16  The Parable Of The Unprofitable Servant

Introduction
The Parable Itself

Jesus teaches:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. (15) And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (16) Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. (17) And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. (18) But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. (19) After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. (20) And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. (21) His lord said unto him, Well done, thou 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. (22) He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. (23) 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. (24) Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed [sown]: (25) And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. (26) 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 strawed: (27) Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with interest. (28) Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. (29) For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. (30) And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 25:14-30 KJV.)

A More Accurate Name

This parable could also be called the Parable of the Servant who Produces Nothing. Non-productivity is the main point and the focus of Jesus’ most important warning. However, sometimes we call it the Parable of the Talents. A better label, and which is used sometimes, is the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. For this discussion, we will use that familiar label so as to keep the point of the parable in sharper focus. The term talents in the normal name “Parable of the Talents” has taken an unwarranted meaning that this is a parable of varying rewards based on varying talents or abilities. Such a notion is contrary to the thrust of the parable. Thus, it is preferable to call this the Parable of the Unprofitable Ser-
Synopsis Of Parable Of The Unprofitable Servant

In this parable, Jesus talks about three servants who were each given some gold (or talents). Two invested wisely. One not at all. The latter had nothing to show for having been given the gold.

Was the unwise servant merely punished, but made it to heaven? No. In Matt. 25:14 et seq., Jesus says “now throw this useless [unprofitable KJV] servant into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 25:30 NIV). Jesus in Matthew 13:42, 49-50 identifies this place of “weeping and gnashing” as the “fiery furnace” where the wicked are sent by the angels in the day of judgment when Christ returns.

This parable is straightforward and easy to dissect. The three servants are said to be three servants of the Lord. One produces nothing with the treasures entrusted to him. Two produce varying amounts and receive varying rewards. The one who produces nothing receives no reward and is sent to hell.

Hence the primary moral of the story is very clear. A servant of the Lord Jesus must produce some fruit or otherwise he will be sent to hell. It is exactly as Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:19: “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” As Chrysostum (349-407 A.D.) explained, it is not only sinners who go to “outer darkness, but he also who does no good.” (Wordsworth:134.)

Finally, this parable also means that all Christians who are productive (in the way Jesus means) are rewarded in correspondence with the fruit they produced.
This is probably the easiest of all the parables to dissect. Yet, because it so clearly contradicts the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace, it suffers twists and turns by commentators eager to bury its meaning. Let’s now turn to see how cheap grace teachers interpret this parable so as to solve their dilemma that the Lord clearly refutes their faith-alone gospel.

What is Outer Darkness Where There Is Weeping and Gnashing Of Teeth?

Advocates of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace (e.g., Dillow and Charles Stanley) insist the place this servant is thrown outside in darkness is in heaven, not hell. This servant thrown in this place of “weeping and gnashing” supposedly remains saved. Jesus allegedly means this servant suffers merely a loss of rewards by being thrown outside.

For example, Charles Stanley insists that this “weeping and gnashing” which is “outside in darkness” is in heaven, not hell: “It certainly does not mean hell...It clearly refers to being thrown outside a building into the dark. There is no mention of pain, fire or worms.”

In arriving at such a conclusion, Stanley never discusses the Master’s words in Matthew 13:42 and 13:49-50. In them, Jesus twice calls the place of “weeping and gnashing” the “fiery furnace.” First, Jesus says in 13:42 this place is the “fiery furnace” where the angels at the time of final judgment throw those who were “ensnared” in sin. Lastly, Jesus says in 13:49-50 that this place of “weeping and gnashing” is the “fiery furnace” where the wicked are sent after separating them from the righteous. How can this place of weeping and gnashing be anything but a lost condition?

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2. Stanley’s claim also disregards God’s consistent message that in heaven there is “no more sorrow, nor crying.” (Rev. 21:4; see also, Isaiah 25:8 “God will wipe away tears from all faces”; Rev. 7:17.)
Because these two passages share implications obviously undermining Stanley’s doctrine, he ignores them.

For had Stanley discussed these verses, Jesus would refute faith alone. Rather than lose the Cheap Grace Gospel, Stanley preferred abandoning Jesus’ intention behind His warnings. Thus, Jesus and His meaning are sacrificed to the pyre of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. As Bonhoeffer said of the modern cheap grace gospel: “Jesus is misunderstood anew, and again and again put to death.” (Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center (1960) at 39.)

Can this place of darkness outside really be in heaven? Stanley insists it can. He explains:

To be in the outer darkness is to be in the kingdom of God but outside the circle of men and women whose faithfulness on this earth earned them a special rank or position of authority. (Stanley, Eternal Security, supra, at 126.)

