

Origen

Concerning the King Who Made a Reckoning with His Own Servants, to Whom Was Brought a Man Who Owed Ten Thousand Talents

“ Therefore I say unto you the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who wished to make a reckoning with his own servants.” Matthew 18:23 The general conception of the parable is to teach us that we should be inclined to forgive the sins committed against us by those who have wronged us, and especially if after the wrongdoing he who has done it supplicates him who has been wronged, asking forgiveness for the sins which he has committed against him. And this the parable wishes to teach us by representing that even when forgiveness has been granted by God to us of the sins in respect of which we have received remission, exaction will be demanded even after the remission, unless we forgive the sins of those who have wronged us, so that there is no longer left in us the least remembrance of the wrong that was done, but the whole heart, assisted by the spirit of forgetfulness of wrongs, which is no common virtue, forgives him who has wronged us those things which have been wickedly done against any of us by him, even treacherously. But next to the general conception of the parable, it is right to examine the whole of it more simply according to the letter, so that he who advances with care to the right investigation of each detail of the things previously written may derive profit from the examination of what is said. Now there is, as is probable, an interpretation, transcendental and hard to trace, as it is somewhat mystical, according to which, after the analogy of the parables which are interpreted by the Evangelists, one would investigate each of the details in this; as, for example, who the king was, and who the servants were, and what was the beginning of his making a reckoning, and who was the one debtor who owed many talents, and who was his wife and who his children, and what were the “all things” spoken of besides those which the king ordered to be sold in order that the debt might be paid out of his belongings, and what was meant by the going out of the man who had been forgiven the many talents, and who was the one of the servants who was found and was a debtor not to the householder, but to the man who had been forgiven, and what is meant by the number of the hundred pence, and what by the word, “He took him by the throat saying, Pay what you owe,” and what is the prison into which he who had been forgiven all the talents went out and cast his fellow-servant, and who were the fellow-servants who were grieved and told the lord all that had been done, and who were the tormentors to whom he who had cast his fellow-servant into prison was delivered, and how he who was delivered to the tormentors paid all that was due, so that he no longer owed anything. But it is probable also that some other things could be added to the number by a more competent investigator, the exposition and interpretation of which I think to be beyond the power of man, and requiring the Spirit of Christ who spoke them in order that Christ may be understood as He spoke; for as “no one among men knows the things of the man, save the spirit which is in him,” and “no one knows the things of God, save the Spirit of God,” 1 Corinthians 2:11 so no one knows after God the things spoken by Christ in proverbs and parables save the Spirit of Christ, in which he who participates in Christ not only so far as He is Spirit, but in Christ as He is

Wisdom, as He is Word, would behold the things which were revealed to him in this passage. But with regard to the interpretation of the loftiest type, we make no profession; nor on the other hand with the assistance of Christ who is the Wisdom of God do we despair of apprehending the things signified in the parable; but whether it shall be the case that such things shall be dictated to us in connection with this Scripture or not, may God in Christ suggest the doing of that which is pleasing to Him, if only there be granted to us also concerning these things, the word of wisdom which is given from God through the Spirit, and the word of knowledge which is supplied according to the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:8

“The kingdom of heaven,” He says, “is likened,” Matthew 18:23 etc. But if it be likened to such a king, and one who has done such things, who must we say that it is but the Son of God? For He is the King of the heavens, and as He is absolute Wisdom and absolute Righteousness and absolute Truth, is He not so also absolute Kingdom? But it is not a kingdom of any of those below, nor of a part of those above, but of all the things above, which were called heavens. But if you enquire into the meaning of the words, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:3 you may say that Christ is theirs in so far as He is absolute Kingdom, reigning in every thought of the man who is no longer under the reign of sin which reigns in the mortal body of those who have subjected themselves to it. Romans 6:12 And if I say, reigning in every thought, I mean something like this, reigning as Righteousness and Wisdom and Truth and the rest of the virtues in him who has become a heaven, because of bearing the image of the heavenly, and in every power, whether angelic, or the rest that are named saints, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come, and who are worthy of a kingdom of such a kind. Accordingly this kingdom of heaven (when it was made “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” Romans 8:3 that for sin it might condemn sin, when God made “Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us,” 2 Corinthians 5:21 who bear the body of our sin), is likened to a certain king who is understood in relation to Jesus being united to Him, if we may dare so to speak, having more capacity towards being united and becoming entirely one with the “First-born of all creation,” Colossians 1:15 than he, who, being joined to the Lord, becomes one spirit with Him.

