

PARABLES OF JESUS PART 15

The Ten Virgins – The Talents

This morning, we are going to finish our study in the parables of Jesus. We have been looking for the past several months at each of Jesus's 40 recorded parables in chronological order. These last two parables were given by our Lord just two days before His betrayal by Judas. Matthew Chapters 24 and 25 (that is where we will be today) are referred to as the "Olivet Discourse." Jesus is alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives and He is teaching them. He is asked a question which prompts Him to speak at some length about His second coming. And it is in this context that He tells these two parables. The question He is asked is, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal Your return and the end of the world?" (Matthew 25:3 NLT).

Q1, what do the disciples ask that prompts Jesus to give the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25? When will all this happen? When will the world end? What signs will there be of Your return? Now, the option I gave about the temple's destruction is inferred in the context of the previous verses. Up to that point (Matthew 24:1-2) Jesus had been talking about the temple's destruction. He talked about it earlier in Matthew also. And so, part of their "all this" is the temple's destruction. They are linking Jesus's second coming and the end of the world with the temple's destruction. Now, we have the benefit of history. Looking back, we know now that these events have or will occur at different times. The temple's destruction happened about 40 or 50 years after Jesus left this earth and, of course, He still has not returned yet. So, they are two different things. But in their minds, they are thinking it is all linked.

Jesus's answer to their questions becomes what we know as the Olivet Discourse. Jesus goes into detail about what we can expect in the last days, some of the signs we can look for. Now, as to exactly WHEN it will all happen (His return and end times), in Matthew Chapter 24, v 36 Jesus says, "No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not

even the angels in heaven or the Son Himself [not even Jesus in His incarnation knew]. Only the Father knows." Jesus repeats this in v 42, "So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming." Then again in v 44 He says, "You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected." And just in case they missed His point, He repeats it again in verse 50: "The master will return unannounced and unexpected."

Q2, when does Jesus say that He will return? No one knows. So, these last two parables serve as warnings. They drive home the importance of us, His followers, being prepared for His return -- even though we do not know exactly when that will be. All we know is that He IS coming back. So, we better get ready.

Now, the original twelve disciples, the First Century church and all Christians throughout history have anticipated the return of Jesus. When He goes away, they felt He was going to come back pretty soon. Many, like my own grandfather, who died in 1985, were convinced that it would happen in their lifetime. That is a good thing that they think that. That is the right attitude, nothing wrong with that. The truth is that none of us knows exactly when Jesus will return, but we all believe that He will because He said He would.

Q3, what phrase that I gave you (I gave four phrases to choose from) best summarizes the attitude we ought to have as we wait for Jesus to return? Prepare knowing that He will return. Now, if you want to spend your time wondering and predicting when Jesus will return, and a lot of people do that, OK, that's fine. But what Jesus is saying here is that it ought not be our primary focus. The pastor talked about the book of Revelation. And a lot of people read the book of Revelation trying to figure out what this means and that means. They are missing the point of the book and that is that Jesus is coming back, so let's be ready.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

In this first parable we are going to look at, Jesus is wrapping up His teaching about His second coming. That is what He has been talking about. He uses illustrations (like He always does in His parables) that His disciples, who are His audience, are going to understand. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the bridegroom arrives at the bride's home after dark. The bridesmaids, here called "virgins," are also waiting. From the bride's home there will be a procession to the bridegroom's house where the wedding feast will be held. These virgins have their lamps lit and they are going to help light the way to his house. Picking it up in Matthew Chapter 25, v 1...

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept" (Matthew 25:1-5).

Q4, True or False? The bridegroom in this parable arrives right on time, as expected. False. It says the bridegroom was delayed, right? Q5, what word is used by Jesus for the five virgins who did not bring enough oil? "Foolish." Q6, what word is used for the five virgins who took flasks of extra oil? "Wise" [some versions use the word "prudent"]. Only five of the ten virgins are adequately prepared while they wait for the bridegroom to show up.

