

A Tale of Two Parables

Introduction

Parables are short, allegorical stories, which are used to make a moral or spiritual point. Parables tend to be quite *effective* at getting their points across – as they place their lessons in very “real world” environments; so to speak.

Another item to note about parables is that many people are under the impression that parables only exist in the New Testament – i.e., some people believe that parables were only used by Jesus. However, that is not the case – parables were also used in the Old Testament.

Here are seven examples, of some of the more well-known Scriptural parables:

- The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37
- The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32
- The Poor Man's Ewe Lamb: 2 Samuel 12:1-18
- The Sower: Luke 8:4-8
- The Vineyard Yielding Wild Grapes: Isaiah 5:1-7
- The Ten Virgins: Matthew 25:1-13
- And, my personal favorite: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Luke 18:9-14

The following sections contain two *other* famous parables, which will be described further. Please compare those two parables – and see if anything “catches your eye” between them.

The Parable of The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 (ESV):

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I

choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

The Parable of The Ten Minas

Luke 19:11-27 (ESV):

¹¹ As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹² He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' ¹⁹ And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' ²⁰ Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' ²² He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' ²⁵ And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' ²⁶ 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'"

Is There a Contradiction Here?

At first glance, it may appear that the two parables above "contradict" each other. Basically, the "workers in the vineyard" parable states that all of the workers received the same reward – 1 denarius – no matter how many hours they worked in the vineyard. However, the "Ten minas" parable states that the servants received different rewards – depending on what each servant did with his mina.

So, the question is: what **conclusion** are we supposed to draw, from the above parables? Basically, will all Christians receive the same reward, no matter *what* we do – or will we receive different rewards, depending on our *actions*? Let's take a look at the parables further, to see if we can resolve this apparent contradiction.

Analysis of "The Workers in the Vineyard"

From what I can see, the following analogies are being made in the "Workers in the Vineyard" parable:

- The master of the vineyard is Jesus.
- The workers in the vineyard are people whom Jesus is "calling" to follow him.

- The fact that the workers are called at different “hours of the day” refers to the fact that people are called at different times in their lives. In other words, some people are called very early in life – and therefore, they spend almost all of their lifetimes following Jesus. However, other people are called very late in life – and as a result, they spend a relatively small percentage of their lifetimes following Jesus.

- All of the workers in the parable end the day working in the vineyard. In other words, **none** of those workers “quit” working, *before* the day ended. This represents Christians who end their lives following Jesus.

- Finally, the denarius given to each worker symbolizes salvation – i.e., being granted everlasting life, in the Kingdom of God.

In other words, the parable appears to say the following: Some people will be called to follow Jesus very early in their lives, while other people will be called much later in life. However, as long as a person ends his life following Jesus, then he will receive *everlasting life* in the Kingdom.

So, in that respect, all Christians will receive the **same** reward. That is, we will all receive everlasting life, no matter how long we were Christians – as long as we **maintain our faith** until the end of our lives.

Analysis of “The Ten Minas”

It appears to me that “The Ten Minas” parable makes the following comparisons:

- The nobleman represents Jesus.
- The kingdom that the nobleman receives represents authority to rule over the kingdom of God, on the earth.
- The servants of the nobleman refer to followers of Jesus, during this age.
- The minas that the nobleman gave to his servants refer to the “abilities”, or “talents”, that each person has.
- The period of time in which the nobleman visits the “far country” refers to the time that Jesus remains in heaven – i.e., from the time he ascended to heaven, until the time that he returns to the earth, at the end of this age.

In other words, this parable refers to the fact that each of us has our own God-given talents – some of us are gifted in serving others, others in teaching, some in generosity, others in pastoring, etc. This “God-given talents” analogy can be easily seen in the “parallel version” of this parable, in Matthew 25:14-30 – because in that parallel version, the coins that the master gives his servants are actually called talents.

However, no matter what our individual talents are, God wants us to develop them – i.e., He wants us to **grow spiritually**. Of course, some people do grow spiritually – some people are very *dedicated* to following God; and are constantly *striving* to obey Him more closely every day. However, some *other* people are simply not interested in growing spiritually. That is, some people are unwilling to go through the difficult process of “discipleship” – the process of *altering our behavior*, in order to obey God’s commands.

Overall, this parable evidently refers to the fact that our “roles”, or “authority”, in the kingdom of God will be determined – at least in part – by our **actions during this age**. Basically, people who make a very consistent, *dedicated* effort to grow spiritually during this age will be given great authority in the kingdom. In fact, those people will presumably assist Jesus in **ruling** the kingdom – as evidenced by the fact that the first two servants were given authority over cities.

However, people who refuse to make **any effort** to grow spiritually during this age will not be given *any* authority in the kingdom. This is presumably because those individuals will not have learned the necessary *discipline* to follow God – and as a result, those people will not be trustworthy to exercise authority in a responsible way.

So, in that respect, Christians will receive **different** “rewards”. In essence, our **actions** during this age will determine the amount of *authority* that we will receive in the Kingdom – and as a result, *different* individuals will receive *different* levels of authority.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the “Workers in the Vineyard” parable refers to salvation – i.e., to receiving everlasting life – while the “Ten Minas” parable refers to the amount of authority that people will receive in the Kingdom. As a result, those parables do not “contradict” each other – because they are referring to two *different* items. That is, all Christians will have the **same** salvation – but they will have **different** levels of authority in the Kingdom.

Of course, there are several *other* important points to consider about those two parables as well. Here are two *specific* items to consider:

First, people who have been Christians for a very long time can sometimes “resent” people who become followers very late in life. For example, people who have dedicated their **entire lives** to following God may feel “cheated”, when they hear about someone who spent most of his life in a sinful lifestyle, but finally devoted himself to God during his last few years. It appears to me that the “Workers in the Vineyard” parable tells us that we should not resent people who become followers late in life. On the contrary – I think that we should **rejoice** whenever *anyone* devotes himself to God – no matter how late in life it occurs. After all, Jesus himself told us: “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” This idea is also expressed in the “Prodigal Son” parable.

Second, some people assert that our actions in this age do not make any difference whatsoever. Basically, some people are **solely** focused on the fact that we cannot “earn” *salvation* (as we are all sinners) – and because of that, those people believe that it is completely “worthless” for us to try to follow God **at all**. (This line of thinking is usually tied in with the “eternal security” doctrine.) The “Ten Minas” parable demonstrates very clearly that it is important for us to **follow** God (and Jesus) – not only because our actions determine our *authority* in the Kingdom, but also because Jesus cares about us following Him! After all, Jesus explicitly asked his followers: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” Similarly, Jesus stated: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” So, the Ten Minas parable gives us yet another indication of the *importance* of following God and Jesus.

Hopefully these two parables will inspire you as well!