

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 11

Are You Ready for the King?

Matthew Chapter 25

Outline of This Chapter

- 1A. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (25: 1-13)
- 2A. The Parable of the Talents (25: 14-30)
- 3A. The Judgment of the Nations (Gentiles) Following the Return of Christ (25: 31-46)

The coming of the King is such an important event that God through Matthew gives us another entire chapter showing how and why we need to be ready for this great event.

Matthew chapter 25 is actually a continuation of the Olivet Discourse which began in Matthew chapter 24. In Matthew chapter 24 the Lord Jesus gives the prophecy concerning what will happen (the great tribulation, the second coming, the gathering of elect Israel, etc.). In Matthew chapter 25 He gives the application, and shows the need for each person to be ready to meet the King and to stand before the King who is also the Judge of everyone of us.

The study of prophecy is serious business. The fact that the King is coming is not just a fact that should arouse the curiosity and stimulate the intellect, but it is a very real event which every person needs to prepare for. The consequences of not being ready are very serious, and involve a person's eternal destiny. The coming of the King is good news to some, but very bad news for most. Those who know Him as Saviour gladly await His coming. Those who do not know Him as Saviour must meet Him as Judge.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

Are You Ready to Meet the King?

The serious student should carefully read through these 13 verses to get a general understanding of what the passage is saying.

The ten virgins took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom (verse 1).

To understand this we first need to know something about marriage customs back in those days, which are different from our marriage customs today. In the Jewish wedding system, when the marriage was to be consummated, the bridegroom would go to the home of the bride to fetch her and bring her to his home. As he approached his own home, he would be met by a procession of virgins who would lead the bride and groom to the marriage ceremony which would be followed by the marriage feast. This is the background of this parable.

Renald Showers describes the Jewish marriage customs as follows:

After the marriage covenant was established, the bridegroom left the bride's home and returned to his father's house. There he remained separated from his bride for twelve months. This separation gave the bride time to gather her trousseau and prepare for married life. Meanwhile, the bridegroom prepared living accommodations in his father's house to which he could bring his bride. At the end of the separation, the man came to take his bride to live with him. The taking of the bride usually occurred at night. The bridegroom, best man, and other male escorts would leave the bridegroom's father's house and conduct a torchlight procession to the bride's home. Although the bride was expecting her bridegroom to come for her, she did not know exactly when he would arrive. As a result, the bridegroom's arrival was preceded by a shout. This shout forewarned the bride to be prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. After the bridegroom received his bride and her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party returned from the bride's home to the bridegroom's father's house. Upon arriving there, the wedding party would find that the wedding guests had assembled already. Shortly after the bride and bridegroom arrived, the other members of the wedding party would escort them to the bridal chamber. While the groomsmen and bridesmaids waited outside, the bride and bridegroom would enter the bridal chamber alone. There, in private, the couple entered a physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted earlier. After the marriage was consummated, the bridegroom would announce the consummation to the other members of the wedding party waiting outside the chamber. These people relayed the news of the marital union to the wedding guests. After receiving this good news, the wedding guests feasted and made merry for the next seven days. [*Behold the Bridegroom Comes*, by Renald Showers, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry]

The lamps are explained by Edersheim, "The lamps consisted of round receptacles for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer, which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, in which it was borne aloft." Olive oil was the fuel which would keep the wick burning and thus keep the

lamp shining.

Five of these maidens were wise and five were foolish. They all went forth to meet the bridegroom wishing to participate in the marriage feast. The five foolish maidens took their lamps, but took no oil with them. The wise virgins took extra oil along with them.

The five foolish maidens represent those who are only professing believers, while the five wise maidens represent those who are possessing believers (true believers). Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and His wonderful work of regeneration, apart from which no one shall see the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

This can be illustrated by the following object lesson: Two flashlights can be used, one with batteries and the other with no batteries. They both look good. They both profess to be lights. They both look like lights. But only one of them is a true light because only one of them has a true source of power within. It reminds us of 2 Timothy 3:5--"having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." A flashlight is no good without batteries; a lamp is no good without oil. A person needs to have the Person and Presence and Power of God in his life for real, not just for pretend. To lack the reality of God in one's life is to be unprepared for the King.