1 Corinthians 6:17 Now of this kingdom of the heavens which is likened unto a certain king, according to the conception of Jesus, and is united to Him, it is said by anticipation that he wished to make a reckoning with his servants. But he is about to make a reckoning with them in order that it may be manifested how each has employed the tried money of the householder and his rational coins. And the image in the parables was indeed taken from masters who made a reckoning with their own servants; but we shall understand more accurately what is signified by this part of the parable, if we fix our thought on the things done by the slaves who had administered their master's goods, and who were asked to give a reckoning concerning them. For each of them, receiving in different measure from his master's goods, has used them either for that which was right so as to increase the goods of his master, or consumed it riotously on things which he ought not, and spent profusely without judgment and without discretion that which had been put into his hands. But there are those who have wisely administered these goods and goods so great, but have lost others, and whenever they give the reckoning when the master makes a reckoning with them, there is gathered together how much loss each has incurred, and there is reckoned up how much gain each has brought, and according to the worthiness of the way in which he has administered it, he is

either honoured or punished, or in some cases the debt is forgiven, but in others the talents are taken away. Well, then, from what has been said, let us first look at the rational coins and the tried money of the householder, of which one receives more and another less, for according to the ability of each, to one are given five talents as he has the ability to administer so many, but to another two as not being able to receive the amount of the man before him, and to another one as being also inferior to the second. Matthew 25:15 Are these, then, the only differences, or are we to recognize these differences in the case of certain persons of whom the Gospel goes on to speak while there are also others besides these: In other parables also are found certain persons, as the two debtors, the one who owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty; Luke 7:41 but whether these had been entrusted with them and had administered them badly as being inferior in ability to him who had been entrusted with a talent, or had received them, we have not learned; but that they owed so much, we seem to be taught from the parable. And there are found other ten servants who were each entrusted with a pound separately. Luke 19:13 And if any one understood the varied character of the human soul and the wide differences from each other in respect of natural aptitude, or want of aptitude for more or fewer of the virtues, and for these virtues or for those, perhaps he would comprehend how each soul has come with certain coins of the householder which come to light with the full attainment of reason, and with the attention which follows the full attainment of reason, and with exercise in things that are right, or with diligence and exercise in other things, whether they be useful as pursuits, or in part useful and in part not useful, such as the opinions which are not wholly true nor wholly false.

But you will here inquire whether all men can be called servants of the king, or some are servants whom he foreknew and fore-ordained, while there are others who transact business with the servants, and are called bankers. Matthew 25:27 And in like manner you will inquire if there are those outside the number of the slaves from whom the householder declares that he will exact his own with usury, not only men alien from piety, but also some of the believers. Now the servants alone are the stewards of the Word, but the king, making a reckoning with the servants, demands from those who have borrowed from the servants, whether a hundred measures of wheat or a hundred measures of oil, Luke 16:6-7 or whatever in point of fact those who are outside of the household of the king have received; for he who owed the hundred measures of wheat or the hundred measures of oil is not found to be, according to the parable, a fellow-servant of the unjust steward, as is evident from the question— how much do you owe to my lord? Luke 16:5 But mark with me that each deed which is good or seemingly is like a gain and an increment, but a wicked deed is like a loss; and as there is a certain gain when the money is greater and another when it is less, and as there are differences of more or less, so according to the good deeds, there is as it were a valuing of gains more or less. To reckon what work is a great gain, and what a less gain, and what a least, is the prerogative of him who alone knows to investigate such things, looking at them in the light of the disposition, and the word, and the deed, and from consideration of the things which are not in our power cooperating with those that are; and so also in the case of things opposite, it is his to say what sin, when a reckoning is made with the servants, is found to be a great loss, and what is less, and what, if we may so call it, is the loss of the very last mite, Luke 12:59 or the last farthing. Matthew 5:26 The account, therefore, of the entire and whole life is exacted by that which is called

the kingdom of heaven which is likened to a king, when “we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad;” 2 Corinthians 5:10 and then when the reckoning is being made, shall there be brought into the reckoning that is made also every idle word that men shall speak, Matthew 12:36 and any cup of cold water only which one has given to drink in the name of a disciple. Matthew 10:42

