



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Five

**XIII. Matthew 24:1-25:46 - The Delay, Return, and Judgment of Messiah (Fifth [Olivet] Discourse) (continues/concludes)**

**XIII.d Matthew 24:45-25:30 - Parabolic exhortations to watch and be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man (continues/concludes)**

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

Jesus concluded this final discourse with three parables, each of which is intended to prepare disciples for the return of their Lord and Saviour.

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is about the mixed church, containing those that are prepared for Jesus' return and those that will be caught out. However, it also provides a warning to all that the church will be spiritually asleep when the final announcement of the Second Coming is made. Even those who are prepared will find that they are only sufficiently prepared for themselves and have made no provision to help others in that final time. Those who are prepared will go into the great Wedding Banquet; those who are not will be locked out, signifying either that they were never really saved or more likely that they have eternal salvation but will not receive their rewards.

The Parable of the Talents is an illustration of the gifts that God gives to each according to their ability. It shows that some will put their gifts to good use while the Lord is away, producing a good Kingdom return and being rewarded when they come before Christ in judgement. The one that does nothing with the gift, other than to preserve it, will be severely rebuked at the time of judgement and will face eternal punishment or loss of reward.

The Judgement of the Nations shows that all people will stand before Christ when he comes. First they will be segregated into those who have accepted the Gospel by faith and thus have received eternal salvation, and those who rejected the message. The first group will be led away into the eternal presence of God, while the latter will be cast into hell. The overriding rationale is that it is about how people receive the agents of Christ who bring the Gospel. Each will be rewarded according to their response for the way the agent is treated, for it represents the way that they have received Jesus.

### XIII.d.ii Matthew 25:1-13 - The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

This parable is both about keeping watch for the return of the Son of Man and also being prepared when he does come. The parable is couched in cultural analogy. Weddings were of great social significance and bridesmaids played the part of lighting the procession with their torches from the bride's home to the groom's, since weddings were typically held in the evening. To be unprepared for their duties would be seen as insulting to both bride and groom.

The parable describes ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise because they took extra oil for their lamps along to ensure their torches continued to burn no matter how long they waited; the other five were foolish because they didn't take any extra oil, their flame burning for a short while only.

The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and so they all fell asleep waiting. When he finally arrived, the five wise bridesmaids could follow him immediately, but the foolish ones could not, since they had used up their oil and didn't have any more. They had to go out and buy more oil for the others with extra had insufficient to share. By the time they returned, the bridegroom's banquet was underway and the doors were closed. The moral of the parable is: **<<Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour>>** (v.13).

The parable of the ten bridesmaids is primarily eschatological, although it also describes those who miss out on the rewards that could be theirs.

**<sup>1</sup> 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.'**

#### Matthew 25:1

**The Kingdom of Heaven will be like this.** The term **Kingdom of Heaven** is found only in Matthew's Gospel and is interchangeable with Kingdom of God, found in all of the Gospels, the Book of Acts and the epistles of Paul. Jesus frequently told parables to describe his Kingdom: **<<He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field>>** (Matthew 13:24). Jesus draws on various common experiences to describe the arrival and activity of the Kingdom. This is the last of ten occasions recorded by Matthew where Jesus used this or a similar comparative phrase.

The **ten bridesmaids** or **ten virgins**. Ten represents divine perfection in Scripture, yet some of these bridesmaids would fall well short of the mark. Jewish tradition for major events such as circumcision, Bar Mitzvah and weddings always required ten witnesses, just as Boaz called for ten men to witness his acceptance of Ruth as his wife in his duty as kinsman redeemer: **<<Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down>>** (Ruth 4:2).

As God referred to himself as the husband of Israel in the OT, for example: **<<Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your**

*Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God>> (Isaiah 54:4-6), so Jesus portrays himself as a bridegroom: <<Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast>> (Matthew 9:14-15).*

It was the Jewish marriage custom, for the bridegroom and his friends to leave his home in order to proceed to the home of his bride at night, where they would be initially welcomed by the bridesmaids. The bride and bridegroom would then be escorted by these unmarried bridesmaids, i.e. ten virgins, who would be bearing torches to light the way: <<*in many-coloured robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow*>> (Psalm 45:14), back to the home of the bridegroom, where the wedding ceremony and feast would take place: <<*So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her*>> (Genesis 29:22-23). Traditionally, the celebratory banquet could last up to seven days.

