders experienced persecution from the people. However, by now in Lisha one strong congregation is established. Now Mafo has continued its outreach evangelism to other places.

This tremendous gain of the congregation has happened because the majority of the members are paying their tithe; they work in the congregation farm every Friday, and they voluntarily involve in the congregation businesses. For them, working for the growth of the kingdom of God is an integral part of their life as Christians; those who are not willing to work are recognized as the servant who buried his talent and such a person could be rejected to be a leader in the congregation.

When I realized that the congregation is so thoughtful in the work. I asked them, how they understand our Lutheran belief of justification by faith and grace alone. They replied that they are saved by grace through faith, but unless they put their faith in action, they might lose their salvation.

According to the constitution of EECMY, those who practice sin like adultery, theft, those who quarrel, etc. might be put under church discipline. Thus, I asked them, whether the congregation looks at negligence for diaconal work as the same kind of sin and punishes those not willing to work except striving for leadership positions. To this question, they replied that they have no such understanding. But they realized practicing holy life and feeding the hungry seem to have the same status by pointing to Matt. 25:31-46. If someone is disciplined because of being adulterous, in the same way the one who does not work for the growth of the kingdom of God could also be disciplined in any way.

Finally, I asked them, why use of the talent has become an integral part of Christian life of this congregation. They responded to me that use of talent was introduced initially when the gospel was preached for them. And they told me the story how the congregation was established.

Mafo congregation was established around 1943 by three notable indigenous gospel preachers who were sent from Entoto congregation (from Addis Ababa). These ministers were 1) evangelist Kassa Konde 2) pastor wolde kassa 3) Rev. Daniel Arke. As the leaders informed me, the first believers of Mafo congregation were very poor, sick men and socially marginalized ones. The above mentioned gospel preachers, besides preaching the gospel, also started to share their clothes for those who had no clothing, they fed the hungry and they totally identified themselves as part of the situation.

When the congregation was growing in number, others who had better economy and healthy people joined the congregation. Hence, the ministers had started to teach the believers to share what they have for the needy by being models. Therefore, diaconal activity became the integral part of the gospel preaching. This is the real reason for Mafo seeing as exemplary today for other SWS congregations.

3.5 Summary of the Empirical Analysis

In this empirical analysis, I realized that the parable about talents is a text which seems to be interpreted by all people, however, not being practiced well in the congregations. Almost all my informants understood that the talent is both natural and spiritual gifts bestowed from God. Thus, the message that the parable carries is giving awareness to the disciples to be prepared for the coming of the Son Man by using their gifts that they are endowed from God. Thus as the parable shows, bearing fruit by their God given talent has reward; whereas disobedience ends up with punishment.

Though, the meaning of trade and gain is somehow difficult to analyse, my informants showed and communicated in the group discussions that they understood it well. Accordingly, trade can signify any activity that the individual disciple or the congregation does by using his or her God given talent. Likewise, gain denotes the benefit that the person or the congregation contributes to growth of the kingdom of God. In the SWS congregations, the trade (using talents in an organised way) is not effective. My informants expressed that the congregations are enriched with potentials, whereas the use of talents is not effective. On the other hand, the main problem seems to be the understanding and practice of gain. According to this field research, gain implies mainly helping others, especially those in need of physical and spiritual help. However, the

concept and the practice among the congregations regarding gain is weak, and both physical and spiritual problems are prevailing in the community where congregations are even dominant in number.

As the field research indicates, the congregation's inefficiency of gaining is related to their understanding of salvation. Initially the gospel was preached focusing on liberation of souls, and, on the other hand, some practical aspects like helping others, working for social transformation of the community were not taken as integral part of salvation. In this regard, most of my informants indicated that the shortcomings happened because of the approach of the missionaries when they started evangelism. This seems realistic, when the Mafo congregation, which was established by indigenous missionaries, is efficiently making diaconal work as an important part of the Christianity. Moreover, later on the raise of prosperity gospel which inspires more the individual blessing than living for the benefit of others, contributed the impracticality of gain. Thus, because of the influence of such teachings, congregations in the SWS held members who are rich, and professionals who have different skills, but not sharing what they have for the needy. Further, congregation members who get political responsibilities do not work effectively for economic and social transformation of the community. Even, the research showed the lack of understanding and practice among the congregation pastors.