I want to share a quote from J. Vernon McGee. This is just one of the commentaries I looked at. I just thought it was an interesting thought. He says in his commentary: "Oil is symbolic of the Spirit of God. In that day [in the latter days] I think there will be phonies as there were at His first coming." [At Jesus's second coming he thinks there will be a lot of people pretending to be followers that really are not]. "Jesus called them hypocrites. They will have lamps but no oil." It is an interesting thought. What McGee is implying here is that the five wise virgins represent genuine

believers, while the five foolish virgins represent those who just appear to be believers but are not really. It could be. He calls them “phonies,” pretenders. The foolish virgins have lamps. They outwardly look like the wise virgins, but with one big difference – they have no oil. In other words, they have no internal fuel source. They do not possess the Holy Spirit. It is an interesting thought. I don’t know. I am just throwing it out there. But that is one take-away that he got from this parable. Look at v 6...

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him’ [This is the moment they have all been waiting for]. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’ [They ran low on oil, right? They have no oil now]. But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And 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 (Matthew 25:6-10).

So, after a prolonged delay, the bridegroom finally shows up. But the five foolish virgins are not prepared. Q7 asks, at what point in this parable do these five foolish virgins realize that they are low on oil? When they rose and trimmed their lamps. One commentary I read talked about trimming the lamps. It involved (I have never trimmed a lamp in my life) “cutting the wick to ensure that the light burns brightly without smoke.” So, they have the lamps on [burning low], but then, when he shows up, they want [the light] to be bright. They are going to be using it to guide the way.

Now, had these five been wise, they would have recognized the situation earlier. They would have looked around, seen their friends have these extra flasks of oil – “Why do you have this oil?” “Well, here’s why...” “Ohhhh!” And they could have done something about it earlier. But they did not do that.

Q8, how many of the ten virgins who waited for the bridegroom's arrival actually ended up attending the wedding feast? Only five. As a result of not being prepared, the five foolish virgins missed out on the wedding feast. Once the door was shut, it was too late. V 11...

"Afterward the other virgins [these five virgins] came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore [be on the alert], for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:11-13).

"I do not know you..." This is probably where J. Vernon McGee is getting his theological interpretation of the parable.

Q9, what word of admonition does Jesus give to us, His followers, while we wait for His return? "Watch." Notice that Jesus says "watch" rather than "wait." There IS a difference. I want to give you an illustration of this...

Have you ever gone to pick up your kids or grandkids from school? When the bell rings, all these kids come pouring out of the school building. You keep a close watch for that one special person that you are waiting for. You have told them you would be there. They are looking for you and you are looking for them. There are a lot of kids running around, but you are intently looking for that one person. And when you see them, there is joy and a sense of relief, and you link up, right? On the other hand, in that same parking lot, there is a school bus parked in front of the school. The bus driver, he is looking for kids to get on his bus. But he is just waiting for them all to get on. So, do you see the difference between the bus driver and you? One is watching. One is waiting. Watching evokes the idea of eager expectation. Waiting is more casual and indifferent. We never know when our Lord will return, so we must watch.

Application

So, what is the application for US? Watch for the arrival of the bridegroom (speaking of Jesus). Be prepared for His return. We know He is coming back, right? We do not know when. Live your life as though Jesus

is coming back today. Now, do you all live your life that way? It is just a question. We don't know. It could be. We must be prepared for Him when He finally does return! Look around at the signs in our own time. There are a lot of things taking place. It could very well be that He comes in our lifetime!

The Talents

So, this is the last of Jesus's 40 recorded parable. It is a hard-hitting parable. Jesus indicates that among us are some who are only pretending to follow Him. Now, He has talked about these kinds of individuals before in His other parables. They are the ones who built their house on the sand; they are the plants with shallow roots that ended up withering; they are the tares among the wheat; they are those who are not wearing the proper wedding garments, which we talked about last time. Later in Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus is going to speak about separating the sheep (true believers) from the goats (the pretenders, the phonies). This parable begins in v 14...

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away" (Matthew 25:14-15).

Q10, True or false? The master gives each of his servants the same number of talents. False. We clearly see that. What is interesting is that this parable is very similar to the Parable of the Pounds that we saw in Luke 19. But in the Parable of the Pounds, each of the servants was given the same number of pounds to invest. Here, in this parable, the servants are given a different quantity of talents with no specific instruction stated, at least not up front, right? So, there are some differences in the two. There are some similarities, but there are some differences. People sometimes get these two parables confused.