*Although the bride is never mentioned in this parable, God has always been betrothed to his people: <<And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy>> (Hosea 2:19). In the NT era that is the church of Jesus Christ.*

<sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

#### Matthew 25:2-4

Some commentators believe that five of them were foolish, and five were wise is the proportion of those in the church who are saved and those who falsely profess Christ, i.e. hypocrites: <<*For many are called, but few are chosen*>> (Matthew 22:14). Others believe it to refer to all that are saved with some receiving their reward at judgement and some missing out. Refer also to comments made on v.18.

One viewpoint is that the wise are open to correction by the Spirit: <<*let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill*>> (Proverbs 1:5), while the foolish are not, often content to have faith and trust in their own ability and perceived wisdom. Paul warns against this: <<*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned*>> (Romans 12:3).

*There was a comparison given between a wise and foolish builder in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24-27 that indicated the consequences for those who heeded Jesus' teaching and those who did not.*

Lamps refer to large dome-shaped torches, fuelled by rags soaked in oil and used for walking outside. With extra containers of oil, the torches could last for several hours.

The wise took flasks of oil, which would enable them to keep their torches burning probably for the entire night. Disciples are called to be properly prepared for the return of Christ.



Modern torches not too dissimilar to those used in ancient times

Some commentators refer to those with additional flasks of oil as believers who are spiritually mature, having their hearts filled with the oil or grace of Christ, and living with high levels of expectancy. Those described as foolish may indeed be hypocrites or perhaps are just people not in the right place in their walk of faith but who are still saved. It will always be a mixed church, for the Church that Jesus describes is mixed, with spiritual and carnal, strong and weak, mature and immature, and those with their own agenda.

Ultimately, the foolish are those who do not make provision for the return of Christ. Their lamp was burning for a short time only as they had no additional supply of oil. It is about lifestyle choices, about ensuring that God is at the centre of all that is done, said and thought. Jesus summarises it as: <<Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me>> (John 15:4). The lamp cannot burn brightly for very long without the presence of the oil that is the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.”

#### Matthew 25:5-6

The bridegroom was delayed. In cultural terms, a bridegroom was often delayed while the bride’s family haggled over the final bride price or value of the gifts given. In the case of Jesus’ return, it has been announced and is imminent but the exact time is not known. The delay is a blessing for those not yet saved even if it means the time of tribulation for the church continues, which is part of the price of discipleship. The prophet speaks of being prepared despite the delay: <<For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay>> (Habakkuk 2:3).

Although Jesus may be delayed beyond our time on earth, he will not be delayed beyond the time appointed by God. His return is certain.

At midnight there was a shout. Scripture reveals that ‘the last days’ is the church age: <<In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams>> (Acts

2:17), and: <<*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world*>> (Hebrews 1:1-2).

What this midnight shout does is to herald in the very last days, a time probably of empowerment for the Word to be preached even more boldly, accompanied by a further outpouring of the Spirit, for Christ is a God: <<*who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*>> (1 Timothy 2:4), and this would be their final opportunity. Once the bridegroom comes, he will then segregate the people into two groups for final judgement (vv.32-33).

Became drowsy and slept. It was not just the foolish who slept, thus Jesus gives a warning to his church to remain alert. He is clearly indicating that the church will metaphorically be asleep, i.e. not spiritually alert or discerning of the time, as his return approaches.

The Greek term translated midnight actually refers to the middle of the night and thus does not provide any clues to the actual time Jesus will return. However, it is an hour that was associated with judgement: <<*At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock*>> (Exodus 12:29). Unless God intervenes supernaturally, it will only be night time for approximately half the world, most likely the middle of the night in Israel if his return is to be on his Holy Mount: <<*Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*>> (Revelation 14:1).

