

The Olivet Discourse Part 2c - Christendom: the Talents

by C.H. Mackintosh

The sermon explores the divine nature of ministry and the responsibilities of believers in anticipation of Christ's return.

Scripture: Matthew 25:14, Luke 19:12, Acts 1:24, Acts 6:1, Acts 14:23, Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 12:18, Ephesians 4:7, 1 Timothy 1:12, 2 Timothy 4:1

Topics: "Divine Appointment", "Christian Ministry"

Description

C.H. Mackintosh preaches on the importance of divine appointment and ability in ministry, emphasizing that only Christ can call and equip individuals for His work. He highlights the need for ministry to be carried out with the awareness of the Lord's return, as seen in the parables of the talents and the ten servants. Mackintosh stresses that ministry, whether inside the house of God or in the world, must be rooted in divine appointment and divine ability, as shown throughout the Scriptures.

Transcript

Matthew 25:14-30.

It only remains for us now to consider that portion of our Lord's discourse in which He again takes up the deeply solemn subject of ministerial responsibility during the time of His absence. That this stands closely connected with the hope of His coming is evident from the fact that having summed up the parable of the ten virgins with these most weighty words, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour". He goes on to say, "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods".

There is a material difference between the parable of the talents and that of the servant in chapter 24:45-51. In the latter, we have ministry inside the house. In the former, on the other hand, we have ministry abroad in the world. But in each we find the grand foundation of all ministry, namely, the gift and authority of Christ. "He called His own servants, and delivered unto them His goods". The servants are His, and the goods are His. No one but the Lord Christ can put a man into the ministry, as none but He can impart spiritual gift. It is utterly impossible for any one to be a minister of Christ unless He calls him and fits him for the work. This is so plain as not to admit of a single question. A man may be a minister of religion; he may preach the doctrines of the gospel, and teach theology; but a minister of Christ he cannot

possibly be unless Christ calls him to, and gifts him for, the work. If it be a question of ministry inside the house, it is "whom his lord hath made ruler over his house". And if it be a question of ministry abroad in the world, we are told that "He called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods".

This great root-principle of ministry is powerfully embodied in these words of one of the greatest ministers that ever lived, when he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Timothy 1:12). Thus it must be in every case, whatever the measure, character, or sphere of ministry. The Lord Christ alone can put any one into the ministry, and enable him to fulfil it. If it be not this, it will be either a man putting himself into the ministry, or his fellow man doing it, both of which are alike opposed to the mind of God, and to all the principles of the true ministry as taught in the Word. If we are to be guided by Scripture, we must see that all ministry in or out of the house must be by divine appointment and divine ability. If it be not thus, it is worse than worthless. A man may set himself up as a minister, or he may be set by his fellows; but it is all utterly vain. It is not from Heaven - it is not of God - it is not by Jesus Christ; and, in the sequel, it will be made manifest and judged as a most horrible and daring usurpation.

It is important that the Christian reader should thoroughly seize this grand principle of ministry. It is as simple as it is solemn. Moreover, that it rests on a basis truly divine cannot be questioned by any one who bows down - as every Christian ought - with unqualified and absolute submission, to the authority of the divine Word. Let the reader take his Bible, and read carefully every line therein which bears on the subject of ministry. If he turns to the parable of the house-steward, he will read, "Whom his lord hath made ruler". He does not make himself ruler; neither is he appointed by his fellows. The appointment is divine.

So, also, in the parable of the talents, the master calls his own servants, and delivers unto them his goods. The call and the equipment are divine.

We have another aspect of the same truth in Luke 19. "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said to them, Occupy till I come". The difference between Luke and Matthew appears to be this: in the former, human responsibility; in the latter, divine sovereignty is prominent. But in both the great root-principle is distinctly maintained and unanswerably established, namely, that all ministry is by divine appointment.

The same truth meets us in the Acts of the Apostles. When one was to be appointed to fill the place of Judas, the appeal is made to Jehovah, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, show whether of these two Thou has chosen; that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship".

Even where it is a question of local charge, as of deacons in chapter 6, or of elders in chapter 14, it is by direct apostolic appointment. In other words, it is divine. A man could not appoint himself to a deaconship, much less to an eldership. In the case of deacons, inasmuch as they were to take charge of the people's property, these latter were, in the grace and lovely moral order of the Spirit, permitted to select men in whom they could confide; but the appointment was divine, whether of deacons or elders. Thus, whether it be a question of gift or of local charge, all rests on a purely divine basis. This is the all-important point.

If we turn to the Epistles, the same great truth shines in full and undimmed lustre before us. Thus, at the opening of Romans 12, we read, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members

have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us", etc. In 1 Corinthians 12, verse 18, we read, "But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, according as it has pleased Him". And in verse 28, "God has set certain in the assembly, first, apostles", etc. So also in Ephesians 4, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ".

All these Scriptures, and many more that might be quoted, go to establish the truth which we desire to impress upon our readers, namely, that ministry in all its departments, is divine - is of God - is from Heaven - is by Jesus Christ. There is no such thing in the New Testament as human authority to minister in the Church of God. Turn where we may, throughout its sacred pages, and we find only the same blessed doctrine as is contained in that one brief sentence in our parable, "He called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods". The whole New Testament doctrine of ministry is embodied here; and we earnestly entreat the Christian reader to let this doctrine take full possession of his soul, and exert its full sway over his conduct, course and character¹.