But Stanley is again contradicting Scripture in his desperate attempt to hold onto the faith-alone gospel which this simple parable refutes.

For example, in Revelation 22:23, we hear of the New Jerusalem that needs no sun because the “glory” of God and Jesus are the “light” thereof. The New Jerusalem, importantly, is the picture of the kingdom of God. This is thus the same as heaven. Then Revelation says there shall be no “night” there. And there “shall no wise enter into it...[except] they who are written in the lamb’s book of life.” Rev. 21:27. This thus says only those written in the book of life can enter this city. And there is no darkness there. Stanley fails on his claim there is darkness anywhere in heaven. God says there is no night there. Instead, God’s glory provides light throughout.

What about this place outside? Can this really mean inside heaven but outside a ruling group of authority as Stanley claims? Clearly the answer is no.
Revelation 22:15 says “outside” are the “dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

These outside are almost verbatim listed again in Revelation 21:8. Listen to their fate:

But the fearful [cowards] and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev. 21:8 KJV.)

Likewise Revelation 20:15 says: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Then Revelation 20:10 says the lake of fire is a place of torment for Satan: “And the devil... was cast into the lake of fire...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (KJV).

Thus, those outside in darkness in Revelation are going to hell’s fire.

Furthermore, what could be more clear than Matthew 8:12 that outside heaven are those who suffer weeping and gnashing?

And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: (12) but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 8:11-12 ASV.)

3. The parallel in Luke 13:28 (NKJV) is slightly different: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.”
Synopsis Of Parable Of The Unprofitable Servant

Those “sons of the kingdom” who have fallen into sin are thus thrown into “outer darkness” which is clearly outside the “kingdom of heaven.”

Thus, Jesus equates being thrust out of the kingdom of God with this place of weeping and gnashing of teeth in Matthew 8:11-12. And in the kingdom of heaven is Abraham and all the prophets. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven must mean heaven. It is inescapable that the place of weeping and gnashing must be outside heaven. It can only be a place for those destined to hell.

Thus, honest evangelical scholars admit Jesus’ point. For example, Russell in his dictionary writes: “The Greek noun [for gnashing] occurs repeatedly in the sayings of Jesus…concerning the remorseful gnashing of teeth by those excluded from heaven.”

4. Notice that these “sons of the kingdom” are in “heaven” when thrown “outside” heaven. Jesus says they are “thrust out” of the “kingdom of heaven.” (Cf. Luke 13:28 in footnote 3 supra.) Jesus is thus rejecting eternal security. This is clear here as well as by comparing this to the wedding guest who is thrust outside of heaven in the Parable of the Wedding Garment. (Matt. 22:1-13.) Jesus calls the wedding guest a “friend” who has accepted the invitation, and makes it all the way to the banquet. Yet, just before the celebration begins, it is noted the “friend” is lacking a “proper robe.” Jesus says this “friend” is then thrust outside in darkness, thus excluded from what obviously is heaven. This “friend” who accepted the invitation but otherwise made no preparations to be ready was to be torn apart in a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Thus, sons of the kingdom in Matthew 8:11-12 can mean Christians because Christians can be removed from the banquet-exam inside heaven. This supports regarding “sons of the kingdom” in Matthew 8:12 as a stock phrase of Jesus to mean saved individuals, including Christians. Further proof is that the “good seed” in the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13:38 are likewise “sons of the kingdom.” At the judgment, in that parable, those who are such sons (and have obviously not fallen into condemnation) are preserved in the final judgment. Now note once more that in Matthew 8:12, these same “sons of the kingdom” (hoi huioi tes basileias) are thrown into this “outer darkness” because they have fallen into sin or teach lawless doctrine. Thus, repeatedly Jesus describes “sons of the kingdom” as including believers who are thrust outside of heaven for various faults.
How do Stanley and Dillow in *Reign of the Servant Kings* deal with these countervailing passages in Matthew 8:11-12, and 13:42, 49-50? They ignore them. They never discuss them. In other words, the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace simply asserts a place of darkness outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth is in heaven. The only justification of this is that otherwise Jesus refutes the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. These two authors love this other gospel even though it is contrary to what Jesus taught. Hence, Jesus’ true gospel is ignored. No contrary evidence is admissible to test the Gospel of Cheap Grace. Why? Because the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace knows it has no substance if it were properly held up to Jesus’ words. Cheap grace proponents prefer a fable that it has duped everyone to believe. They must regard this false gospel much easier to sell to the public than the real truth of Jesus’ costly-grace gospel.