<sup>7</sup> Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.”

#### Matthew 25:7-8

Our lamps are going out. Jesus had warned his disciples to remain vigilant: <<*Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit*>> (Luke 12:35). Nearly all people who come to saving faith start well and have great enthusiasm and love in their hearts for God, serving him with a passion. As time passes, some people cool off for a variety of reasons: comfort in their own salvation, disappointment due apparent unanswered prayer, complacency, wrong priorities in life, etc. When the final cry for Christ's return comes, or indeed when people reach the end of their earthly life, they realise all too late that they have become spiritually unreceptive and ask others for some of your oil, some of their spirituality, a request for them to pray on behalf of the foolish.

**We should all take care not to become complacent but to live in the reality of our own salvation. If the fire is not burning as bright as it once was, we should pray for more oil, more of the Spirit and ask those around us to pray for us too. It is never too late to fill up the spare oil flask, although it has to be done before the midnight call goes out.**

<sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.”

<sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

#### Matthew 25:9-10

Not be enough for you and for us. The lamps required regular dowsing with oil and each person would normally have a flask with sufficient oil only for their own lamp. Two key points here are that even those who were prepared had been asleep and they had only made provision for themselves. The church of Christ is supposed to be one body, caring for each other. There is a call here for the church to ensure they notice when others are perhaps slipping back and they should be prepared to offer support, advice, prayer and even a rebuke in love, in order to bring those straying back onto the path: <<*While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish*>> (Job 8:12-13), and: <<*All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees*>> (Psalm 25:10). Solomon wrote: <<*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid*>> (Proverbs 12:1), but probably of greater importance here: <<*Better is open rebuke than hidden love*>> (Proverbs 27:5). Although such rebuke is mainly the responsibility of leadership it is also the responsibility of all in a genuine loving family. Sometimes it comes better from a friend than one in authority. It is better to offer the rebuke in time rather than foolish and untimely counsel, even it was well intended, i.e. go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.

However, to the credit of the wise, at least they had the good grace not to boast about their own foresight in preparedness or to criticise the foolish bridesmaids for their failure to do so.

The bridegroom came represents the Second Coming. There appears to be a period of time between the final midnight call of v.6 and the arrival of Christ. How much time is not revealed to humankind, although it appears to be insufficient for those who were unprepared when the call came to get themselves ready.

Those who were ready indicates that it was the responsibility of each person to be individually prepared to meet the bridegroom and accompany him into the wedding banquet. Those attending the banquet will receive their reward. The apostle provides a timely reminder: <<*Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward*>> (2 John 8).

<sup>11</sup> Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” <sup>12</sup> But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.”

#### Matthew 25:11-12

I do not know you. The OT speaks of God knowing his chosen people: <<*Moses said to the Lord, ‘See, you have said to me, “Bring up this people”; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know*

*you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight”>> (Exodus 33:12), <<Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations>> (Jeremiah 1:5), <<It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought>> (Hosea 13:5 ESV), and: <<You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities>> (Amos 3:2). The same theme continues in the NT, where it describes a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ: <<Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again?>> (Galatians 4:8-9), and: <<But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his’, and, ‘Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness’>> (2 Timothy 2:19).*

There are differing viewpoints on this passage. The first is that the foolish bridesmaids, those in the church unprepared for Christ’s return, have lost their salvation or perhaps were not really saved in the first place. The second viewpoint is that, being shut out from the wedding banquet means they have lost out on the reward they would have received had they remained prepared until the very end.

<sup>13</sup> **Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

#### Matthew 25:13

**Keep awake therefore.** The point of the parable is that disciples must keep watch diligently in order to be properly prepared and ready to accompany the Son of Man when he returns. Jesus had given the same warning in an earlier parable: <<**Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming**>> (Matthew 24:42).

**You know neither the day nor the hour.** That the time of Jesus’ coming is unknown does not preclude that the signs Jesus refers to in Matthew 24:4-25 will precede it. However, the signs themselves do not mean that his return will immediately follow; they simply indicate that he is preparing to come. God alone knows when the time will be: <<**But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**>> (Matthew 24:36), and: <<**He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority**>> (Acts 1:7).