In this parable, the master represents Jesus. The servants represent those of us who claim to be His followers. In the church there are both

genuine believers and pretenders, unbelievers. This would have been on Jesus's mind right now. Standing there as He is talking to His twelve disciples is one who is an imposter. He will soon be exposed for who he is. His name is Judas. That will happen in the very next chapter. Jesus is aware of this. He knows it. So, this is on His mind as He gives this parable.

The talents represent our God-given opportunities, our abilities, our material resources; even our physical strength and energy. God expects us to use these things that He has given us wisely for His honor and glory.

Q11 says, the master "entrusted" his servants with a portion of his possessions. What does he expect his servants to do with these things while he is away? The answer is all four things listed. The answer is actually inferred later in the passage that we are going to get to. We will see what he expects. Apparently, the servants understood what he expected. They did not have any questions and he did not have to go into a lot of detail. They knew what the master wanted [them to do]. That comes up later in the passage. So, I am just giving you a heads-up [as to] the things he would have expected -- to be responsible with what he gives them; to invest or trade them wisely; to promote his interests; and look for worthwhile business ventures (that is part of investment). That is what he expected them to do with what he gave them.

The master gives his servants responsibilities commensurate with their individual capabilities. Not every servant is given the same level of responsibility and no one receives more than they can handle. So, picking it up in v 16...

"He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money" (Matthew 25:16-18).

So, two of the servants perform well. They are diligent and faithful with what they have been entrusted. They "went at once and traded."

They did something with what they had been given. The result is that they double their original investment. Their hard work pays dividends.

But, oh, that third servant. He does not do so well. He takes the one talent he has and buries it in the ground. He wastes it. Now, had the talent belonged to him, he could have done whatever he wanted to do with it. If he wanted to go bury it, that is his business. But the talent is not his. It belongs to the master. Now, surely, he must have realized what his fellow servants were doing with their talents. He is not blind. He must have known. You would think that their effort and success would have motivated and encouraged this servant. But instead, he chooses to do nothing with what he has been given. And like all lazy people, he has an excuse, which he will see here in a minute.

Well, there finally comes a day of reckoning. The master returns. It is time to settle accounts with his servants. V 19...

“Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them” (Matthew 25:19).

He has been gone for a while. One day our Master will return in the clouds of heaven, right? Yes, He has been gone a long time, but He will return. And, when He does, “each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). The issue is not IF He is coming, but WHEN He is coming. Are you ready? V 20...

“And 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.’ His 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.’

And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His 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’” (Matthew 25:20-23).

These first two servants report their earnings to the master. Both acknowledge that they were entrusted by the master with talents that belonged to the master. Both servants now have twice as many talents as they had originally been entrusted with. So, they take that profit and they turn it over to the master.

Q12, how does the master in this parable reward these first two servants? First, he commends them for a job well done. He offers them words of praise. Second, he gives them greater responsibility. And then third, he invites them to enjoy his fellowship. He says, "Enter into the joy of your master."

I threw that fourth choice in there [makes them joint heirs with his son] – I wanted to get you thinking a little bit – because that applies to US. If we do a good job for our Lord, [then] when we go to get our reward, we are going to get the same things that these [first two] servants got. But also, we will get that fourth one. [We will become joint heirs with Jesus]. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs [we are joint heirs] with Jesus Christ..." (Romans 8:17). That is pretty exciting, right?

[One class member commented on how much they hope to hear those same words of commendation from Jesus one day, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I told them that this was a good attitude to have, that they were thinking ahead long-term, down the road, when they get to heaven. But in order to hear those words, the servants had to do something with what their master had entrusted to them].

Well, the third servant, it is his turn. He steps forward and he gives his rather embarrassing report in v 24...

"He 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, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' [He hands it back to him]. But his master answered him, 'You wicked

and slothful [lazy] servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? [That is what you, the servant, thought]. Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest." ["So, I would have had something"]. (Matthew 25:24-27).

Q13, what words does the master use to describe the one who buried his talent? Two words he uses – “lazy” and “wicked.” By the way, if you read through Proverbs, you will see how many times wickedness and laziness are linked together, all throughout Proverbs. The master, who represents God, sees right to the heart.

Notice the servant’s excuse. He is afraid. He is afraid of the master. His view of the master is the view that many people have of God and it is NOT accurate. While God is a just God, He is also a loving and kind and merciful God. The servant also accuses his master of taking what does not belong to him... “You are a hard man, reaping where you do not sow, gathering where you scatter no seed.” That is NOT God at all. Everything belongs to God and it is out of His grace that He shares any of it with us. This servant’s view of his master is all wrong.

