

Ministry of Grace Church

Matthew 25

Preface:

In the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel account, we were told that the day and the hour of Jesus' second coming is unknown to everyone except God the Father. We were also told that the ones who didn't believe in Noah's message were taken away in judgment. And, just like in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of our Lord. When He comes back, those who don't believe in God and are living their lives unaware that God is coming in judgment will be taken away in judgment.

He then used the parable of the master of the house and his steward to illustrate what will happen to those who don't think His coming is soon. That parable was directed toward Jews as are the two parables in this chapter. (Slide 2A) From the parable in the previous chapter, we see a difference between those who believe their master is coming back soon and those who don't believe he will return. The unbelievers will be condemned.

Now, let's see what we can learn from the two parables in this chapter.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

¹Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Notes:

Let's talk first about **interpretation** versus **application**. Proper interpretation (called exegesis) is to determine the specific message or truth the writer of the text intended his reader to learn. Biblical interpretation is explaining what God's message to mankind is. (Slide 2B) There are several ways of interpreting a Biblical passage, but the only one that reveals God's message to us is the "plain or literal method of interpretation." This method accepts the plain sense of scripture, unless the context gives us a reason to think otherwise. This is the normal approach used to interpret any book of the Bible. It uses grammar, history and culture to understand a text. But – even though we may use our understanding of the culture the writer was living in when he wrote a passage to help interpret the text; God's message does

not change based on the culture of the people reading it. (Slide 2C) There can only be one interpretation of any passage of Scripture. In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we read:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

When we interpret Scripture, we are trying to determine what God's message to mankind is. This message does not change based on the culture of the reader.

Application, however, is different from interpretation. Application takes the interpreted meaning of a passage and "applies" it to the reader's life and relationship with God. (Slide 3A) Therefore, we could **apply** the teaching of all three of these parables in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew's gospel account to our lives in Christ, even though, by strict **interpretation**, they were delivered to Jews as instructions of how to behave while waiting for the expected kingdom.

We need to be careful, however, that we don't interpret a passage based on how we might apply it. For instance, we have all heard the following verse used as an invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

When used as an evangelistic verse, it is usually quoted as, "Behold, I stand at the door *of your heart* and knock ..." However, by interpretation, this is not a gospel invitation. This is a message given to a church (the church at Laodicea) that has excluded the Lord from its practice and worship. It is not delivered as an invitation to salvation, but as a warning to a church that is about to receive judgment.

Given that background, let's look at the parables in Matthew 25 and see how they might *apply* to our lives.

Parable of the 10 Virgins

The entire teaching of Jesus in chapters 24 and 25, is referred to as the Olivet Discourse because it was delivered while Jesus and His disciples were on the Mount of Olives. This teaching was given to Jews. Even though the eleven disciples will become the apostles of Jesus' new church, this teaching was given to them before they became Christians and answers the question of "when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Slide 3B)

The parable of the ten virgins is probably the clearest in this regard. First, however, let's establish some reference points. The word "bridegroom" is used fourteen times in the New Testament as a reference to Jesus. And the church is said to be "engaged" to Him. In Paul's writings to the Corinthian church, he said,

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

And, in Paul's writing to the church in Ephesus, he uses the example of how Christ loves the church to teach how a husband should love his wife.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (Ephesians 5:25)

Therefore, we can conclude that the church (Christians) will someday be the bride of Christ.

With that in mind, let's look at the parable of the ten virgins. These ten were waiting for the bridegroom to come so they could go into the marriage feast. The bridegroom is a symbol of Jesus. (Slide 4A) This

feast traditionally occurred after the husband has gone to the bride's house and has brought her back to his father's house. Since these 10 virgins were waiting for the bridegroom to return, they could not be representative of the bride. They are invited guests! The ten virgins are referring to Jews. (Slide 4B)

Remember that this Olivet Discourse was delivered because the disciples wanted to know about the end of the age. The tribulation will occur at the end of this age. Immediately following the tribulation will be the Millennial reign of Christ. During the Great Tribulation (the second half of the tribulation) the Jews will be severely persecuted by Satan and the Antichrist. They will be eagerly awaiting their Messiah.

In the Bible, olive oil is frequently used as a symbol for the Spirit of God. (Slide 4C) Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the five virgins who ran out of oil do not have the Spirit of God. Because they don't possess the Spirit, they will be refused entrance into the wedding feast (and the Millennium).

The first parable (from the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel account) teaches that those who do not believe will not enter the kingdom. This parable implies that mere profession of faith is not enough. Those who don't have a genuine faith in God will be left out.

Next, we have the parable of the Talents.