#### XIII.d.iii Matthew 25:14-30 - The Parable of the Talents

Before the master went on a journey he entrusted each of three slaves with a certain amount of money according to their ability. Two invested wisely and saw a good return for their master, receiving appropriate reward on his return. The third did nothing with what he had been given and simply gave it back to him on his return, for which he was severely punished. The returned sum of money was then given to the one who had the most.

God gives to each person the gifts they need to do the work they are called for. He not only expects them to use those gifts but to multiply them. Those that are faithful to his call will be entrusted with even more responsibility; those who do not will receive no reward and will even lose what they have been given.

<sup>14</sup> **‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;**

#### Matthew 25:14

Entrusted his property to them. In the Roman Empire slaves, i.e. servants, could earn wages and bonuses, even acquiring property of their own. Hence they would have more incentive to look out for the master’s property than slaves in many other cultures do.

In the absence of an appropriate male family member, householders going on a journey that would keep them away for some time would normally entrust their estate to slaves to oversee, since household slaves often held managerial roles, as indicated in an earlier parable: <<*Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?*>> (Matthew 24:45). The master has bestowed a high level of trust in his servants, thus they understood very well what was required of them.

The journey here is best explained by Paul: <<*Therefore it is said, ‘When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people’*>> (Ephesians 4:8). Thus when Jesus went into heaven he left his church well equipped.

<sup>15</sup> **to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.**

#### Matthew 25:15

In OT times, one talent, Greek *talanta*, was a unit of weight equalling about 75 pounds or 34kg. In NT times, it was a unit of monetary reckoning, although not an actual coin, valued at about 6,000 drachmas, the equivalent of about 20 years’ wages for a labourer, since a labourer earned usually just one denarius for each day worked: <<*After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard*>> (Matthew 20:2 ESV). These were not small investments that the king was making.

According to his ability shows that God already knows what each person is capable of achieving when he provides them with the Spiritual gifts and other abilities they require in order to fulfil their calling. There is a difference here with the Parable of the Ten Minas recorded in Luke 19:12-28, where each servant was given the same amount; although a mina was worth considerably less than a talent.

Since the parable is about disciples using the gifts they have been entrusted with, the equivalent monetary value of even just one talent demonstrates how highly God views the value of the gifts he bestows on his people. God expects his people to use those gifts appropriately: <<*Like good stewards of the*

*manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received*>> (1 Peter 4:10).

Essentially, this parable focuses on the natural, if God-given, abilities that a person has, providing them with the opportunity and capability to accept the responsibility they are then given. That is, all people have a certain level of common grace, their ability. God then adds to it responsibility, the number of talents, which then represents their anointing for Kingdom service. Therefore, ability + responsibility = anointing.

If a person appears to have natural ability in a particular area, God often opens up opportunities for them to be productive in the Kingdom within their skill area; he gives them sufficient talents in order to use their ability for his glory. Thus Jesus can say: *<<From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded*>> (Luke 12:48b).

People need to be careful not to let their own ambition get in the way of their anointing. In the world people often take on responsibilities that are beyond them because of prestige or financial gain. Positions in church ministry should not be sought with a worldly desire but undertaken according to the ability and opportunity that God provides.

<sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

#### Matthew 25:16-17

Went off at once. The first and second servants acted industriously and earned a return on their entrusted amounts, probably by setting up some kind of business. Most people lacked capital, but those who had it could multiply their investment fivefold or even tenfold: *<<The first came forward and said, “Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.” He said to him, “Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.” Then the second came, saying, “Lord, your pound has made five pounds”>>* (Luke 19:16-18); doubling one’s investment might be regarded as a reasonable minimum return in the ancient economy.

The immediacy of their action is a good lesson for all disciples to learn. When one knows what is right in God’s calling on their life they should act without delay. This was even seen in one who had fallen away from grace, as with the Prodigal who realised he needed to be back with his father and went: *<<So he set off and went to his father>>* (Luke 15:20a).