Synopsis Of Parable Of The Unprofitable Servant

To be absolutely precise in our analysis, let’s create a table summary of the verses at odds with Stanley and Dillow to see what they both have overlooked:

TABLE 1. Place Outside In Darkness Where There Is Weeping And Gnashing Of Teeth: Is This Heaven Or Hell?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Outside”</th>
<th>“Darkness”</th>
<th>“Weeping &amp; Gnashing”</th>
</tr>
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Why is such a preposterous notion put forth by Stanley and Dillow that weeping and gnashing outside in darkness signifies heaven? Because in seven of the nine parables where Jesus warns of weeping and gnashing of teeth, Jesus is clearly warning Christians. Not hypocrites. Not mere professors. But real servants. Real Christians. Among the seven are this Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. The warning here is to a servant. Other parables are just as clear — sometimes even clearer — that Christians are in view in these weeping and gnashing parables.
Numerous Other Weeping & Gnashing Parables Aimed At Christians

Dillow in *Reign of the Servant Kings* acknowledges the many parables of Jesus that discuss “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” These parables typically threaten such grief on servants of His in the parables who are to be thrown “outside in darkness.” These servants’ errors were:

- not having interest on their talents given by God. Matt. 25:14 ff.
- failing to have charity to the brothers. Matt. 25:31 ff.
- being once virgins who later let their oil burn out. Matt. 25:1 ff.
- being once a “friend” who accepts the “call” and is even seated at the great banquet but when the time for examination comes they lack a “proper robe.” Matt. 22:2 ff.

Stanley and Dillow both confess it is too obvious to deny that the above weeping and gnashing parables are Jesus’ threat to Christians of this place for misbehavior.

The problem that Stanley and Dillow are hoping to solve by insisting this place is in heaven is obvious. Otherwise, Jesus is warning Christians *hell* (weeping and gnashing outside in darkness) if they have the failings of the “unprofitable servant. If they are an “abusive servant.” If they are “goats” who call Him Lord but do not provide food, clothing and water to the brethren.

Why did Dillow and Stanley make this admission? Because of the overwhelming weight of textual evidence that the weeping and gnashing parables are aimed at Christians. This is what forced Dillow and Stanley into the above preposterous assertion to save the gospel of cheap grace. They both amazingly insist a place outside in darkness where there is weeping and gnashing is *inside* heaven. Oh my! What man cannot make himself believe when he will not listen to *all* of Jesus’ words!
MacArthur Tries To Say The Servant Never Was A Christian Servant

Apparently lacking familiarity with this overwhelming weight of evidence that these weeping and gnashing parables apply to Christians, MacArthur is going to insist this servant in the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant was never a Christian. Why? Because MacArthur admits this servant was lost in the end. The weeping and gnashing outside in darkness is clearly a reference to judgment in hell. However, why should his fate in hell tell us this person was never a Christian? Because MacArthur knows the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace says a Christian can never become lost as long as they once truly believed. In other words, faith alone doctrine is used to block any meaning from Jesus that is to the contrary!

However, Jesus’ Gospel says that a servant who does not produce on talents given is sent to hell and those servants who do produce are given proportionate rewards. Jesus must be wanting to warn servants to be productive in some manner. There is no textual reason to say the unproductive servant is a nonbeliever while the other two are believers. It is only circular presupposition in the validity of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace that is used to force such a reading on the text.

Let’s hear MacArthur’s argument to see this exposed. John MacArthur in his Study Bible (1997) attempts to spin this passage in a way that does not conflict with the Modern Cheap Grace Gospel. He says that the three servants are “professing” believers. (Page 1441). That is not accurate. There is a purpose in MacArthur’s misdescription. MacArthur wants to say later that the unproductive servant was never a true believer but a mere profess-or. Therefore, MacArthur is planting a false seed that we should think this ‘servant’ was always lost. However, Jesus gave all three the same designation: servants.

Next, MacArthur concedes that the master in the story is Christ.
With these premises set forth, let’s return to the servant versus professing believer issue. Why would Jesus call someone a servant who professes to believe but is not a believer? Wouldn’t Jesus call him an unbeliever? This way we would know the unbelief is why he was unproductive. By calling him a servant, Jesus is making us think that he was not true to his calling as a servant rather that he was not true to his belief as a Christian. Jesus used the wrong terminology if he had the meaning that MacArthur is obviously trying to draw us to accept.