Therefore, this empirical work assures that congregations in the SWS are burying their talents. The congregations have members with different professions, there is money in congregations, and they have opportunities to do every good thing. However, a deeply rooted misunderstanding of what a holistic approach means, has not effective in use of talents as its consequence. Thus, they applied the failure of the third servant who buried his talent especially to diaconal activities.

The other aspect that informants dealt with me is the issue of reward and punishment. Accordingly, they thought that the faithful servants could be rewarded here in this world by upgrading of their responsibility, and they will inherit the everlasting life. Conversely, the ignorant servant loses both. But, in congregations taking measure of the members who are not sharing what they have with others is not worked well. Even, conceptually, not sharing the talent with others is not regarded as other sins. However, my informants agreed that the unfaithful servant could be punished in eternal damnation. This shows how serious it is not use God given talents.

Thus, in order to maximize the use of talent in the congregations my informants underlined mainly the need for teaching which focuses how justification relates to sanctification or how salvation encompasses diaconal work especially in theological schools. In addition, each member of the church could be strategically involved in bible studies about use of talents. Likewise, training for church leaders of all levels, making use of talents as part of confirmation teachings, and teaching by experience sharing are also possible solutions. Moreover, it is important to incorporate use of talents in the constitution of the church to implement the concept and practice structurally. Finally, as it is observed from the Mafo congregation, there is a need for making use talents or diaconal approach an integral part of mission or evangelism.

Chapter 4: Findings of Biblical and Theological Problems of Congregations in Using Talents

4.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I have tried to analyze the historical and cultural setting of the parable about talents, and I did an exegesis of the text in order to grasp its meaning within this context as precisely as possible. Next, in chapter three, I did an empirical analysis to find out how the parable about the talents has been understood and practiced among the congregations in the SWS.

Hence, my point of departure in this fourth chapter is to compare the historical and social settings of the text within its original context in the first century A.D with the congregations of the SWS, in order to examine and reflect on the appropriate use of talents. In addition, in this chapter, I will try to analyze the theological and biblical understanding of the text which I found in doing the exegesis with the perception and practice of the use of talents in the congregations in the SWS. Finally, I will assess the ethical aspects of the text and its application in the congregations of the SWS.

4.2 Findings in Historical and Social Comparison between the Text (Author), and of the Congregations in the South West Synod

4.2.1 Understanding the Relation between the Master and the Servants in the Parable about the Talents

It is certain that the setting of the parable about talents is quite different from the context of the congregations in the SWS, both historically and culturally. In addition, the parable belongs to the first century; thus, there is a long time gap between the parable and the congregations. Hence, I thought that there could be a hindrance to understand and practice the parable appropriately in the congregations of SWS in terms of master slave relation.

In the historical context of the text, the lordship of the master is expressed in the way that the master administers from highly professional servants to less skilled ones. Though the slave

master relation needs the loyalty of the servant to his master, the power of the master bases on the legality and acknowledged authority as the exegesis about the master (ὁ κύριος) implies. Furthermore, the kindness of the master is expressed in the parable by his entrusting of property, leaving home on a journey to do the business and by the rewards that the master gave to the productive servants on his return.