In Kingdom terms, their investment may have been in ministry, evangelisation, teaching or similar work according to their gifts and calling. The return would have been their fruit.

<sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

## Matthew 25:18

Dug a hole in the ground. Since there were no banks as such in ancient times, it was common practice to bury valuables as was indicated in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure: <<*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field*>> (Matthew 13:44). Refer also to comments made on v.27.

Although burying the money kept it safe, it would have been no less safe with the money traders who would have paid interest when it was redeemed.

There are some commentators and scholars who believe that the proportion here represents the number of faithful servants in the church, i.e. two thirds are fruitful, just as vv.2-4 show that half the church is wise and half foolish. It seems doubtful that these analogies are intended as an accurate figure either for local congregations or the global church.

<sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

## Matthew 25:19

After a long time is the same as delayed in the previous two associated parables: <<*But if that wicked slave says to himself, "My master is delayed"*>> (Matthew 24:48), and: <<*As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept*>> (v.5). This is once again a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

Settled accounts with them refers to judgement and the giving of rewards.

<sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

## Matthew 25:20-23

I have made five more talents; I have made two more talents. The faithful and trustworthy slaves each brought in a return commensurate with the responsibility the master had given them. This is in line with the promises of God for those who endure in faithfulness: <<*Because their shame was double, and dishonour was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs*>> (Isaiah 61:7). It was the blessing that Elisha requested: <<*When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.'* Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a

*double share of your spirit'*>> (2 Kings 2:9). They had demonstrated both faith and faithfulness through their good works: <<*Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom*>> (James 3:13).

Well done, good and trustworthy slave or faithful servant. The master's identical statements of praise to both servants show that what was important was not the total amount earned but faithfulness in utilising their gifts and potential.

You have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Faithful stewardship in this life will result in being given greater responsibility and stewardship in both this life and the one to come. Jesus also teaches that: <<*'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?'*>> (Luke 16:10-12). It often takes time and effort to make the most of the gifts that God has given to his people. Those who simply bury what they have been given can expect to receive nothing in return.

What should also be noted here is that it doesn't matter in Kingdom terms whether a person has been given the responsibility and gifting equal to one, two or five talents. If they are faithful in their service to God they will each receive the same Kingdom reward. They are all of equal value in God's sight, the only viewpoint that ever matters.

Enter into the joy of your master. This is the invitation, not into eternal life as such, but the added bonus of being presented to the Father as a reward for faithful service to Christ: <<*I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete*>> (John 15:11), and: <<*But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves*>> (John 17:13).

<sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

#### Matthew 25:24-25

Master, I knew that you were a harsh man. The third servant's actions result from his apparent misperception of his master, which manifests itself in fear, laziness and bad stewardship. What is even worse is that he tried to justify his actions. Job had shown inappropriate fear of God through his misunderstanding of the situation: <<*If he would take his rod away from me, and not let dread of him terrify me, then I would speak without fear of him, for I know I am not what I am thought to be*>> (Job 9:34-35), for which he was later rebuked; and God's people Israel had often claimed it was God who was unfair in his dealings with them: <<*Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?'*>> (Ezekiel

18:25). Worst of all was when Adam even tried to place the responsibility for sin on God by providing him with Eve: <<*The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate'*>> (Genesis 3:12). It is a frequent human failing not to accept responsibility and to blame others.

Reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed is the harshest of criticism when it is levelled at the creator and sustainer of all things and has absolutely no foundation: <<*for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*>> (Matthew 5:45b), <<*In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy*>> (Acts 14:16-17), and: <<*The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things*>> (Acts 17:24-25). God has always sown profusely throughout the entire earth and yet has only ever reaped a modest return at best for all his efforts.

What the slave failed to acknowledge is that, by giving him the talent, God was actually sowing into his life, yet he reaped nothing in return! This is precisely the opposite of what the man was accusing the master of. The words of Paul ring true for such people as this man: <<*Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse*>> (Romans 1:20).