Next, MacArthur says the parable is about “faithfulness,” and even says the “parable suggests that all who are faithful will be fruitful to some degree.” This is a non-sequitur. This conclusion relies upon concluding the first servant is not a true believer. Yet, MacArthur never has proven that is textually possible.

Meanwhile, this claim that the parable is about faithfulness allows MacArthur to perform another slight of hand. Having interjected the word ‘faithful’ in his spin, which at first he uses to mean loyal, MacArthur next switches this so it means ‘full of faith.’ MacArthur concludes: “the fruitless man is unmasked as a hypocrite and utterly destroyed.” MacArthur had previously laid the unsubstantiated groundwork to suggest Jesus was saying the unprofitable servant lacked true faith. With that MacArthur now is deducing a fruitless person necessarily means he has been exposed as a non-believer. A hypocrite. He supposedly merely professed faith, but he was not faithful in the sense of not being full of faith. Hence MacArthur wants us to think the servant was never a believer.

Do Christians really not recognize what MacArthur has done? Our long conditioning to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace just accepts this. We never critically examine arguments. This is because we too are hunting for support for our preconceived views of faith alone. We want the easy way. Independent critical thought which questions that assumption is dissuaded. If the result of reading Jesus’ words literally
defects from the cheap grace gospel, the reaction is not curiosity and self-examination. Instead, it results in twisting and turning Jesus’ words. What MacArthur has done is itself shocking: he has stripped the passage of its true meaning and given us a substitute meaning that satisfies presuppositions about the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. It is seen as compatible with faith alone — the very doctrine the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant directly refutes.

**Conclusion**

In the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant, Jesus gave three servants different treasures of the kingdom to use productively. Two do so and one does not. The one who does nothing is condemned to hell. It is that simple.

The Parable of the Unprofitable Servant is not about professing faith and lacking fruit thereby, leading to your exposure as a false believer. The parable is not about a false professor somehow tricking God into giving him some treasure of heaven to waste. That doctrinal construct is highly belabored and strained. Such a view is simply a mental overlay solely designed to hold onto the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. To hold onto faith-alone doctrine. Its intent is obvious: it wants to justify rejecting Jesus’ words whenever on their face they refute the faith alone paradigm.

Instead, this parable is one of the most blatant contradictions of cheap grace from the lips of Jesus. For Jesus says, as He does in many other passages, that the fruitless Christian will not be saved. This is in the Metaphor of the Vine (John 15:1-6); the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:8 ff); the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, etc. It fits precisely the non-parabolic and direct statement of our Lord in Matthew 7:19:

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Matt 7:19.)
The Parable Of The Unprofitable Servant

The servant with no good fruit on his talent is eventually cast into the fire of hell.

Could Jesus be any more blunt in a parable?

Frederick Lisso, the German evangelical minister, explains it likewise, citing Calvin in support. The servant who is lost is the one who did not use the treasure given by the Lord in a “conscientious and faithful” manner. (Lisco, Frederick. *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. from German by Rev. Fairbairn) (Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 1850) at 197.) The other two servants knew the “obligation under which they lie to serve” their Lord, but only “if they acted agreeably to the will of the Lord.” *Id.* Calvin says that Jesus’ gives the parable to believers to “stir themselves up to the work of a pure and holy life.” *Id.*, at 202. Also, Lisco emphasizes it was not the “sinful” use of the talent, but instead the “slothful indifference” toward it that caused the unprofitable servant to suffer his fate. *Id.*, at 198. God calls him a “wicked and slothful servant.” *Id.*, at 200. His fate is clear. He is brought to the “final judgment” which involves the “strictest justice.” *Id.*, at 201. The slothful servant for his “negligence and shortcoming” will suffer “everlasting pain.” *Id.* This proves the “necessity and importance of works of love....” *Id.*, at 202.

Hence, Jesus’ warning to those who trust in faith alone to their detriment (by not having completed works to show at judgment) is unmistakable. Your doctrine is false.

Will you have any excuse for having no fruit on the talents of gold God gives you? Will you be able to argue you could believe no works were necessary to be saved?

At the final judgment seat, you will not be able to point fingers at John MacArthur, Stanley, Dillow or Paul, and blame them. Jesus was too blunt in the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant as well as in Matthew 7:19. Jesus will grill you on why you did not take His words in their plain sense. You will have no answer. He told you all along He was your “Sole Teacher.” (Matt. 23:8-11.) And your sole teacher told you that the unprofitable servant goes to hell. There will be no more excuses then. ‘He who has ears to hear let him hear.’