Historically, the slavery system is well-known to the congregations in the SWS, but the master slave relation of the congregations' historical context does not fit to the historical setting of the text. In the historical setting of the congregations, the master was against his the servants, like as I indicated under the exegesis on Matt. 25:14 (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). Thus, the master was perceived as severe, harsh, as someone who owns the slave and the property for himself. There was no incentive for the productive slave.²⁷¹

Therefore, the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, needs to be interpreted from its historical setting, in order to authenticate its message to the congregations in the SWS. The severe and the cruel slavery system of the congregations' setting could be taught as it is not comparable with the setting of the parable. Hence, based on the understanding of the parable in its historical setting, the congregations should be taught that the slavery system of their own context needs to be corrected, and the need for the social transformation could also be emphasized as integral part of salvation; otherwise, it is difficult to symbolize the master with Jesus and the servants with the disciples in the historical setting of the congregations.

As my informants indicated under the additional point (3.3.2), when the missionaries introduced the gospel, they could not teach or correct the masters who became Christians to make their slaves free and to stop harsh treatment and discrimination. And also this was not taken as an important part of salvation. But the masters who believed in Christ, continued to be harsh to and to disrespect their servants. Though the formal slavery system has been denounced from the

²⁷¹ Boshia Bombe, *Slavery in the Gamo Highlands, Ethiopia* (Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), 47.

country since 1942, still those believers who were born from the master families continued discriminating and isolating those believers whose background belonged to a slave family.²⁷² This problem has brought social and spiritual crises in the congregations, and has even caused a split within one of the congregations in Arba Minch.²⁷³

Thus, in terms of master servant relation the understanding and practice of the parable has been difficult in the context of the congregations. Because, as I tried to clarify above, the master who is depicted in the parable gave freedom to his servants to do their business and, when he returned rewarded the productive servants by giving more, he appears positively. As I noted, in the section “Historicity and Historical context of the textual unit’s content” (2.2.1.4.2), in the first century slaves in the Roman Empire could earn wages and bonuses and could acquire property for working in their master’s property. Thus, in the parable about talents, the master allegorically implies the loving gracious Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise, the servants symbolically refer to the disciples. But for applying this parable to the congregations in the SWS, an appropriate interpretation in this respect is needed.

4.2.2 The Importance of Understanding the Monetary Value of the Talents

In the 2.2.1.3.2 Parallel texts and in 2.2.1.4.2 Historicity and Historical context and in the exegesis of Matt. 25:15, I discussed about the monetary value of the talent in its historical setting. Literally, the talent was not a coin but a unit of monetary reckoning, and when used for money it refers to either gold or silver. Hence, one talent valued analogues to \$ 800,000 in today’s money. Based on this understanding, all the gifts (five, two, and one talent), were a considerable amount of money to engage in a business.

However, in my empirical analysis, none of my informants could explain the literal meaning of the talent or its historical monetary value, except suggesting that it is money and that it appears

²⁷² Bosha Bombe, *Slavery in the Gamo Highlands, Ethiopia* (Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), 47.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*... 58-60, 80-83.

one of the possible gifts of God. I think my informants were fair to say so, because talent is not historically known to the congregations in the SWS. Consequently, not knowing the historical monetary value of the talent led my informants to misinterpret the text. Accordingly, for my question, “what is the reason of the third servant to bury his talent?”, some of my informants responded that the third servant had buried his talent because he was afraid of losing to work on it because it was only a small amount of money (3.2.1 Answers for questionnaire).

As to me, understanding the monetary value of the talent could help the reader to realize how precious God’s gift is. I think this also encourages the disciple to work diligently and responsibly on God-given talents. When the readers realize that one talent was a considerable amount to do the business, then they recognize that burying the talent is negligence or disobedience to use God’s gift. Thus, there was no reason to bury the talent.

4.3 Findings of Theological and Biblical Messages of the Text and the Understanding of the Congregations in the South West Synod

4.3.1 Understanding the Meaning of the Trade and Gain in the Use of Talents

In the parable about the talents, the servants who had been entrusted with five and two talents had traded by their talents and had gained one hundred percent. Exegetically, the trade marked the personal investment of effort involved in the effective use of the talent. Likewise, theologically gaining signified losing one’s privilege for the sake of the wellbeing of others, or it is regarded as working to benefit others.