I went and hid your talent in the ground. This response was not in keeping with the man's calling: <<*for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline*>> (2 Timothy 1:7). By investing the talent given in this life a disciple can store up treasure in heaven. There is no benefit in storing up treasure in this life: <<*Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days*>> (James 5:3), and then losing their heavenly reward as a result.

Here you have what is yours. God does not bestow his gifts just to have them given back unused. He loans everything to people in order that they may steward them for the benefit of the Kingdom. Simply handing the gift back is highly insulting as it would be if a friend or family member had given them a gift in love.

<sup>26</sup> But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?”

### Matthew 25:26

You wicked and lazy slave! God does not rebuke his people for losing the talent given to them if they had genuinely tried to put it to good use for the Kingdom. It is when they make little or no effort to use what they have been given that he becomes angry with them.

When the lazy slave declares, 'Here is your own money back!' he refuses to acknowledge responsibility; a responsibility he could have easily enough fulfilled. Having already failed the master's trust, he then proceeded to insult the master. He offers an excuse no master would have accepted; wrongly perceiving the master's reputation for sternness, which is actually holy righteousness, he was paralysed with fear. He is like too many Christians so overwhelmed by the magnitude of God's task that they put off contributing anything to it.

The lazy slave is rightly condemned, something Paul would also write about: <<*For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:10), producing the fruit of idleness: <<*Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say*>> (1 Timothy 5:13).

<sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

#### Matthew 25:27

You ought to have invested my money with the bankers. There were no banks in that era as they are understood today, just those whose business was loaning money. In the OT, Israelites were forbidden from charging interest to other Israelites: <<*If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them*>> (Exodus 22:25), <<*If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit*>> (Leviticus 25:35-37), and: <<*You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent*>> (Deuteronomy 23:19), but it was permissible to charge interest on money loaned to Gentiles: <<*On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess*>> (Deuteronomy 23:20). In any case, the central point of the parable concerns the importance of being a faithful servant of all that God has entrusted to one's care.

<sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

#### Matthew 25:28-29

So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. Solomon sums this up as: <<*There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honour, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not*>>

***enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill***>> (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2). It is a grievous ill because the one entrusted with the gift chose not to use it for good.

To all those who have, more will be given. Using one's God-given abilities wisely and productively is a vital aspect of discipleship and will be rewarded with additional opportunities to serve God faithfully and fruitfully.

Those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. All people have been given ability through common grace. Those who come to faith will also receive additional Spiritual gifts. Those who do not use these gifts are spiritually bankrupt and therefore **have nothing**. God will then also remove the gifts he has given, i.e. what they have will be taken away, so they will not be available for the person to utilise if they were to have a change of heart. In such a case, they would need to come before God in repentance and pray for his mercy. He may well decide to requip such people.

<sup>30</sup> **As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

### Matthew 25:30

The outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth is a typical description of hell and eternal damnation, occurring six times in Matthew and once in Luke. Refer to the comments made on Matthew 8:11-12. However, this parable is not about salvation but inheritance. Salvation is by grace; this parable is about good works and faithfulness resulting from that grace. It is about the loss of the inheritance: anointing in life and reward in heaven.

Whereas the other servants are rewarded by the master's benevolence, this servant, fearing the master's harshness but unaware of his benevolence, experiences the very wrath he feared. This, says Jesus, is what will happen to those who claim to be his followers but do not invest their lives in the work of the Kingdom.

### XIII.e Matthew 25:31-46 - The Judgement of the Nations

Jesus' disciples are to wait patiently in anticipation of reward at his return, at which time the unprepared and unrepentant will receive only judgment. This last parable in Jesus' final sermon in Matthew brings home the reality of judgment. As the missionaries from the early churches started to spread the good news of the Kingdom both among fellow Jews and among Gentiles, they faced hostility as well as welcome.

This parable brings together some of the themes from the rest of this Gospel account. That is, Jesus, like the Kingdom, had always been present in a hidden way and the way that people would respond to those sent out by Jesus are indicative of the way they are responding to God.