And these things will take place whenever that happens which is written in Daniel, “The books were opened and the judgment was set;” Daniel 7:10 for a record, as it were, is made of all things that have been spoken and done and thought, and by divine power every hidden thing of ours shall be manifested, and everything that is covered shall be revealed, in order that when any one is found who has not “given diligence to be freed from the adversary,” he may go in succession through the hands of the magistrate, and the judge, and the attendant into the prison, until he pays the very last mite; Luke 12:58-59 but when one has given diligence to be freed from him and owes nothing to any one, and already has made the pound ten pounds or five pounds, or doubled the five talents, or made the two four, he may obtain the due recompense, entering into the joy of his Lord, either being set over all His possessions, Matthew 24:47 or hearing the word, “Have authority over ten cities,” Luke 19:17 or “Have authority over five cities.” But we think that these things are spoken of as if they required a long period of time, in order that an account may be made by us of the whole times of the earthly life, so that we might suppose that when the king makes a reckoning with each one of his many servants the matter would require so vast a period of time, until these things come to an end which have existed from the beginning of the world down to the consummation of the age, not of one age, but of many ages. But the truth is not so; for when God wished all at once to rekindle in the memories of all everything that had been done by each one throughout the whole time, in order that each might become conscious of his own doings whether good or bad, He would do it by His ineffable power. For it is not with God as with us; for if we wish to call some things to remembrance, we require sufficient time for the detailed account of what has been said by us, and to bring to our remembrance the things which we wish to remember; but if He wished to call to our memory the things which have been done in this life, in order that becoming conscious of what we have done we may apprehend for what we are punished or honoured, He could do so. But if any one disbelieves the swiftness of the power of God in regard to these matters, he has not yet had a true conception of the God who made the universe, who did not require times to make the vast creation of heaven and earth and the things in them; for, though He may seem to have made these things in six days, there is need of understanding to comprehend in what sense the words “in six days” are said, on account of this, “This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth,” Galatians 2:4 etc. Therefore it may be boldly affirmed that the season of the expected judgment does not require times, but as the resurrection is said to take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” 1 Corinthians 15:52 so I think will the judgment also be.

Next we must speak in regard to this, “ And when he had begun to reckon, there was brought unto him one which owed many talents.” Matthew 18:24 The sense of this appears to me to be as follows: The season of beginning the judgment is with the house of God, who says, as also it is written in

Ezekiel, to those who are appointed to attend to punishments, "Begin ye with My saints;" Ezekiel 9:6 and it is like "the twinkling of an eye;" but, the time of making a reckoning includes the same "twinkling," ideally apprehended, for we are not forgetful of what has been previously said of those who owe more. Wherefore it is not written, when he was making reckoning, but it is said, "When he began to reckon," there was brought, at the beginning of his making a reckoning, one who owed many talents; he had lost tens of thousands of talents, having been entrusted with great things, and having had many things committed to his care, but he had brought no gain to his master, but had lost tens of thousands so that he owed many talents; and, perhaps on this account, he owed many talents, seeing that he followed often the woman, who was sitting upon the talent of lead, whose name is wickedness. Zechariah 5:7-8 But observe here that every great sin is a loss of the talents of the master of the house, and such sins are committed by fornicators, adulterers, abusers of themselves with men, effeminate, idolaters, murderers. Perhaps then the one who is brought to the king owing many talents has committed no small sin but all that are great and heinous; and if you were to seek for him among men, perhaps you would find him to be "the man of sin, the son of perdition, he that opposes and exalts himself against every God or object of worship;" 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 but if you seek him outside the number of men, who can this be but the devil who has ruined so many who received him, who wrought sin in them. For "man is a great thing, and a pitiful man is precious," Proverbs 20:6 precious so as to be worthy of a talent, whether of gold like as the lamp which was equal to a talent of gold, Exodus 25:39 or of silver or of any kind of material whatsoever understood intellectually, the symbols of which are recorded in the Words of the Days, 1 Chronicles 22:14 when David became enriched with many talents of which the number is mentioned, so many talents of gold, and so many of silver, and of the rest of the material there named, from which the temple of God was built.