It may perhaps be asked, "Is there no adaptation of the vessel to the ministerial gift deposited therein?" Unquestionably there is; and this very adaptation is distinctly presented in the words of our parable, "Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability".

This point is deeply interesting, and must never be lost sight of. The Lord knows what use He means to make of a man. He knows the character of gift which He purposes to deposit in the vessel, and He shapes the vessel and molds the man accordingly. We cannot doubt that Paul was a vessel specially formed of God for the place he was afterwards to fill, and the work he had to do. And so in every case. If God designs a man to be a public speaker, He gives him lungs, He gives him a voice, He gives him a physical constitution adapted to the work which He designs him to do. The gift is from God; but there is always the most distinct reference to the ability of the man.

If this be lost sight of, our apprehension of the true character of ministry will be defective. We must never forget two things - the divine gift, and the human vessel in which the gift is deposited. There is the sovereignty of God, and the responsibility of man. How perfect and how beautiful are all the ways of God! But alas! man mars everything, and the touch of the human finger only dims the lustre of divine workmanship. Still, let us never forget that ministry is divine in its source, nature, power, and object. If the reader rises from this paper convinced in heart and soul of this grand truth, we have so far gained our object in penning it.

What has all this subject of ministry to do with the Lord's coming? Much every way. Our blessed Lord introduces the subject again and again in His discourse on the mount of Olives. And this entire discourse is a reply to the disciples' question, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the age"? Is not His coming the great prominent point of the discourse? Unquestionably. And the next prominent theme is ministry. In the parable of the servant made ruler over the household, how is he to serve? In view of his Lord's return. The ministry is linked to the departure and return of the Master. It stands between, and is to be characterized by, these two grand events. And what is it that leads to failure in the ministry? Losing sight of the Lord's return. The evil servant says in his heart, "My Lord delays to come", and, as a consequence, "he begins to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken".

So also in the parable of the talents. The solemn, soul-stirring word is "Occupy till I come". In short, we learn that ministry, whether in the house of God or abroad in the world, is to be carried on in full view of the

Lord's return. "After a long time the lord of those servants comes and reckons with them". All the servants are to keep continually before their minds the solemn fact that there is a reckoning time coming. This will regulate their thoughts and feelings as to every branch of their ministry. Harken to the weighty words in which one servant seeks to animate another, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

Does not this touching and weighty passage show how intimately the subject of ministry stands connected with the Lord's coming? The blessed apostle carried on his work, fulfilled his ministry, and discharged his holy responsibilities in full view of "that day". He looked forward, and still looks, to that solemn, glorious occasion when the Righteous Judge shall place on his brow "the crown of righteousness". And, with such affecting sweetness, he adds, "not only to me, but also to all who love His appearing". This is peculiarly touching. There will be a crown of righteousness in "that day", not merely for the gifted, laborious, and devoted Paul, but for every one that loves the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Lord be praised for such words! May they stir up our hearts, not only to love the appearing of our Lord, but also to serve with more intense and whole-hearted devotedness in view of that glorious day! That the two things are very closely connected we may see in the sequel of the parable of the talents.

We can do little more than quote the words of our Lord. When the servants had received the talents, we read, "Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants comes, and reckons with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst me five talents; behold I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

It is interesting and instructive to note the difference between the parable of the talents as given in Matthew, and the parable of the ten servants, in Luke 19. In the former, it is a question of divine sovereignty; in the latter, of human responsibility. In that, each receives a like sum; in this, one receives five, another two, according to the master's will. Then, when the day of reckoning comes, we find in Luke a definite reward according to the work; whereas, in Matthew, the word is, "I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord". They are not told what they are to have, or how many things they are to rule over. The master is sovereign both in His gifts and rewards; and the crowning point of all is, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord".

This, to a heart that loves the Lord, is beyond everything. True, there will be the ten cities and the five cities. There will be ample, distinct, and definite reward for responsibility discharged, service rendered, and work done. All will be rewarded. But above and beyond all, shines this precious word, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord". No reward can possibly come up to this. The sense of the love that breathes in these words will lead each one to cast his "crown of righteousness" at the feet of his Lord. The very crown which the righteous Judge shall give, we shall willingly cast at the feet of a loving Saviour and Lord. One smile from Him will touch the heart far more deeply and powerfully than the brightest crown that could be placed on the brow.

Who would not work? Who hid his lord's money? Who proved to be "a wicked and slothful servant"? The man who did not know his master's heart - his master's character - his master's love. "Then he who had received the one talent, came and said, Lord, I know thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His Lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming, I should have received mine own with interest. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

How awfully solemn! How striking the contrast between the two servants! One knows, loves, trusts, and serves his Lord². The other belies, fears, distrusts, and does nothing. The one enters into the joy of his lord, the other is cast out into outer darkness, into the place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. How solemn! How soul-subduing is all this! And when does it all come out? When the Master returns!

1 We do not, by any means, restrict the application of the "talents" to direct, specific, spiritual gifts. We believe the parable takes in the wide range of Christian service, just as the parable of the ten virgins takes in the wide range of Christian profession.

2 We may add, in connection with the foregoing remarks on ministry, that every Christian has his or her own specific place and work to do. All are solemnly responsible to the Lord to know their place and fill it, to know their work and do it. This is a plain practical truth, and most fully confirmed by the principle upon which we have been insisting, namely, that all ministry and all work must be received from the Master's hand, carried on under His eye, and in full view of His coming.

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