This is a parable that clearly illustrates the final judgement to come; the saved to receive their reward; the unrepentant to be condemned.

<sup>31</sup> 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

### Matthew 25:31

The Son of Man is Jesus' favourite self-designation and was commented on fully in Matthew 8:20.

The bible describes how kings of the earth sit on judgement seats with great ceremony: <<*So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in*>> (Acts 25:23). Jesus, the true King and Judge, does so in his glory.

All the angels with him. The angels will bring together the saints: <<*And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*>> (Matthew 24:31), separate the weeds from the wheat: <<*Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age*>> (Matthew 13:40), witness the rewarding of the saints: <<*And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God*>> (Luke 12:8), and the judgement of the unrepentant: <<*they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb*>> (Revelation 14:10).

Jesus will not return alone or secretly but will be accompanied by a whole heavenly host, all the angels with him: <<*For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7), with others operating in support of his work: <<*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*>> (Matthew 13:41-42), and: <<*Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles*>> (Revelation 14:17-20).

He will sit on the throne as both Judge and King. In rabbinic understanding the ultimate judge is God and thus this parable is a further illustration of the deity of Jesus as the Christ of God. In his human nature, Jesus is the only person who is truly faithful and has never sinned; thus he makes a righteous judge, knowing both the hearts and desires of mankind, yet only ever doing the will of God. He was appointed for this very task from eternity past: <<*While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in*

*righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead>> (Acts 17:30-31).*

<sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

### Matthew 25:32-33

All the nations, for both Jews and Gentiles, who are the object of the Great Commission throughout the church age, will be gathered before him; those who accepted his call and those who did not. Other men had been seen as shepherds of Israel before, most notably Moses and King David, but God is always seen as the chief shepherd: <<*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*>> (Psalm 23:1), <<*He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep*>> (Isaiah 40:11), and: <<*My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud warhorse*>> (Zechariah 10:3).

He will separate people one from another. Jesus knows which sheep are his own and he will call them to him: <<*Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him*>> (Malachi 3:18), and: <<*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me*>> (John 10:14). This will include the Gentiles: <<*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*>> (John 10:16). He will then ensure that those who are not his, i.e. the goats, are segregated from those who are: <<*As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats*>> (Ezekiel 34:17), including many who professed falsely to be disciples: <<*Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers"*>> (Matthew 7:21-23). It will be time to separate the tares from the wheat: <<*As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be at the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear*>> (Matthew 13:40-43 21CKJV).

He will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. The right hand is the place of honour: <<*The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'*>> (Psalm 110:1). Therefore, by analogy, those placed on the left are not favoured.

<sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”

#### Matthew 25:34-39

The king refers to the Son of Man upon his throne (v.31), and recalls the prophecy: <<As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:13-14), in which the Ancient of Days bestows the Kingdom upon ‘one like a son of man’.

Blessed by my Father refers to the blessing given to the sheep in v.32 that consists of their inheritance of the Father’s Kingdom, given not as a reward for good works but because of their saving relationship with the Father and the Son, a relationship that comes through faith alone on their part, with mercy, grace and faithfulness coming from God.

People inherit the kingdom because of their adoption by God: <<For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’>> (Romans 8:15), <<But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children>> (Galatians 4:4-5), and: <<He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will>> (Ephesians 1:5). As children of God, which is itself a free gift of grace: <<But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God>> (John 1:12), the elect have become co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom: <<it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him>> (Romans 8:16-17); it is a free gift with a cost, although only a fraction of the true cost paid by Jesus on the Cross.

A free gift with a cost may seem a strange statement but it is based on the concept that becoming a disciple of Jesus will cost you nothing and yet will cost you everything.

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. This does not explicitly refer to predestination as some might think, although other passages do support that theological premise: <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family*>> (Romans 8:29), and: <<*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love*>> (Ephesians 1:3-4). Those who have accepted the call have a place prepared by Jesus in the Kingdom: <<*In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*>> (John 14:2).

This is the fulfilment of God's original plan for only the Trinity were present at the foundation of the world, as noted in the dialogue between God and Job: <<*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*>> (Job 38:4a).