Only, though he cannot pay the talents, for he has lost them, he has a wife and children and other things, of which it is written, "All that he has." Matthew 18:25 And it was possible that when he had been sold along with his own, he would have prospered if some one had bought him, and, by his worth and the things that were his, have paid the whole debt in full; and it was possible that he might no longer be the servant of the king, but become that of his purchaser. And he makes a request that he be not sold along with his own, but may continue to abide in the house of the king; wherefore he fell down and worshipped him, knowing that the king was God, and said, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all;" Matthew 18:26 for he was, as is probable, an active man, who knew that he could by a second course of action fill up the whole deficiency of the former loss of many talents. And this truly good king was moved with compassion for the man who owed him many talents and then released him, having bestowed upon him a favour greater than the request which had been made; for the debtor promised to the long-suffering master to pay all his debts, but the Lord moved with compassion for him did not merely forgive him with the idea of receiving his own back as a result of his patience, but even entirely released him and forgave him the whole debt. But this wicked servant, who had besought his master to have patience for his many talents, acted without mercy, for, having found one of his fellow-servants which owed him a hundred pence, he laid hold on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay if you owe ." Matthew 18:28 And did he not exhibit the very excess of wickedness who laid hold of his fellow-servant for a hundred pence, and

took him by the throat and deprived him of freedom to breathe, when he himself, for the many talents, had neither been laid hold of, nor seized by the throat, but at first was ordered to be sold along with his wife and children and all that was his own; but afterwards, when he had worshipped him, the master was moved with compassion for him, and he was released and forgiven in regard to the whole of the debt. But it were indeed a hard task to tell according to the conception of Jesus who is the one fellow-servant who was found to be owing a hundred pence, not to his own lord, but to him who owed many talents, and who are the fellow-servants who saw the one taking by the throat, and the other taken, and were exceedingly sorry, and represented clearly unto their own lord all that had been done. But what the truth in these matters is, I declare that no one can interpret unless Jesus, who explained all things to His own disciples privately, takes up His abode in his reason, and opens up all the treasures in the parable which are dark, hidden, unseen, and confirms by clear demonstrations the man whom He desires to illumine with the light of the knowledge of the things that are in this parable, that he may at once represent who is brought to the king as the debtor of many talents, and who is the other one who owes to him a hundred pence, etc.; whether he can be the man of sin previously mentioned, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 or the devil, or neither of these, but some other, whether a man, or some one of these under the sway of the devil; for it is a work of the wisdom of God to exhibit the things that have been prophesied concerning those who are in themselves of a certain nature, or have been made according to such and such qualities, whether among visible powers or also among some men, in whatever way they may have been written by the Holy Spirit. But as we have not yet received the competent mind which is able to be blended with the mind of Christ, and which is capable of attaining to things so great, and which is able with the Spirit to “search all things, even the deep things of God,” 1 Corinthians 2:10 we, forming an impression still indefinitely with regard to the matters in this passage, are of opinion that the wicked servant indicated by the parable who is here represented in regard to the debt of many talents, refers to some definite one.