In the empirical analysis, trade is interpreted as using effectively God’s gift for the purpose that it is intended for. Thus, regarding the meaning of trade, the empirical meaning is identical with the exegetical meaning. However, in their answers to the questioner my informants mainly suggested gaining as the promotion of the servants who were effective in use of talents or gaining denoted as the increasing of the spiritual gifts. Thus, they take this to refer to the individual servant’s promotion rather than to sharing what we have for others. But the meaning of gaining became clearly defined as helping the needy or living for good of others, in the subsequent group discussions.

Thus, I observe that the idea of gaining which is a critically important aspect of the use of talents is not well understood in the congregations of the SWS. As it is well expressed in the exegesis of vv. 16-17, and in the group discussions (3.2.2 and 3.3.2 of additional points from the groups), gaining is perceived as working for the spiritual, economic, social and political transformation of the community. Therefore, this implies that, for the use of talents, the theological meaning of gaining and its practical implementation needs to be thoroughly taught in the congregations of the SWS.

4.3.2 Understanding the Use of Talents from Mission of the Church Perspective

The parable about talents does not explicitly say anything about the mission of the church; rather it is about the need of effective use of the talents of the disciples in anticipating the parousia. However, there are indications in the exegesis that the use of talents has a relation with the understanding of the master.

Indeed, all the three servants are introduced in the text of v. 14, as the master's "own" servants (τοὺς ἰδίου δούλους). These servants were entrusted with the talents. This implies that all the servants are disciples of Jesus, and they were expected to bear fruits. However, the third servant had buried his talent in the ground (v.18), because he misperceived his master (vv. 24-25).

According to the exegesis in vv. 24-25, the wickedness of this servant primarily stems from his attitude to his master, which in turn has led him to laziness and bad stewardship. Thus, as already indicated in the exegetical discussion, this third servant might represent the disciple who seems to worship the Lord, but is unpractical in his deeds (cf. Jas 1:26-27). This is the way many people deal with God. Their wrong attitude to God results in disobedience to their calling. Thus, our perception of God and our knowledge about his attributes are so important in determining our action. As the empirical analysis shows, the understanding of God primarily relates to the approach of mission when introducing Christianity.

Thus, according to empirical findings in chapter three, all my informants responded that the congregations in the SWS are not effective in the use of talents (except Mafo congregation). The root causes of inefficiency in use of talents in the congregations of the SWS were related to the

primary evangelism approach of the missionaries. In the beginning, missionaries never taught the people about gifts as one of practical demonstrations of salvation (See. 3.2.1 for further understanding). Sharing what we have to the needy, the biblical concept of work, giving tithe, social justice and political responsibilities of Christians had not been integrated as a part of Christian life in the mission approach of evangelism (see 3.2.2 for further understanding). Moreover, initially the church work was fully dependent on the funds coming from abroad but, no internal attempts were made to complement the external support (see 3.3.2 for further understanding).

But strikingly, Mafo is one congregation that has become effective in use of talents among the congregations of the SWS because of its initial evangelism approach. As stated in chapter three, Mafo congregation was established by indigenous evangelists who consciously integrated use of talents understood as diaconal work as an essential part of Christian life, when starting evangelism (see 3.4 for further understanding).

Therefore, it seems appropriate to integrate our evangelism strategy with use of talents in order to empower congregations to fulfill the holistic calling of the church.

4.3.3 Understanding the Use of Talents from an eschatological point of view

In the background discussion of chapter one, I noted that I have been involved in the ‘Use your talents’ project since 2013. Likewise, I presented that the essence of ‘Use your talents’ is to start from the congregation and to go into the community- using what we have here and now in order to fulfill the holistic responsibility of the church and to realize this objective. This project is based on the biblical text Matthew 25:14-30.