The righteous refers to the faithful saints who have received the free gift of righteousness through grace. It is not through any merit of their own: <<*If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 5:17).

When was it that is not a statement to refute their desire to inherit the Kingdom, nor a sign of embarrassment at being praised for their work, it is parabolical in order that the truths of this passage can be established and demonstrated.

When was it that we saw you sick. The Galatian churches had received Paul when he was sick and therefore they had received Jesus: <<*You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus*>> (Galatians 4:13-14).

Likewise, the Ephesian Onesiphorus had visited Paul in a Roman prison: <<*May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain*>> (2 Timothy 1:16).

<sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

#### Matthew 25:40

In the context of the parable, the least of these refers to those who are most needy among Jesus' family members, a reference most likely to Jesus' disciples and by extension all believers. The grace of Jesus is demonstrated when he is content to call fallible humans his family: <<*For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters*>> (Hebrews 2:11).

The sheep are commended for their great compassion towards those in need – for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger; for those who are naked, sick, or in prison. The righteous will inherit the Kingdom not because of the compassionate works that they have done but because their righteousness comes from their transformed hearts in response to Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom, as evidenced by their compassion for the least of these.

In caring for those in need, the righteous discover that their acts of compassion for the needy are the same as if they were done for Jesus himself, i.e. you did it to me. This is Christian faith in action: *<<But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith>>* (James 2:18), for: *<<How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?>>* (1 John 3:17). It is not only done for Jesus, it is done in Jesus’ name: *<<And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him>>* (Colossians 3:17).

<sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

#### Matthew 25:41-46

Then he will say to those at his left hand. In contrast to the sheep, who will ‘inherit the Kingdom’ (v.34), the goats are condemned to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The horrifying conclusion is the damnation of people who did not actively embrace messengers of the Gospel, yet nevertheless were oblivious to how they had offended God. The goats thus depart into eternal fire, the worst possible conception of hell. God had not originally created them for the fire or the fire of hell for them; that had been prepared solely for the devil and his angels: *<<For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgement>>* (2 Peter 2:4), *<<And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day>>* (Jude 6).

You that are accursed. Their failure to accept the call of Christ upon their lives means they will be dismissed from his presence for all eternity without a blessing. Their own self reliance in life has now cost them dearly: *<<For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law’>>* (Galatians 3:10).

Depart from me. God was betrothed to his people and his intention for marriage was for an eternal life-long union: <<*Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate*>> (Matthew 19:6a). Here, there are those who have been unfaithful to him as his bride and he has no option but to dismiss them with a certificate of divorce: <<*Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away*>> (Isaiah 50:1). It was neither God's will nor his choice that these should be lost for all eternity.

Sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Jesus did not say 'sick and did not heal me' or 'in prison and did not release me', his expectation and requirement of people is much less than that. What he does not want them to do is simply bury their talent. After all: <<*If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?*>> (James 2:15-16). In similar vein, King Solomon observed that: <<*if you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter; if you say, 'Look, we did not know this' – does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?*>> (Proverbs 24:11-12).

The reason for their condemnation is that they are guilty of sins of omission; that is, they have not shown compassion to the least of these, which is the same as if they failed to have any care for Jesus himself.

Given the evident unrighteousness of their hearts, they are condemned to eternal punishment. Some interpreters believe that this judgment, i.e. these will go away, will occur prior to the inauguration of Jesus' earthly millennial Kingdom, and that the sheep in v.33 are those blessed to enter and live under Jesus' dominion. Others equate this judgment scene with that which closes the earthly age, just prior to the eternal state: <<*Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done*>> (Revelation 20:11-13). The most important point, however, is that judgment will come!

Eternal punishment, eternal life. God's people had been offered this choice before they entered the Promised Land: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19). Despite the recommendation by Moses, too many have chosen punishment!

What this statement by Jesus also confirms is that, once judgement is passed on these people, there will be no reprieve. It is not a temporary setback with them being brought into the Kingdom at a later time through a backdoor; this is final judgement for all eternity!