What are some outward similarities between the wise and foolish virgins? You may see ten people carrying flashlights, but you cannot tell which flashlights have batteries until the lights are turned on. Lamps which have no source of light are quite useless. These lamps used olive oil as fuel, and it was wise to carry a reserve supply of oil, just as it would be wise to carry extra batteries for your flashlight just in case your batteries would become weak. "Trimming the lamp" involved cleaning the wicks, lighting them and adjusting the flames.

Notice the cry which sounds forth in verse 6-- "Behold the bridegroom cometh!" Notice in the parable that when this cry is made it will be too late to get ready. Those who already are ready can go out to meet Him, but those who are not ready cannot go out and meet him. They are not prepared for the coming of the King. And for them, it is too late to get ready. So the message of this parable is not "get ready." The message is this: "be ready!" Be ready right now so when He comes you will be ready then. If you are not ready right now, then when He comes suddenly, it will be too late to get ready then.

In Luke 12:35 Jesus said, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning." This means that we are to be serving ("loins girded about") and shining ("lamps burning")! We are not to get ready, but we are to be ready. Today the great event that we are looking for is the rapture of the Church, when the King will come in the air to instantly receive His bride (John 14:3). We do not know when this great event will take place, but we know it could happen at any time (compare Matthew 25:13). In order to be ready for this event we must first be saved and secondly we must be abiding in Christ (1 John 2:28), enjoying His power and

His presence in our lives. If we are not properly connected to the Vine (our Life-source, see John 15:1-7), then there is no way that we will be able to serve Christ and shine for Him (just as a branch cut off of an apple tree will never produce apples).

It is very clear that the five virgins who were foolish represent unbelievers as indicated by Matthew 25:11-12. The King will say to them: "I know you not" (compare Matthew 7:23--"I never knew thee"). The idea is this: "I do not have any kind of saving relationship with you. You do not belong to me." These are serious and sobering words. These words speak of an eternity separated from God. How important it is to be sure of our salvation and be sure we know Christ in a real, right, and personal way.

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Are you Serving the King During His Absence?

The "talent" that is spoken of in this parable is not referring to a special ability that one may have ("she has a talent for playing the piano," etc.). A talent was a unit of coinage of very high value, a very large sum of money. One writer says, "A talent was a large sum of money, varying greatly in value according to whether it was silver or gold, and could weigh from fifty-eight to eighty pounds." Of course, a gold talent would be far more valuable than a silver talent. In this parable the talents were silver (in verse 18 the word "money" means "silver").

In some respects this parable is similar to the parable of the pounds, which had been given a few days earlier at Jericho (Luke 19:11-27). The parable of the pounds illustrated the truth that equal gifts, if used with unequal diligence, may be unequally rewarded. The parable of the talents showed that unequal gifts, if used with equal faithfulness, will be equally rewarded. The preceding parable of the ten virgins stresses the need for alert preparation for Christ's coming. The parable of the talents emphasizes the need for faithful service during His absence.

The man traveling into a far country is to be identified as "the Son of Man" (compare verse 14 with verse 13). He travels into a far country (v. 14) and stays there a long time (v. 19). This refers to the time during which the King will be absent from the earth.

The talents represent differing responsibilities to be exercised in accord with each man's capacity (verse 15). The first two servants, though possessing different amounts of money, were equally diligent and doubled their capital (verses 16-17). The servant who possessed only one talent displayed no diligence and was not challenged by his opportunity. Instead he hid his money in the earth (verse 18).

When the Lord of those servants returned, the first two servants had different sums to present, but both offered increases of 100% and received the same

commendation and reward, "Well done good and faithful servant" (verses 19-23). Notice that the emphasis is upon faithfulness (being faithful with what was given to you to use).

The unfaithful servant accuses his master of being very hard, harsh, and merciless (v. 24) and the master judges him on this basis (v. 26).

Verse 30 makes it clear that the wicked, slothful (lazy) and unprofitable servant was an unbeliever who would suffer eternal punishment. The terms "outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" refer to the destiny of the wicked. This is a terrible judgment that will be measured out to the unfaithful.

We each need to think about the privileges and opportunities which God has given us and we need to ask ourselves, "What am I doing with these things?" Has God given you a Bible? What are you doing with such a treasure? Has God given you a Bible believing church and a godly pastor? What are you doing with these privileges? Has God given you the opportunity to know Him as Saviour and live for Him? What are you doing with this opportunity?

We should not miss the phrase in verse 19-- "reckoneth with them." When the King returns it will be a time of reckoning, a time of giving account. The time to fix things in our lives is now, not when the King comes, for then it will be too late. How valuable is God's "WELL DONE" to you? We often appreciate it when we are commended by men for a job well done, but how important is God's commendation? There is nothing more important than pleasing the Lord.

What is your concept of the King? What is your concept of God? Do you consider Him "a hard man" (cf. v. 24)? We cannot serve Christ properly unless we have a true and correct concept of WHO HE IS. Compare Psalm 100. "Serve the LORD with gladness?" Why? Because the LORD is God (v. 3) and because the LORD is good (v. 5). It is impossible to really trust and serve the Lord unless you have really tasted and experienced His goodness (see Psalm 34:8).

The Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

This is a very important passage of Scripture and one which has been often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Many people wrongly identify this great judgment in Matthew 25 with the Great White Throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15. However, these two judgments are actually separated by a period of a thousand years.

The time of this Matthew 25 judgment is indicated in verse 31--"When the Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." The Son of man coming in glory with the angels was

clearly referred to in the previous chapter (see Matthew 24, verses 27,30,31, etc.). The Lord's coming in glory clearly takes place at the end of the great tribulation ("immediately after the tribulation of those days" --Matthew 24:29), which is at the beginning of the millennial Kingdom (the thousand year Kingdom mentioned in Revelation chapter 20). The Great White Throne judgment does not take place until after the millennial Kingdom (see Revelation chapter 20). Thus these two judgments are separated by 1000 years.

Where does this judgment take place? The judgment of Matthew 25 takes place on the earth because at the second coming Jesus Christ returns to the earth. This is different from the Great White Throne judgment which does not take place on the earth (because the earth and heaven have fled away--Rev.20: 11—referring to the destruction of the heaven and earth by fire as predicted in 2 Peter chapter 3).

Who are the subjects of this judgment? Who are the ones being judged? In Matthew 25:32 we learn that "all the nations" will be judged and the individuals who make up these nations will be divided into "sheep" and "goats." The context makes it clear that the sheep and goats represent believers and unbelievers, saved and unsaved. This is different from the Great White Throne judgment where the ones being judged are "the dead" (Rev. 20: 12) which refers only to the unsaved. The earlier judgment of Matthew 25 involves both saved and unsaved; the latter judgment of Revelation 20 involves only the unsaved (with the saved present as witnesses).

Thus the judgment spoken of in Matthew 25 describes an awesome judgment which will take place just prior to the 1000 year millennial Kingdom.

The first thing that the King will do is to divide the sheep from the goats, putting the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left hand. The sheep represent the saved individuals from among the nations (Gentiles) and the goats represent the unsaved individuals from among the nations. God knows who belongs on which side. "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2: 19). Sometimes we have a problem distinguishing between those who merely profess salvation and those who actually possess salvation, but God has no problem with this. The Judge makes no mistakes. He knows the hearts of all men.

To the sheep He says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). These are Gentile people who lived during the tribulation (and who survived the tribulation) and who will now be allowed to enter and inherit the Kingdom (referring to the millennial Kingdom of 1000 years). These are the saved Gentiles who survived the tribulation and who were not killed during this difficult time of trouble.

To the goats He says, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). These are unsaved Gentile people who lived during the tribulation but who never trusted Jesus Christ for salvation. They will be banished into everlasting fire.

It is helpful to see the contrast when we compare verse 34 with verse 35 and put them side by side:

<p>COME</p> <p>This speaks of a welcome, an invitation to enter into the joys which God has for them in His kingdom.</p>	<p>DEPART FROM ME</p> <p>This speaks of a banishment, a separation from God and from all that is good.</p>
<p>YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER</p> <p>These people are recipients of the blessing of God.</p>	<p>YE CURSED</p> <p>These people are under an eternal curse.</p>
<p>THE KINGDOM</p> <p>Joys and blessings will be experienced with the King of Kings in His kingdom.</p>	<p>EVERLASTING FIRE</p> <p>Punishment will be experienced in a terrible place separated from the King of Kings.</p>
<p>THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD</p>	<p>EVERLASTING FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS</p>

There are some who wrongly teach that there are three destinations for three groups of people at the beginning of the millennium:

1. Those who are "spiritual believers" who will inherit the Kingdom and enter into the joys of the Kingdom.
2. Those who are "carnal believers" who will enter the Kingdom but will not inherit it. They will be excluded from the joys of the Kingdom.
3. Those who are consigned to the everlasting fire. These are the unsaved.

It is important to understand that Matthew 25 does not set forth three groups, but only two, the sheep and the goats. There are those who will inherit the Kingdom (the sheep) and there are those who will not inherit the Kingdom (the goats). It is not Biblical to speak of a third group made up of saved people who will not inherit the kingdom.¹

Notice that God prepared the Kingdom for the sheep (verse 24), but God did not prepare the fire for the goats (verse 41). This shows that the doctrine of "reprobation" taught by many extreme Calvinists is unbiblical. Hell was not prepared for man, but for the devil and his angels. Men are not chosen in advance

¹This errant view is set forth by such men as Zane Hodges, Robert Wilkin, Joseph Dillow, Chuck and Nancy Missler, Paul Benware and many others from the "free grace" camp. A much more extreme view is held by J. D. Faust who teaches that disobedient saved people will suffer in hell during the millennial Kingdom and be totally excluded from the Kingdom.

to damnation. Those who enter the Kingdom have only God to thank; those who enter the eternal fires have only themselves to blame. When a person is saved God gets all the credit; when a person is lost man gets all the blame. The saved person thankfully says, "I'm in heaven because of God and because of Christ!" The lost person must truthfully say, "I'm in hell because of me." The lost person will never be able to blame God and say, "I'm damned because God did not choose me" or "I'm damned because God predestined me for hell and prepared hell for me before I was ever born." No, the damnation of the lost is based not upon God's rejection of them, but upon their rejection of God (Mark 16:16; John 3:18; John 16:9, and see especially John 5:40).

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. It is the work of God "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph.2:8-9). God does not contribute to man's unbelief. That is man's work. God alone must do the SAVING; man alone must do the BELIEVING.

So far we have encountered the sheep (the saved Gentiles) and we have encountered the goats (the lost Gentiles), but there is a third group of people mentioned in this passage: see verses 40 and 45. The King refers to a group of people known as "His brethren." Many people have misinterpreted this passage because of their failure to rightly identify those whom Jesus referred to as "My brethren." These are Jewish believers living during the tribulation period.

The basis of this judgment will be the way in which these brethren were treated. "How have you treated My brethren?" is the question Christ will ask at this judgment.

We need to remember that the time of great tribulation will be a time of unparalleled anti-Semitism, when the Jews will be under severe persecution. We see this in Matthew 24:15-21 and in Revelation 12:13-17 where the woman represents Israel. In the great tribulation, anyone who is a friend of the Jew will be an enemy of the government (compare Germany in World War II). To help a Jew in those days will be a very dangerous and costly thing. It could even cost a person his life. Only those Gentiles who are really saved will have the courage and inner strength and concern to lend a helping hand to the persecuted Jews in that day (compare Matthew 10:40-42 which is speaking of the same period of time).

One thing needs to be kept very clear however. "Loving treatment of the brethren" will not be a condition of salvation ("to be saved you must love these brethren") but it will be an evidence of salvation ("if you are really saved, then you will love the brethren"). These saved Gentiles will not love the brethren in order to be saved but they will love the brethren because they are saved. It is not something a person will do to get saved; it is something a saved person will do. This is very important to understand. Being saved is not based upon anything that man does. It is based upon the Person and work of Jesus Christ, especially His death and resurrection for us. But when a person is really saved, then this person gives evidence of his salvation (to one degree or another) as He allows God to

work in his life.

This distinction needs to be kept clear in a number of passages. For example:

1 John 3:14. Loving the brethren is not something that we do to be saved but it is something we do because we are saved. The gospel is not: "Love the brethren and thou shalt be saved." The message of salvation is this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." If a person truly believes on Christ, then God will dwell in this person and this person will have a love for the brethren. Faith is the root and love is the fruit (see Gal. 5:6, "faith which worketh by love").

1 John 2:3-4. Keeping God's commandments is not a requirement for salvation. If it were, then none of us would make it! We all fall short of perfect obedience. The gospel is not, "Keep God's commands and thou shalt be saved." We are not saved because of our obedience. Indeed, the opposite is true! We need to be saved because of our disobedience! Obedience is a fruit of salvation not a cause of salvation. Obedience is not a condition of salvation but it is an evidence of salvation. Saved people should be obedient people, and if they are not, then there is a legitimate question raised as to the reality of their salvation.

Suppose you turned on the radio and heard a preacher saying something like this: "To be saved and enter the Kingdom we must feed the poor, clothe the naked, visit the needy and care for the sick. When Christ sees these good works, then He will let us into His Kingdom!"

What is wrong with this? Is this a gospel based upon the cross of Christ or is this a gospel based upon man's own efforts at trying to do good works? This kind of message is being preached in many churches today. "Do good works and thou shalt be saved." This is not God's way of salvation at all, and often a minister will turn to a passage such as Matthew 25 to try to support his false gospel.

True saving faith ought to show itself in good works (see James 2:14-26). It is important that a person knows that he is saved, and it is also very important that a person shows that he is saved by the way he lives. How else will others know that he is a saved person?

Eternal Punishment

A final word should be said about eternal punishment since this is a doctrine that is denied by so many people. Notice especially Matthew 25:41 and 46. Eternal punishment involves two key elements: 1) SEPARATION FROM GOD (notice the words "depart from Me" and "these shall go away"; 2) PUNISHMENT BY GOD (notice the words "everlasting fire" and "everlasting punishment").

Those who deny the doctrine of everlasting punishment have a real problem with verse 46. They either have to say that "everlasting" does not really mean

everlasting or that "punishment" does not really mean punishment. The problem is that both of these words mean exactly what they say! The reason people have a problem with eternal punishment is that they do not understand the holiness of God and they do not understand the sinfulness of sin.

There are many who believe in the "annihilation of the wicked." They say that God destroys the wicked person in such a way that he ceases to exist, he ceases to be, he is no more. But verse 46 shows that this cannot be because there is no way that an "eternal punishment" could be an annihilation. If a person's soul is annihilated, then he is not being punished forever. It's interesting to note that the word "everlasting" in verse 46 is the same Greek word as the word "eternal" in verse 46. The one word describes the punishment of the wicked and the same word describes the life of the righteous. Thus, if the eternal life of the righteous is forever and ever, then we must conclude that the punishment of the wicked must last for just as long, because the same expression is used for both.

How important it is that we know the Lord as our Saviour and that we are ready for the coming King, because our eternal destiny depends upon it. These are not little, unimportant matters. The person who plans only for this life and takes no thought about the future life is a wise man for a second but a fool forever!

Notes For Further Study

Matthew 25:30. See our detailed study on "Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth," showing that this is the fate of the wicked, not the fate of those who are true believers.

Matthew 25:31. Non-dispensationalists teach that there is just one general judgment at the end of the age. They fail to distinguish the various judgments described in the Scriptures. See the last chapter in our study entitled, *Shedding Light on Dispensations*, which distinguishes between the different judgments.

Matthew 25:41. For a fuller study showing that the Bible does not support the doctrine of reprobation, see our study notes on Romans under Romans 9:23.