

Lesson #26- Matthew Chapter 25 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. 1-13 compares 10 virgins and their lamps to the kingdom of heaven. Discuss this parable and the likenesses you think Jesus is asking us to see.

Help for Teachers:

It appears to have been a familiar custom among many in the Jewish culture of that day, that the bride would await the coming of the bridegroom, attended by her bridesmaids. He would arrive late in the night, but his arrival would be with notice that his appearance was imminent. The bridesmaids were to go out with lamps lighted, to usher him into the house with joy and ceremony, making the marriage the more wonderful.

We see how this relates to what He has taught the disciples in chapter 24. No one knows the day or the hour, but Jesus' return is certain nevertheless, and will be preceded by ample signs to those that are looking for His return (25:6).

Notice that these ten virgins were "in" the wedding party, by all outward appearance, but five were without oil. They had lamps but nothing within the lamps, no capacity to provide light. Jesus had already taught in Matt. 7 about the broad and narrow gate, many that go to destruction and few into everlasting life. So, 50/50 seems like great statistics compared to that, until you think that this parable is centered only on the professed wedding party... perhaps those claiming a place within the church. Through the centuries some of the most brutal, ungodly, horrific acts have been perpetrated by those claiming "church" status, wicked men operating under the guise of Christianity. Even worse, many flying under the banner of Christianity have, and still do, present with much humanitarianism and moral appeal, but replace the gospel of grace with a gospel of works or anything other than the blood of Jesus Christ alone for salvation (Gal 1:8-9). These deceivers are the more dangerous. No matter how the five without oil saw themselves (or how those claiming Christianity but having never come to saving faith and not having the Holy Spirit [oil] within), Jesus declares them "foolish".

Jesus declares in verse 5 that they all "slumbered and slept". The foolish and the wise alike slumbered and slept, "While the bridegroom tarried". This certainly was a bad thing for the foolish without oil. How many times does Jesus speak of those whose eyes are closed that they don't see? Their sleeping displays an attitude such as Peter speaks of in 2 Peter 3:3-4, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

It would be easiest to conclude that the five wise virgins shouldn't have gone to sleep either. This parable ends with Jesus telling the disciples, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." (V13). In the next chapter we will find Jesus praying and agonizing in the garden, while His three closest disciples can't keep their eyes open for an hour. Certainly, we are to be watching and ready, serving our Lord with all our strength until the day of His appearing.

Our compassionate Lord mercifully says to the three exhausted and sleeping disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak". He knows the battle that rages in His children, having a new heart and indwelt with the Spirit, but trapped for the time in a body of flesh that is "carnal, sold under sin" as the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 7:14. I don't think it the primary application, nevertheless a thought; Jesus offered rest to those that come to Him and take up His yoke (Matt 11:28).

Though the bridegroom tarried, He came... Jesus will return. The foolish and the wise simultaneously heard the cry announcing His coming... Believers and unbelievers alike will hear and see Him returning in great glory. Excitement and joy for those prepared, terror and confusion for those not prepared.

The foolish virgins ask for the oil that the wise virgins have. The wise answer wisely, "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:". Salvation isn't a gift that can be repurposed or shared. The "oil" can only come from one source, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved". The wise in Christ, know that they have no power to give salvation to another. The grace we have is sufficient for us and we are needy of it. We can only point those without to the source of our oil, Jesus Christ.

"Give us your oil". Having refused to have Jesus rule over them and change their wicked heart in life, they will now at death or at His return, wish for that grace that only can save them. But their plea comes too late, the opportunity is passed, "(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)" (2 Cor 6:2).

Unfortunately, it's too late for the foolish virgins, the end has come. But the wise continue to have compassion and share the message right to the end. They don't ridicule the unwise virgins for their foolishness, or display a superior posture, but rather they give them the best advice possible, "go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." But the market has closed.

Prepared or not the day will come when the Bridegroom comes, there is an appointed day Jesus will return. Verse 10 says that "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." As in the days of Noah, after many years of proffered grace, God shut the door of the ark. In the Revelation, John records Jesus saying to the Philadelphian church, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;".

Verse 11 finds the unwise virgins, still without oil, having previously disregarded their responsibility to glorify the Bridegroom and counted His coming not worth their worrying about, at the door. They cry out to the Lord for entrance, but now it's too late, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Just like those imposters that appeal to Jesus for entrance into the kingdom based on their good works to which Jesus answers, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt 7:23). They wanted to be part of the kingdom, but they didn't want the King. They wanted to be part of the wedding party, but they didn't want the Bridegroom.

Watch and be ready. That we don't know which day or which hour in no way diminishes the fact that the day and hour will come.

2. Jesus then offers another parable concerning the kingdom of heaven (14-30). How do you understand the parable of the talents?