However, the exegesis of Matthew 25: 21, 23, 28-30 in chapter two, and the empirical analysis of question four in chapter three express that the parable about the talents communicates the church’s responsibility in using God’s gift here in this world and also discloses the consequence of being productive or unproductive for the responsibility in the Parousia.

Since the ‘Use your talents’ project targets the faith community (congregations) and depends on the parable about the talents in Matthew, I think the approach could be conscious about the eschatological aspect of the text, especially its relation to the final judgment (cf. 25:31-46). If the approach focuses only in the moralizing approach (‘use your talents to the best of your ability’), which does not take into account the eschatological horizon (the return of the master and the accounting (see section 2.2.1.2.2, about the Form of the text), the project uses the text partially. As far as I have observed, in the ‘Use your talents’ project in seminaries and experience sharing activities, the moralizing approach is strongly emphasized.

But theologically, the knowledge of what we really perceive about the life in the coming world, especially our recognition of rewards in the parousia is a driving force to implement the use of talents here and now. Likewise, our understanding about the consequence of neglecting to use the talents in the final judgment awakes the believer to realize the accountability in the end time.

Therefore, the congregations in the SWS should be taught that everything should be done with a view to the day of reckoning that is coming. This might help to use their talents effectively.

4.4 Ethical Concerns of the Text and Praxis in the Congregations of the South West Synod

4.4.1 Use of Talents and Helping the Needy

The succeeding context of the parable about the talents, the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, exhibits the reward of those who have good merits and the punishment of those who lived for their own benefit (see section 2.2.1.1.1 Immediate Context). Likewise, as I indicated in the exegesis of vv. 16-17, the NT is critically opposed to normal economic orientation of profit in so far as profit is looked for out of selfish motives (cf. Matt. 16:26; Jas. 4:13). But theologically, gaining signifies losing one’s privilege for the sake of the wellbeing of others (cf. Phil. 2:5ff; 3:8).

Conversely, according to the field research in the congregations of the SWS, though the congregations are able to influence the community economically, socially and spiritually, there

are street children who are subjected to suffering, there are old and sick people dying in the street because of lack of the basic needs, no fair economic distribution in the community, and there has been social crisis. Moreover, the bad news is that Protestantism is perceived by the needy people as the way of neglecting to support the poor (see 3.3.2 Additional points from the group).

However, in the every Sunday worship, the liturgy of EECMY instructs to pray for the poor, sick, the oppressed and the orphans in the community.²⁷⁴ Likewise, helping the needy and working for the development of the community is described in the constitution of EECMY SWS, as one of the main responsibilities and duties of the synod.²⁷⁵

But practically, as it is discussed on the empirical research, the congregations are not supporting the needy. Thus, this point needs a strong work among the congregations in the SWS.

4.4.2 Use of Talents and the Church Discipline

As I indicated in the form of the parable, it is a warning for the disciples to work diligently in the present and to avoid laziness and fear in the face of the Son of man's coming (see 2.2.1.2.2, about the Form of the text). Likewise, the exegesis of v. 28 refers the removal of the talent from the third servant which implies a denial of any second chance of work. Practically, this happens when the unproductive servant is not wanted by the church because of his disobedience.

In this regard, in the empirical analysis the punishment is also recognized as losing his/her spiritual gifts, or losing position from any responsibility (see 3.2.1 and 3.3.1 Answers to the questionnaire). The Mafo congregation sees neglecting for diaconal work as one of the sins; however, the congregation does not take the discipline on the members who are not active in diaconal activities, but it only prohibits those who are reluctant in use of talents from the leadership positions (see. 3.4 Mafo Congregation Leaders).

²⁷⁴Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, book of liturgy and worship, Addis Ababa: Rehobot printers, 2008, 39.

²⁷⁵ South west synod, *Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus South West Synod, the Rule and Regulation Hand Book* (Arba Minch: South West Synod, 2015), 19-20.