But it is fitting to examine at what time the man— the king— in the parable wished to make a reckoning with his own servants, and to what period we ought to refer the things that are said. For if it be after the consummation, or at it at the time of the expected judgment, how are we to maintain the things about him who owed a hundred pence, and was taken by the throat by the man who had been forgiven the many talents? But if, before the judgment, how can we explain the reckoning that was made before this by the king, with his own servants? But we ought to think in a general way about every parable, the interpretation of which has not been recorded by the evangelists, even though Jesus explained all things to His own disciples privately; Mark 4:34 and for this reason the writers of the Gospels have concealed the clear exposition of the parables, because the things signified by them were beyond the power of the nature of words to express, and every solution and exposition of such parables was of such a kind that not even the whole world itself could contain the books that should be written John 21:25 in relation to such parables. But it may happen that a fitting heart be found, and, because of its purity, able to receive the letters of the exposition of the parable, so that they could be written in it by the Spirit of the living God. But some one will say that, perhaps, we act with impiety, who, because of the secret and mystical import of some of the Scriptures which are of heavenly origin, wish them to be symbolic, and endeavour to expound them,

even though it might seem ex hypothesi that we had an accurate knowledge of their meaning. But to this we must say that, if there be those who have obtained the gift of accurate apprehension of these things, they know what they ought to do; but as for us, who acknowledge that we fall short of the ability to see into the depth of the things here signified, even though we obtain a somewhat crass perception of the things in the passage, we will say, that some of the things which we seem to find after much examination and inquiry, whether by the grace of God, or by the power of our own mind, we do not venture to commit to writing; but some things, for the sake of our own intellectual discipline, and that of those who may chance to read them, we will to some extent set forth. But let these things, then, be said by way of apology, because of the depth of the parable; but, with regard to the question at what time the man—the king—in the parable wished to make a reckoning with his own servants, we will say that it seems that this takes place about the time of the judgment which had been proclaimed. And this is confirmed by two parables, one at the close of the Gospel before us, Matthew 25:14-30 and one from the Gospel according to Luke. Luke 19:12-27 And not to prolong the discussion by quoting the very letter, as any one who wishes can take it from the Scripture himself, we will say that the parable according to Matthew declares, “For it is as when a man going into another country called his own servants, and delivered unto them his own goods, and to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one talent;” Matthew 25:14-15 then they took action with regard to that which had been entrusted to them, and, after a long time, the lord of those servants comes, and it is written in the very words, that he also makes a reckoning with them. Matthew 25:19 And compare the words, “And when he began to make a reckoning,” Matthew 18:24 and consider that he called the going of the householder into another country the time at which “we are at home in the body but absent from the Lord;” 2 Corinthians 5:6 but his advent, when, “after a long time the lord of those servants comes,” Matthew 25:19 the time at the consummation in the judgment; for after a long time the lord of those servants comes and makes a reckoning with them, and those things which follow take place. But the parable in Luke represents with more clearness, that “a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return,” and when going, “he called ten servants, and gave to them ten pounds, and said unto them, Trade ye till I come.” Luke 19:12-13 But the nobleman, being hated by his own citizens, who sent an embassy after him, as they did not wish him to reign over them, came back again, having received the kingdom, and told the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to himself that he might know what they had gained by trading. And, seeing what they had done, to him who had made the one pound ten pounds, rendering praise in the words, “Well done, you good servant, because you were found faithful in a very little,” Luke 19:17 he gives to him authority over ten cities, to-wit, those which were under his kingdom. And to another, who had multiplied the pound fivefold, he did not render the praise which he assigned to the first, nor did he specify the word “authority,” as in the case of the first, but said to him, “Be also over five cities.” But to him who had tied up the pound in a napkin, he said, “Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant;” Luke 19:22 and he said to them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it unto him that has the ten pounds. Luke 19:24 Who, then, in regard to this parable, will not say that the nobleman, who goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return, is Christ, going, as it were, into another country to receive the kingdoms of this world, and the things in it?

And those who have received the ten talents are those who have been entrusted with the dispensation of the Word which has been committed unto them. And His citizens who did not wish Him to reign over them when He was a citizen in the world in respect of His incarnation, Luke 19:14 are perhaps Israel who disbelieved Him, and perhaps also the Gentiles who disbelieved Him.

Only, I have said these things with the view of referring his return when he comes with his kingdom to the consummation, when he commanded the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him that he might know what they had gained by trading, and from a desire to demonstrate from this, and from the parable of the Talents, that the passage "he who wished to make a reckoning with his own servants" Matthew 18:23 is to be referred to the consummation when now he is king, receiving the kingdom, on account of which, according to another parable, Luke 19:12 he went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. Therefore, when he returned after receiving the kingdom, he wished to make a reckoning with his own servants. And "when he had begun to reckon, there was brought unto him one who owed many talents," Matthew 18:24 and he was brought as to a king by those who had been appointed his ministers— I think, the angels. And perhaps he was one of those under the kingdom who had been entrusted with a great administration and had not dispensed it well, but had wasted what had been entrusted to him, so that he came to owe the many talents which he had lost. This very man, perhaps not having the means to pay, is ordered by the king to be sold along with his wife, by intercourse with whom he became the father of certain children. But it is no easy task to see what is intellectually meant by father and mother and children. What this means in point of truth God may know, and whether He Himself has given insight to us or not, he who can may judge. Only this is our conception of the passage; that, as "the Jerusalem which is above" is "the mother" Galatians 4:26 of Paul and of those like him, so there may be a mother of others after the analogy of Jerusalem, the mother, for example, of Syene in Egypt, or Sidon, or as many cities as are named in the Scriptures. Then, as Jerusalem is "a bride adorned for her husband," Revelation 21:2 Christ, so there may be those mothers of certain powers who have been allotted to them as wives or brides. And as there are certain children of Jerusalem, as mother, and of Christ, as father, so there would be certain children of Syene, or Memphis, or Tyre, or Sidon, and the rulers set over them. Perhaps then, too, this one, the debtor of many talents who was brought to the king, has, as we have said, a wife and children, whom at first the king ordered to be sold, and also all that he had to be sold; but afterwards, being moved with compassion, he released him and forgave him all the debt; not, as if he were ignorant of the future, but, in order that we might understand what happened, it was written that he did so. Each one then of those who have, as we have said, a wife and children will render an account whenever the king comes to make a reckoning, having received the kingdom and having returned; and each of them as a ruler of any Syene or Memphis, or Tyre or Sidon, or any like them, has also debtors. This one, then, having been released, and having been forgiven all the debt, "went out from the king and found one of his fellow-servants," Matthew 18:28 etc.; and, on this account, I suppose that he took him by the throat, when he had gone out from the king, for unless he had gone out he would not have taken his own fellow-servant by the throat. Then observe the accuracy of the Scripture, how that the one fell down and "worshipped," but the other fell down and did not worship but "besought;" and the king being moved with compassion released him and forgave him all the debt, but the servant did not

wish even to pity his own fellow-servant; and the king before his release ordered him to be sold and what was his, while he who had been forgiven cast him into prison. And observe that his fellow-servants did not bring any accusation or “said,” but “told,” Matthew 18:31 and that he did not use the epithet “wicked” at the beginning in regard to the money lost, but reserved it afterwards for his action towards the fellow-servant. But mark also the moderation of the king; he does not say, You worshipped me, but You besought me; and no longer did he order him and his to be sold, but, what was worse, he delivered him to the tormentors, because of his wickedness. Matthew 18:34 But who may these be but those who have been appointed in the matter of punishments? But at the same time observe, because of the use made of this parable by adherents of heresies, that if they accuse the Creator of being passionate, because of words that declare the wrath of God, they ought also to accuse this king, because that “being angry,” he delivered the debtor to the tormentors. But it must further be said to those whose view it is that no one is delivered by Jesus to the tormentors,— pray, explain to us, good sirs, who is the king who delivered the wicked servant to the tormentors? And let them also attend to this, “So therefore also shall My heavenly Father do unto you;” Matthew 18:35 and to the same persons also might rather be said the things in the parable of the Ten Pounds that the Son of the good God said, “Howbeit these mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them,” Luke 19:27 etc. The conclusion of the parable, however, is adapted also to the simpler; for all of us who have obtained the forgiveness of our own sins, and have not forgiven our brethren, are taught at once that we shall suffer the lot of him who was forgiven but did not forgive his fellow-servant.