Help for Teachers:

As the parable of the bridegroom emphasizes the necessity of expectancy, this parable emphasizes the necessity of faithful obedience to the business the Lord has given us to attend.

In this parable the Lord is Jesus Christ.

The servants are the professing church. In verse 14 they are referred to as "his own servants". He has bought them; they are no longer their own (1 Cor 6:19-20). He has rescued them from hopelessness and eternal death and given them a station high above their deserving (Eph 2:4-7). By His grace they have a place and a purpose and great joy in being thus employed. Their allegiance and duty are to the advancement of the business of their Lord. What an honor, as well as great responsibility has Jesus given His church, that He has entrusted the business of heaven's kingdom on earth to His people (2 Cor 2:14-16).

The Lord of the servants provided all that was required to ensure success for His servants. He knew them and assigned responsibility equal to their abilities and assets sufficient for their tasks (1 Cor 12,). Though each servant was given differing resources, all received much with which to work (Phil 4:19): five, two, and one talent. Some translations read "bag of gold" instead of talent. In either case it seems agreeable that a talent constituted about twenty years of a day laborer's wages.

The servants knew what was expected of the Lord. Two of the three obediently went to work, making full use of the ample resources entrusted to them, and with great success. The one with five gained five. The one with two gained two. Both doubled what had been given them to use. The third dug a hole and buried the one talent he had been given to work with, hiding his Lord's money.

After a long time, the Lord of the servants returned. Though a long time had passed, His return was certain and then there was an accounting (2 Peter 3:9).

The reckoning:

The first two servants happily reported to their Lord that they had gained twice the talents they had been left with. The Lord replied to both almost exactly the same thing, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Some things I find wonderful in Jesus’ response:

- “Well done”. What an idea that God would find delight in us! It reminds me of when a young child tries their best to obediently do a task to please their parent, and upon the parent coming to inspect the work, the child is so excited to report that the job is accomplished. The work is a complete trainwreck, but the parent sees it as “well done”, because it was done from a heart of obedience and gratitude, and it is their child. But God’s “well done” is even beyond just that, it really is a job “well done” because God takes our little and makes great out of it. Through our weaknesses and inabilities, God’s strength and grace is made completely clear (2 Cor 12:9).
- “thou good and faithful servant:” Once without value, but now “good” and “faithful”!
 - Righteousness is imputed (put into) to us by God (Rom 4)
 - Once dead in sin, now alive to do the good works that God has predestined us to do to His glory (Eph 2:1-10)
- “I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Vastly more than we can imagine! (1 Cor 2:9). And it will happen without fail, for here Jesus said that HE will do it. It will be unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:1-9)

The accounting is very different concerning the third servant who received one talent. His report begins with what seems a lie, “Lord, I knew thee”. Jesus dismisses him to everlasting darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the same as is spoken of the rejecting Jews in 8:12, as is spoken concerning the tares (hypocrites) in 13:42 and 50, as was spoken in the parable of the marriage feast concerning the man without a wedding garment in 22:13, and as concerning the servant who disallowed the return of his master in 24:51. None of the above had a legitimate relationship of submission to the Lordship of Jesus.

As he continues his explanation, “that thou art an hard man”, it further discounts his relationship, for we know the opposite to be true for all those that come to Jesus by faith. Jesus invites all those that will to “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (11:28-30). “Thou art an hard man” is an accusation against the Lord. He states here that his fear is the basis for hiding the talent. Not knowing the Lord, he views Him as an enemy to be afraid of.

When Adam separated himself from God in the garden, he made a similar accusation, "...The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." (Gen 3:12).

The next part of his statement is self-indicting and true, "reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:". As is a major point of this parable, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe". The work of the servants was to be fruitful by sowing the Word, diligently using all the resources God had richly blessed them with. God has ordained that by this the elect will be gathered in and His name thereby glorified in all the earth. Jesus said in 9:38, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." Without faith in the Lord, the wicked servant declares that because he was afraid, he hid what was given him in the earth. Hebrews chapter 2 says that we are freed from the bondage that the fear of death has gripped all men from the beginning of time with, freed by the One that became us to save us. Unbelieving and unrepentant, this man did what all in that condition have and still do, he fearfully hoped to anchor his physical life and the good gifts God has given all men, saved and unsaved alike, in earthly things. He "dug a hole".

His last statement to the Lord, on which he rested all his hope of acceptance was, "lo, there thou hast that is thine" ... we're even... no harm, no foul... I didn't hurt anyone. Seems like so many that claim Christianity today feel secure in a neutral posture. They can truly say, "I don't disrespect my Bible or church", "I've never set out to attack the efforts of the religious over-achievers", "I live a respectable moral life and don't make a public disgrace of myself", "I haven't squandered and lost the gifts God has given me by partying or fiscal irresponsibility". "Here God, have back what you gave me, we're even".