Regarding church discipline, the constitution of the SWS says that the member of the congregation who has done the revealed sin, the one who is violating the teaching of the church, and the member who does not obey the decisions of the church, can be disciplined.²⁷⁶ However, the constitution does not elaborate about the revealed sin, but practically it is assumed as the other sins apart from neglecting to the diaconal activities. Thus, the constitution does not explicitly instruct how to deal with the members who are not effective in use of the talents.

Therefore, it seems plausible that the congregations should have a clear theological stand and a brief constitution which guides them how to discipline the member who is not willing to use his talents.

4.5 Summary of the Findings

In order to implement the parable about the talents in the congregations, it is very important to understand the text and the setting of the users of the parable. Perhaps, in some of the historical context of the congregations, the master slave relation and the monetary value of the talents might be quite different from the texts. In this case, the text is required to be interpreted in its historical setting in order to communicate the users.

Theologically, as indicated above, the meaning of the trade and gain needs to be exegetically verified to be implemented in the congregations. Moreover, the primary evangelism approach could also be integrated with use of talents in order to establish the congregation holistically oriented as in the case of the Mafo congregation. Since the ‘Use your talents’ project is based on the parable about talents, the eschatological aspects the text could be interpreted to the congregations in order to enhance the use of the talents.

In addition, to fulfill the great commandment of the Lord, congregations need to support the needy and should appropriately discipline the members who are not effective in the use of the talents. I think, enhancing the use of the talents in the congregations helps them to wait for the second coming of the Lord diligently.

²⁷⁶ South west synod, *Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus South West Synod, the Rule and Regulation Hand Book* (Arba Minch: South West Synod, 2015), 16, 56.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, based on the exegetical and empirical analysis and the findings of theological and biblical problems of the congregations in the SWS in the previous chapters, I will recommend some important points which might help to enhance the use of the talents of the congregations, and I will describe a concluding remark.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Integrating Use of Talents in the Curriculum of Theological Institutions

‘Use your talents’ as a subject in the theological institutions is suggested as one of the possible ways to maximize the use of the talents in the congregations of the SWS. Since pastors and evangelists have a key role of teaching and leading the congregations, it is very important to awake them by teaching the theological importance of the responsible use of talents as an essential and integral part of Christian life for the disciples of Jesus Christ while awaiting the second coming of Christ.

The subject of use of the talents should include the interpretation and exegesis of the parable about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 in order to understand it appropriately. In addition, the theological schools must train pastors and evangelists thoroughly regarding how justification relates to sanctification or how salvation encompasses both the spiritual and physical aspects of humans (about salvation by faith and the theological understanding of work). This means a teaching about the social, economic and political responsibility of the Christian. As I indicated in the findings of this research, evangelism or mission can be integrated with the use of the talents. Thus, the integration of evangelism/ mission with the use of the talents (Diaconal work) should also be part of the subject of use of the talents. At the end, teaching the pastors and evangelists how to organize the congregation members according to their talents in order to develop the community should also be a part of the topic.

Hence it seems to me very urgent to incorporate the use of the talents as a subject in the curriculum of the theological institutions.

5.2.2 Training and Teaching should be given in the Congregations

The congregations should be taught in Sunday worship programs that they are potentially rich with talents. Moreover, the theological significance of using talents and the accountability in the end time for those who neglect to work on them should be preached or taught to the pastors and the congregation leaders. Likewise, well-planned biblical teachings and set up bible studies should also be designed to train each member of the congregations in the use of the talents.

On the other hand, use of the talents should be integrated in the confirmation teachings of the congregations. Moreover, teaching through experience sharing from well experienced congregations or organizations is very important to enhance the use of talents.

Finally, the theological understanding of helping the needy could be emphasized more strongly. Theoretically, it is considered in the constitution as well as in the liturgy, but practically it is not implemented well. Therefore, the congregations should thoroughly be taught to understand the theological message of helping the needy and how to work for social justice.

5.2.3 Work on the South West Synod Constitution and Structure

Generally, the objective of the church discipline is not to avoid or to disappoint the believers. Its aim is to correct and to teach the church member to enhance their life and ministry. Based on this frame, the constitution of the SWS should briefly state how to discipline the members who are reluctant in the use of the talents.

In some of the congregations, pastors are not exemplary in their moral life, and some have a lack of theological understanding. Thus, in these congregations pastors become the stumbling block of implementing use of the talents. In this case, as it is stated in the constitution, calling the pastor to the congregations should be structurally worked from the synod to the congregation in order to enhance the use of the talents in the congregation.

On the other hand, in order to implement use of the talents structurally, a “Use your talent committee” should be merged in the structure of the church. In fact, there is a development committee in the structure, but this committee is established to enhance the economy of the church (income generating activities). This committee is not intended to serve the whole person. Therefore, it seems logical to substitute the ‘Use your talent committee’ for the development committee.

5.3 Conclusion

My question of research for this thesis was: “What is the use of talents according to Matthew 25:14-30? And why are the congregations of the SWS not efficient in using talents for social and economic transformation of the community?” Through interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30, I identified the historical and social setting of the first century A. D. in order to explain what the parable about the talents meant originally, and I expounded the theological meanings of the text. In general, the interpretation of the text exposed the responsibility of the individual disciple to invest his gifts for the growth of the kingdom of God and the reward that follows; likewise, the accountability of the ignorant servant and his punishment at present and in the end time was displayed.

In addition to that, by doing the field research, I have assessed how the congregations of the SWS understand and practice the parable about the talents. Accordingly the congregations in the SWS have some limitations in understanding the use of the talents. In this regard the understanding of salvation only in terms of liberation of souls made the use of talents inefficient. Such a perception was caused by the initial evangelism approach made to the congregations. Thus, the congregations are inefficient in helping the needy. In addition, the prevailing of the so called prosperity gospel which focuses on the self- blessing could affect the accomplishment of the great commandment.

Therefore, in order to find an appropriate use of the parable about the talents to the congregations in the SWS, I analyzed the theological and biblical understanding of the text which I found in doing the exegesis with the perception and practice of the use of talents in the congregations in the SWS. Accordingly I found that the understanding of the monetary value of the talent, and the master slave relation in the text are different from the congregations’ historical setting. Likewise,

there have been theological misunderstandings and practices regarding the word “gain” and a lack of perception in the congregations of those not using talents as being disobedient. Therefore, congregations discipline their members because of other sins, but there is no discipline for the ignorant members who do not use their talents.

Finally, based on the exegesis, the empirical research and the findings of the theological and biblical problems of the use of the talents, I have described recommendations to maximize the use of the talents in the congregations of the SWS. Thus, the ‘Use your talents’ should be given as a subject in the bible schools and seminaries, and the pastors, evangelists and congregation leaders should be trained how to use talents. At the end, in order to institutionalize the use of the talents, the constitution of the SWS and its structure should be revised in terms of use of the talents.

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List of informants

No	Code	Date	Place	Age	Sex	Function
1	Informant 1	July 4, 2018	Arba Minch	47	M	DASSC Director
2	Informant 2	July 5, 2018	Arba Minch	29	M	DMT Director
3	Informant 3	July 1, 2017	Arba Minch	48	M	SWS Ex. Secretary
4	Informant 4	July 1, 2018	Arba Minch	45	M	ED Director
5	Informant 5	July 3, 2018	Arba Minch	44	M	Finance Director
6	Informant 6	July 13, 2018	Arba Minch	36	F	Bible School Teacher
7	Informant 7	July 15, 2018	Arba Minch	49	M	Seminary Teacher
8	Informant 8	July 11, 2018	Arba Minch	47	M	Pastor
9	Informant 9	July 15, 2018	Arba Minch	39	M	Seminary Teacher
10	Informant 10	July 9, 2018	Arba Minch	46	M	Pastor
11	Informant 11	July 12 , 2018	Arba Minch	37	M	Church Leader