

“For Whoever has will be Given More” – Matthew 25:29 / Luke 19:26 and the Hidden Transcript

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ABSTRACT

The verse “For whoever has will be given more”, which is attested in several places in the New Testament, sounds like a justification for our capitalist system and, indeed, has often been interpreted as such. The author of this article disputes this interpretation and argues that the logion was originally located at the conclusion of the parable of the entrusted money in both Matthew (talents/minas) and Luke (minas). Reading Luke’s version against the background of Herodian-ruled Galilee after the death of John the Baptist, it is argued that this story can be read as a story of the cost and possible rewards of resistance. Using J.C. Scott’s categories of public and hidden transcripts in the discourse of oppressed groups, the logion is interpreted as an ironic comment on both the misuse and limits of power.

Introduction

The verse in Matthew 25:29, which concludes the parable of the talents, sounds like a biblical justification for our capitalist system, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer: “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (NRSV). Or, more literally, in the singular: “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (RSV). The verse at the end of Luke’s version of the parable of the minas sounds quite similar: “I tell you that to everyone who has, will more be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Luke 19:26 RSV).

The parable of the talents itself has been understood to show that God rewards those who work hard and are willing to take risks, while punishing the lazy and fearful. A study by the Kaiser Foundation and Washington Post in 2017 found that white evangelical Christians in the USA were more likely to blame poverty