The Lord's response to this deluded servant is furious. He addresses him as "wicked" (morally very bad: EVIL, FIERCE, VICIOUS, disposed to or marked by mischief: ROGUSH, disgustingly unpleasant: VILE, causing or likely to cause harm, distress, or trouble [MW]) and "slothful" (full of: disinclination to action or labor: INDOLENCE [inclination to laziness], spiritual apathy and inactivity [MW]).

The Lord judged this wicked and slothful servant by his own words, "thou knewest".

Because he knew, he should have obeyed. "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." Scripture is full of the teaching that true and saving faith will be accompanied by actions that attest to a new nature in Christ. This man professed servitude, but his actions belied his testimony. How many have heard the gospel call and made a public declaration of allegiance to and faith in Christ, possibly even with some regularity of attendance at gatherings, but without any fellowship beyond that? No change in the way they use their God-given resources. No priority to follow Christ. Nothing beyond nominal Christianity to promote the Lord to the world and advance His kingdom. No fruit. Peter writes "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;" (1 Pet 1:15). God is holy, set apart from all others.

He is the Only God and Sovereign over all. He made all, owns all, sustains all, deserves all. Those He has chosen are set apart for His service... holy and are to behave that way. James is very direct as he writes in James 2:17, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone".

"Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents." How many undeserved blessings in this life does God graciously pour out on unbelievers, that they might see His goodness and come to Him in faith? And yet they reject His mercies and will not trust Him. But at the end the Lord will withdraw these gifts and they will be left with nothing. Is that not what hell is, God giving a person what he wants, which is to be left alone by God? And if all good things come from above, from the Father of lights (James 1:17), what is left but the terrors of hell? But to His sheep Jesus says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Verse 30 makes it clear that the unprofitable servant is not of the fold, as his destiny is "outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Even the unprofitable are servants, as Paul explains in Romans 9 concerning Pharaoh, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." And again in verses 20-23, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?". Rather by mercy or by wrath, God will be glorified in all things.

3. 31 through the remainder of the chapter is no parable, but direct statements that Jesus makes concerning judgement when He returns. If salvation is a gift of grace, why does Jesus grant entrance into His kingdom or everlasting punishment based on these apparent works?

Help for Teachers:

Verse 31 begins with "When". Not "if", but "when". It expresses a concrete fact of the return of the King. The interval of time between His ascent and His return in no way changes the inevitability that He is coming back. Jesus declares here that He's not coming in humility as at His first advent, but now He is returning in His glory. It's an event that commands the attendance of *all* the holy angels. He will sit on the throne of His glory and all nations will be gathered unto Him for judgement. He will divide out His elect and set them at His right hand. The unbelievers He describes as goats, at His left hand.

To His sheep He announces, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:". These are not described as having superior qualities, or that did anything worthy of acceptance, or that made a good decision. They are declared to be those that are "blessed of my Father". How blessed are those that the Father has chosen! Yes, the saved are those that have responded in faith to the gospel call, and yes, they have chosen to follow Jesus in faith. But make no mistake, even in that regard they have nothing to boast of concerning their choosing, for He chose them first, and without that they would in no case respond in faith (John 1:12-13, John 6:37, John 6:45-46, John 15:16-19, 2 Thes 2:13). Paul makes it clear that your faith isn't of your own volition, it's given to you because you were chosen of the Father ("For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" [Eph 2:8]), so that ALL glory belongs to the Lord, and we are the more thankful. Though so undeserving, He has chosen to bring us that were dead to life (Eph 2:1). God set a plan in motion from the beginning that will not be thwarted or in any way abridged. From the foundation of the world, God has determined to bring into His kingdom a people to glorify His great name.

Inherit the kingdom, the King says to His sheep (V34)! Why? Because the Son of God has become the Son of man; He has taken on flesh and blood and become our Brother so that He might be the Captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10). He has done for us what we never could, He has "...abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Eph 2:15). And now, His dwelling in us (Col 1:27, 1 Cor 3:16), gives us a new nature and a new capacity to obey a new commandment "That ye love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34). And so, when we have "done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." This Jesus says to the righteous (V37). Paul writes in Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

The chapter ends (41-46) with Jesus pronouncing judgement on those that have rejected Him. They are condemned because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18). As they have rejected Him, He rejects them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:". For they are not made righteous, they are not His brethren, they are not of the body of Christ and He nor the Spirit dwells in them. There has been no fruit, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." Their name is not found in the book of life, and so they are judged according to their works (compare with Rev 20:11-15).

But the righteous go into eternal life!