The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²²And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Luke 19:11-27 – ¹¹As 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. ¹²He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³Calling

ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ ¹⁴But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ ¹⁵When 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. ¹⁶The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ ¹⁷And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ ¹⁸And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ ¹⁹And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ ²⁰Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹for 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.’ ²²He 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? ²³Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ ²⁴And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ ²⁵And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ ²⁶I 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. ²⁷But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

Notes:

The word “talent” is transliterated from the Greek word *talanton*, which refers to a measurement of weight and was used generally to refer to a certain weight of gold or silver. Thus, in general usage it refers to an amount of money. (Slide 5A) And, it is a large sum of money! In Jesus’ day it would have taken a person 50 or 60 years to earn a single talent.

In this parable, the master of the servants entrusted a lot of money to several servants and went away to receive a kingdom. He did not indicate where he was going or how long he would be away. He only indicated what he was going to do (receive a kingdom). If we read the parallel passage in Luke’s gospel account, we see that he gave his servants instructions to, “Engage in business until I come.”

Those who did as their master instructed were rewarded when he returned. It does not seem to be important how much profit they made, only that they used what they were given to increase their master’s property. According to Matthew’s gospel account, these servants were given money according to their ability. Again, if we combine information from the account in Matthew with the account in Luke, we see three types of people. The first type is seen only in Luke’s gospel account. These are the ones who didn’t want to submit to their master. In fact, they sent a delegation after him saying, “We do not want this man to reign over us.” They were severely punished for their unwillingness to submit.

The second group of people are represented by the slothful servant who had possession of the master’s money but did nothing with it. He, too, was severely punished for doing nothing with what was entrusted to him. On the surface, he looked like the other servants who took from the master. However, his allegiance was not to the master, but to himself. He is like the Pharisees who, although they were given the truth and instructed what to do with it, turned it into a selfish set of activities. They did nothing with the spiritual wealth that was entrusted to them.

The third group of people in this parable are represented by the servants who took what was given to them and used it for the good of the master. These servants were submitted to their master’s will and did as they were told. These are people who are not focused on what their religion will do for their own personal glory, but are interested in worshipping Yahweh to give Him the glory.

It seems most reasonable that this parable is about the Israelites between Christ's first and second advent. Remember, Jesus is answering the question, "When will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age." The Son of God, their Messiah, had been presented to the Jews, but most of them rejected Him. As a result, for the remainder of His absence they will be persecuted. And during the Tribulation they will be hunted down by Satan and the Beast (Antichrist). They will suffer and die simply because of their Jewish ancestry. Those who continue to worship in the ways of their forefathers, as exemplified by the Scribes and Pharisees, will suffer and die during the Tribulation because their faith is hollow. However, those who recognize their Messiah, submit to Him, and believe He is coming back to usher in the Kingdom, will be protected while the master is gone and will be blessed by the master when He returns.

The Sheep and Goat Judgment

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁹And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' ⁴¹'Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Notes:

Notice that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is not presented as a parable. If it were, we would see language of similitude like, "Then the kingdom of heaven **will be like** ten virgins ..." as the parable of the ten virgins starts out, or as the parable of the talents starts off with, "For it **will be like** a man going on a journey..."

Since it is not a parable, but a description of real events, we have to ask, "When does the Son of Man come in His glory?" The obvious answer is, "At the end of the Tribulation. At the Battle of Armageddon." This tells us that this Sheep and Goat Judgment occurs at the end of the Tribulation. It's surprising how many noted Biblical scholars miss this. Many of them equate this judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment. However, the Great White Throne Judgment is presented after the thousand years have ended. And, it is presented this way,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (Revelation 20:11)

If there was found no place for the current heaven and earth, then where are they? They no longer exist! In other words, the Great White Throne Judgment occurs at the end of time, when eternity begins. The only way this and the Sheep and Goat Judgment could take place at the same time is if Jesus doesn't return until after the Millennium. And, if that were the case, then what is the kingdom that the sheep are ushered into, the kingdom that has been prepared by the Father from the foundation of the world. And, if Jesus doesn't come back until the end of time, then who is reigning during the Millennium?

The Sheep and Goat Judgment is *not* the same as the Great White Throne Judgment. (Slide 6A) The Sheep and Goat Judgment is sometimes called "The Judgment of the Nations." This is because we are told:

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:32)

Some teachers would have this judgment be about judging nations as a whole, rather than individuals. However, on close inspection we see that the word translated "nations" is the Greek word *ethnos* which is often translated "Gentiles." It is expressed here as a neuter noun. However, the word translated "people" is the pronoun *autos*, meaning "them." It is expressed as a masculine noun. Therefore, by the rules of Greek grammar, the words translated "nations" and "people" can't be referring to the same specific group, otherwise they would either both be expressed as neuter or they would both be expressed as masculine. The only way this verse makes sense is if the word "nations" is referring to the various national or ethnic groups that make up the population of the earth, but the word "people" refers to individual people. At the end of the Tribulation, the nations of the world (those who survive the Tribulation) will be gathered together and these people will be judged individually.

Also, notice that the criterion for judgment is how these people treat the Judge's "brothers." Since Jesus is the judge, the brothers must be Jews. Therefore, the nations being judged must be the non-Jewish nations, or "Gentiles," as the word *ethnos* implies. (Slide 6B) These Gentiles will be separated into two groups: the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. On the surface, this appears to be a judgment of their works, However, we know that salvation can't be earned, it can only be bestowed by grace. The deeds of kindness that they show to the Jews during the Tribulation are not a substitute for faith, but as James says:

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:26)

Their deeds are the evidence of their faith. As a result of living out their faith, these sheep will be ushered into the Millennium along with the believing Jews who survive the Tribulation. And notice that they will:

inherit the kingdom *prepared for you* from the foundation of the world

but the goats will hear:

Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire *prepared for the devil and his angels*.

The goats will not be allowed to enjoy the kingdom prepared for mankind. Instead, they will inherit the lake of fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels.

So What?

Let's take a brief look at the parable in the previous chapter along with the two parables in this chapter. These three parables are:

- The parable of the servant who was put in charge of the household while his master was away
- The parable of the 10 virgins waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom
- The parable of the talents given to servants to invest while the master was away

As we have stated, these parables were presented by Jesus to Jews as a caution to them to look for the King's return, to be prepared for the King's return, and to be active in the King's business until the King returns. This is the interpretation of the parables. However, by application, we can see this also as a message to the church to look for Jesus' return, to be prepared for Jesus' return, and to be busy in Jesus' business until He returns.

Whether we see these parables as applying to Jews or Christians, there are three specific messages to both groups. We will focus on the Christian perspective for obvious reasons.

Many in the world today are not aware of the fact that Jesus is coming for His church. In fact, many deny that Jesus ever existed and, therefore, don't believe that He will return. These are the people who are spoken about in the first parable. They will be severely judged, condemned, and ultimately sent to the Lake of Fire.

In the second parable, the oil is an apparent picture of the Holy Spirit. Although all ten virgins appear to have lamps for their Lord, only 5 of them are actually filled with the Spirit. This is how the church appears today. Many who call themselves Christians are so in name only. They have never really received the Spirit. They have no oil in their lamps.

The third parable clearly can be applied to genuine Christians today. Each of us has been given talents as God has determined. The English word "talent" is actually derived from the Greek word translated as "talent" in this parable. As interpreted in the parable, it refers to money, but as applied to Christians, it applies to the gifts of various abilities as the Spirit has determined. God has given us these "gifts of the Spirit" to be used for His glory.

Now What?

As a result of this and the previous chapter, we have to ask ourselves three questions.

1. The first question is - Do I know for sure that I am **not** a Christian? If this is the case, your time to respond to His invitation is running out. Whether you choose to believe it or not, you will stand before your Judge and give account of your life. Denying the existence of God or claiming that He is other than what He really is won't do you any good. He is real and He will judge the living and the dead. The difference is not based on what you do, but on what you believe.

Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins. Accept His sacrifice today and avoid the torture of eternal Hell.

2. The second question is - Are you a genuine Christian or just a "professing" Christian? If you're not indwelt by the Spirit of God then you aren't really a Christian. It doesn't matter how often you go to church, how often you pray, how much money you donate to worthy causes (including the church), or how much of your time you give in volunteer activities. If you've never accepted Jesus' death on the cross as payment for your sins and you have never submitted to the lordship of Jesus,

then He's not your Lord and you're not a Christian. Like the five virgins who didn't have enough oil, you will be locked out of the wedding feast. That doesn't mean that all is lost, however. You can still get saved, even after the rapture, but only by going through the Tribulation and possibly giving your life as proof of your faith.

If you're not certain, without a doubt, that you are a Christian, don't wait! The time is now to make a commitment to God. Accept His free gift before the Rapture and take the easy road to heaven.

3. The third question is - Are you using the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the work of His Kingdom? If not, why not? He has given His life for you, aren't you willing to give of your time and gift to build His church. Remember that at the Bema Seat Judgment, Christians will receive rewards for the things we have done for Him. We won't receive anything but the smell of smoke on our clothing in exchange for anything we do, if we only do it for ourselves.

In John's gospel account Jesus tells us:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

And, just as Paul told Timothy to devote himself to the reading of Scripture, to challenging and encouraging others, and to teaching – we must all use our spiritual gifts for His glory until He comes.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)

We have opportunities right now, right here in this small church for each and every one of us to be working for the Lord. What is it that He is prompting you to do?

Let's pray.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.