The master does not buy this man’s excuse for one minute. He tells the servant that if he REALLY had this fear of the master like he said he did, he would have put the money in the bank and at least had it draw interest. He would have done something with what he had been entrusted [with] – if he really feared the master. But he was lazy. And he was wicked. He was really no servant at all. Look at v 28...

“So, take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For 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” (Matthew 25:28-29).

In other words, what [Jesus] is saying here is those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away. The master

removes the talent from his wicked and lazy servant and gives it to the most faithful servant. To those who invest wisely what they have been given, even more will be given.

Q14, according to Jesus in v 29, what can those who invest wisely, the faithful servants, expect to have from God? An abundance. Now, let's clarify that. That COULD possibly come in this life – and here in Rockwall, Texas, that certainly seems to be the case with most of the people here, Christian or not. But I really think the focus here (given that they were living in a very poor society) is on the kingdom that is to come. I am going to get to v 30 here in a minute.

Application

So, here is the application for the parable we just read... God gives us time, abilities, spiritual gifts and other resources according to His grace. He expects us to invest these wisely until He returns. We are responsible to use well what God has given us. Here is a big one -- the Lord is not going to ask us HOW MUCH we have done for Him, but HOW FAITHFUL we have been to Him.

Separating the Sheep and the Goats

Now we are going to get to v 30. It is what I call the lead-in verse to one of the scariest passages in all of the Bible. This is how the parable ends...

“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

We have talked about this before. It is a reference to hell. This is one big difference between this parable and the Parable of the Pounds. In the Parable of the Pounds, that servant does NOT get sent to hell. He just loses fellowship. This one apparently was not a true servant at all. So, he gets cast into outer darkness.

So, Jesus's real purpose here is not to scare His listeners. By the way, His listeners included Judas. Remember I said that Judas was right there

[listening to Jesus]. In the very next chapter, he is going to go to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus. Jesus wants us, His followers (this included Judas), to examine ourselves carefully to see if we really do belong to Him. In the verses that follow this, Jesus speaks of the final judgment where He, "the Son of Man," separates the sheep (representative of believers) from the goats (representative of unbelievers).

By the way, I just wanted to point something out here about sheep and goats. They graze just fine together. They intermingle. They get along. If you ever go to Israel, you will see sheep and goats together all the time being [herded] around. But the thing about sheep and goats is, although they get along and they intermingle, just like us and the world, we intermingle, believers and unbelievers, they are fundamentally different animals. This is why Jesus uses this illustration [for] believers and unbelievers because, in the end, He is going to separate the sheep from the goats [in the same way].

Q15, in light of the fact that Jesus IS coming again (though we don't know when that will be), what is the single best thing you and I can do in anticipation of His return? Action point, right? *[Class responses included telling others about Jesus and living righteously and watching].*

But what comes before that? Believing. It starts there, with repenting, confessing and examining yourself. Turning from your sin and getting saved. Then all those things mentioned before will follow.

Q16 is based on the following passage from First John Chapter 3...

"Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He [speaking of Jesus] is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever

does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:7-10).

Q16, True or false? There is a connection between what a person truly believes and how they live their life. True. That is the whole premise of First John and the book of James. While works do not save us, our behavior is a key indicator as to whether we are truly saved or not. The good news for all of us is that there is still time for us to get our hearts right with God. If you are not saved there is plenty of time to get saved. I would do it quickly because you do not know when you will draw your last breath. But there is also plenty of time for those of us who are not living the way God want us to live; to make a new commitment to Him to start doing that.

The End – Closing Thoughts

"THE END" -- At the end of every movie these words come on the screen. That way you know it is time to walk out of the theater. Otherwise, you would be sitting there all night.

This is the end of our parables study. May God bless the reading and the study of His Holy Scriptures! I hope you all enjoyed the parables and got something out of them.

At the end of class I prayed the following prayer for our class...

"Dear God, I come on behalf of those present here in this room. Grant us the strength and the power to live out these truths in our daily lives until Your Son, Jesus, returns for us in the clouds or until the day that You decide to usher us from this earthly life directly into Your presence. I pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen."