

# WE SHOULD BE READY FOR HIS APPEARING

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 2010

TEXT: MATTHEW 25

## INTRODUCTION:

These two parables in chapter 25 and the last one in chapter 24, encourage us to love His appearing, look for His appearing, and labor faithfully until He comes. We should be watching, working and worshipping. We may not be successful in the eyes of men, or even popular with others. But if we are faithful and profitable, we shall receive our reward.

One man asked a Christian, "What would you be if you weren't a Christian?" The Christian responded, "I'd be ashamed of myself." Amen!

On the other hand, what does it feel like to be approved? You feel stroked, affirmed, good, and like your self-esteem could reach to the heavens.

In the second half of the great eschatological speech of Jesus there are three objective ways to know whether one will receive approval or shame when Jesus comes again.

## I. TO BE READY WE MUST WATCHING: Vv.1-13

A. The parable of the ten virgins.

### 1. (V.1) Ten virgins go out to meet a bridegroom at a wedding.

a. **Then the kingdom of heaven:** Matthew 24 ended with a parable meant to emphasize the idea of readiness for the coming of Jesus. Matthew 25 begins with another parable upon the same principle.

b. **To ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom:** There were three stages to a Jewish wedding in that day. The first was *engagement* - a formal agreement made by the fathers. The second was *betrothal* - the ceremony where mutual promises are made. The third was *marriage* - approximately one year later when the bridegroom came at an unexpected time for his bride.

i. "When the bridegroom came, the bride-maids, who were attending the bride, went forth to meet the bridegroom, with lamps lighted, to conduct him and his companions into the house, and to her who was to be the bride." (Poole)

ii. Some wonder why Jesus described **ten virgins** and not some other number. It is claimed that Talmudic authorities said that there were usually **ten** lamps in a bridal procession. It was a common size of a wedding party.

c. **Went to meet the bridegroom:** In this parable, the first two stages have already taken place. Now the wedding party (**the ten virgins**) waits for the coming of the **bridegroom** for the bride.

i. “To see the bridegroom as Jesus himself seems warranted in light of Matthew 9:15. This would be a bold figure for Him to use, as the Old Testament frequently describes *God* (not the Messiah) as the bridegroom, and Israel as the bride (Isaiah 54:4-5; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 1-3, etc.).” (France)

## 2. (Vv.2-13) The young women caught unprepared are denied entry.

a. **Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish:** Some in the wedding party were **wise** and prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. Some in the wedding party were **foolish** and unprepared.

i. “Foolish, wise, not bad and good, but prudent and imprudent, thoughtless and thoughtful.” (Bruce)

b. **While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept:** All ten of the maidens slept, because the bridegroom was **delayed**. In this parable both the wise and foolish maidens slept; but the wise ones were prepared to act immediately when they were unexpectedly awakened. The foolish maidens were not prepared.

c. **Took their lamps and took no oil with them:** The five foolish virgins *appeared* to be prepared for the bridegroom, because they had their lamps in hand. But they really were not prepared, because they **took no oil with them**.

d. **At midnight a cry was heard: “Behold, the bridegroom is coming” . . . all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps:** At an unexpected hour the bridegroom came for the bride and the wedding. The wedding party (**all those virgins**) immediately began to prepare their lamps for lighting.

e. **Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out:** The **foolish** virgins were unprepared because they lacked oil for their lamps. In many Biblical passages **oil** is an emblem of the Holy Spirit (such as Zechariah 4:1-7). Without **oil** the wedding party was not ready for the bridegroom. Without the Holy Spirit, no one is ready for the return of Jesus.

i. Olive oil is a good representation of the Holy Spirit for many reasons.

- Oil *lubricates* when used for that purpose - there is little friction and wear among those who are lubricated by the Spirit of God.
- Oil *heals* and was used as a medicinal treatment in Biblical times (Luke 10:34) - the Spirit of God brings healing and restoration.
- Oil *lights* when it is burned in a lamp - where the Spirit of God is there is light.
- Oil *warms* when it is used as fuel for a flame - where the Spirit of God is there is warmth and comfort.
- Oil *invigorates* when used to massage - the Holy Spirit invigorates us for His service.
- Oil *adorns* when applied as a perfume - the Holy Spirit adorns us and makes us more pleasant to be around.
- Oil *polishes* when used to shine metal - the Holy Spirit wipes away our grime and smoothes out our rough edges.

ii. No one can be a true Christian without the indwelling Holy Spirit, as it says in Romans 8:9: *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*. In this parable Jesus probably did not intend a separation between “Spirit-filled” and “Non-Spirit-filled” Christians; the distinction is likely between true Christians and false believers.

iii. Nevertheless, a key to Christian readiness is to be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Much of the weakness, defeat and lethargy in our spiritual lives can be explained if we are not constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit.

iv. **No, lest there should not be enough for us:** “The best have nought to spare, whatever Papists fancy of the church-treasury.” (Trapp)

f. **The door was shut . . . “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you”:** The penalty was severe for the foolish maidens. They were not allowed to come to the wedding, and the **door was shut** against them in the strongest terms.

g. **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming:** The point of this parable is simple - *be ready*. The price for failing to be ready is too high.

## II. TO BE READY WE MUST BE WORKING: Vv.14-30

### B. The parable of the talents.

#### 1. (Vv.14-15) Jesus describes a master who gives instructions to his servants before departing on a long journey.

a. **A man traveling to a far country, who called his servants and delivered his good to them:** This was not a strange idea in the ancient world, where **servants** (slaves) were often given great responsibility. This was often the safest and smartest thing a man could do with his money.

i. “The best thing he could do with his money in his absence, dividing it among carefully selected slaves, and leaving them to do their best with it.” (Bruce)

b. **To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one:** A **talent** was not an *ability* (though this parable has application to our abilities), but a unit of *money*, worth at least \$1,200 in modern terms, and likely much more.

i. In the application of this parable it is appropriate to see these **talents** as resources in our lives - such as time, money, abilities, and authority.

c. **To each according to his own ability:** The servants were given different amounts of money according to their **ability**. One servant only received one talent, yet we should see that this was not an insignificant amount. Some received more; but everyone received something and everyone received *a large amount*.

i. “The talent which each man has suits his *own* state best; and it is only *pride* and *insanity* which lead him to *desire* and *envy* the graces and talents of another. *Five* talents would be *too much* for some men: *one* talent would be *too little*.” (Clarke)

#### 2. (Vv.16-18) The servants manage the master’s money.

a. **He who had received the five talents went and traded with them:** Each of those who had received **talents** from their master did with them as they saw fit. Two of them **traded with** their talents and earned more talents (**made another five talents . . . gained two more also**).

i. **Went and traded** implies direct action. “The point is that the good servants felt the responsibility of their assignment and went to work without delay.” (Carson)

ii. We can say many good things about the work of the first two servants:

- They did their work *promptly*.
- They did their work with *perseverance*.
- They did their work with *success*.
- They were *ready* to give an account to their master.

b. **He who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money:** The third servant did almost *nothing* with his master’s money. He did take some care that it would not be lost (by hiding it). But he did nothing *positive* with his master’s money, in contrast to the first two servants.

### 3. (Vv.19-23) The first two servants are judged.

a. **After a long time the lord of those servants came:** The long delay would tempt the servants to think that they would *never* give an account for their management. Yet they most certainly would.

b. **You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things:** The reward was the same for both servants, even though one was given **five talents** and the other was given **two talents**. Each performed the same according to the resources they had received.

c. **Well done, good and faithful servant:** This shows that the master looked for goodness and faithfulness in His servants. Whatever financial success these servants enjoyed came because they were **good and faithful**. The master looked first for these character qualities, not for a specific amount of money.

d. **Enter into the joy of your lord:** This has the echo of heaven in it. The idea is that there is a place of **joy** belonging to the master of these servants, and they are invited to join the master in that place.

### 4. (Vv.24-30) The third servant gives account.

a. **Then he who had received the one talent came:** The master judged each of the servants *individually*. If they were taken as a group, they did very well: 8 talents given, and 15 talents returned. Yet each one was judged on their individual faithfulness and effort.

b. **I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown:** The servant who merely buried his talent tried to excuse himself because of his master's great power. In fact, he believed his master to be in some sense omnipotent:**reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.**

c. **Look, there you have what is yours:** The third servant seemed proud of himself. Because the master was so powerful and (in the mind of the servant) didn't need his help, the third servant thought that the master would be *pleased* that he did nothing and could say, "**Look, there you have what is yours.**" He seemed to have no idea how much he had displeased his master.

i. We can say of the work of the third servant:

- He didn't *think*.
- He didn't *work*.
- He didn't even *try*.
- He made *excuses*.

## 5. (Vv.26-30) The third servant is judged.

a. **You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown:** The condemnation of this third servant – here called a **wicked and lazy servant** – was strong. The sovereignty of the master never excused the laziness of the servant. It condemned that laziness all the more.

i. We might say that this servant did not have a proper fear of his master, but an unfitting fear of risk and failure. "See how fear may become the mother of presumption. Faith in God begets holy fear; but servile fear is the parent of doubt, which in its turn has a family of unbelieving rebels." (Spurgeon)

b. **So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest:** This man could have done *something* with what he had. Even if it had not doubled, it would have gained some **interest** for the master's money.

c. **For to everyone who has, more will be given . . . but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away:** There are those who have things (like the servant with one talent), but hold them in such a way that it is as if they have nothing. These ones will find what they had **taken away**. Those who hold what they have received as faithful men and women, to them **more will be given**.

d. **Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness:** Because he was **wicked and lazy**, the third servant demonstrated that he was not a true servant of his master at all. It is fitting that he (and those who show the same heart) was cast forever out of the master's presence.

i. Some think that readiness for Jesus' return is a very spiritual and abstract thing. It really isn't - it is a matter of being about our business for the Lord. In light of this parable, we must ask ourselves: What have we done with our knowledge? Our time? Our money? Our abilities? The sins of *omission* [what we don't do] may ultimately be more dangerous than the sins of *commission* [what we do].

### III. TO BE READY WE NEED TO BE WORSHIPFUL: Vv.31-46

C. The judgment of the nations.

#### 1. (Vv.31-33) The nations are gathered before God's throne and separated.

a. **When the Son of Man comes in His glory:** This is not really a parable; it is a description of a future scene of judgment after the glorious second coming of Jesus (described in Matthew 24:30).

b. **He will sit on the throne of His glory:** Jesus here was either guilty of megalomania (delusion about one's own power or importance) or He is indeed the Lord of **glory**, who will judge the nations from His **throne**. Seemingly this throne is present on earth, because it happens when **the Son of Man comes in His glory**.

- In three days He would be crucified; yet He spoke of "**When the Son of Man comes in His glory**."
- He had around Him a handful of disciples – one would betray Him, one deny Him, and the others forsake Him; yet He spoke of "**all the holy angels with Him**."
- He lived in utter simplicity, almost poverty – and was rejected by almost all the great and mighty men of the world; yet He said He would "**sit on the throne of His glory**."

c. **All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another:** This particular judgment seems distinct from the *great white throne judgment* described in Revelation 20:11-15. This judgment of the nations is distinct from the final judgment for several reasons.

- It happens at a different **time**. The Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 clearly happens *after* the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His saints. The Judgment of the Nations of Matthew 25 happens immediately after the glorious return of Jesus (Matthew 25:31-32).
- It happens at a different **place**. The Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 happens in heaven; the Judgment of the Nations of Matthew 25 happens on earth.
- It happens unto different **subjects**. The Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 emphatically includes all unredeemed men and women. The Judgment of the Nations of Matthew 25 seems only to include the *nations* – that is Gentiles who are judged in large measure on their kindness and care towards [in part] the Jewish people (*My brethren*). It may be that Jewish people who survive the Great Tribulation will not be in this Judgment of the Nations.
- It happens on a different **basis**. This is described in the following section.

d. **He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left:** The Son of Man – Jesus Himself – has the authority to divide humanity in this judgment. There are not *three* categories, but only two: **sheep** and **goats, right** and **left**.

i. “In the countryside sheep and goats mingled during the day. At night they were often separated: sheep tolerate the cool air, but goats have to be herded together for warmth.” (Carson)

ii. This is true of the final judgment, when humanity will be divided into two groups and only two. Jesus spoke here not of the final judgment, but of the separation that will happen after the glorious return but before the final judgment to deal with those who have survived the Great Tribulation.

iv. By the end of the Great Tribulation (mentioned in Matthew 24:21 and other passages), the population of the earth will be greatly reduced by several factors:

- The rapture of the church (described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) will take many millions of believers from the earth.
- The persecution and martyrdom of many of those who believe on Jesus after the rapture and during the Great Tribulation will take many from the earth.

- The terrible death and destruction of the Great Tribulation will take many from the earth.
- The catastrophe of the Battle of Armageddon and Jesus' glorious return to the earth will take many from the earth.

v. Nevertheless, one can assume that even with the greatness of all these, that there will be many people – perhaps 3 billion or more – still remaining on the earth after Jesus returns in power and glory at the end of the last seven-year period. Among these will be the 144,000 who were specially sealed and preserved through the Great Tribulation and who stand with the Lamb of God on Mount Zion at His glorious return (Revelation 14:1-5). It is fair to ask, “What happens with all these people – perhaps 3 billion or more – who survive the Great Tribulation and Armageddon?” This judgment of the nations answers that question.

## 2. (Vv.34-40) The judgment and reward of those on the right hand.

- Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you:** The reward for **those on His right hand**(the sheep) is that they enter into the Father's kingdom.
- For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink:** They were approved on the basis of their works. There is no mention of faith or even forgiveness here. This judgment was based purely on their moral kindness.
- Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me:** This is another clear distinction between this judgment of the nations and the final judgment. The Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 is based on what is written in the Book of Life; the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25 is based on the humane treatment of others, especially Christians and the Jewish people (who will be particularly hated and persecuted the last half of the Great Tribulation).
  - Though the Christian and Jewish **brethren** of Jesus may be first in mind, knowing the nature of Jesus, we can say that it does not exclude others. “The brethren are the Christian poor and needy and suffering, in the first place, but ultimately and inferentially any suffering people anywhere.” (Bruce)

### 3. (Vv.41-46) The judgment and condemnation of those on the left hand.

a. **Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me:** The charge against these lost ones did not concern any flagrant violation of a moral code, but their indifferent attitude toward Jesus (and His people). Their indifference sealed their doom. Throughout this chapter, the point has been emphasized: the price of indifference is too high to pay.

- We cannot afford to be indifferent towards Jesus and His return.
- We can't afford to be indifferent towards the Holy Spirit who makes us ready for the return of Jesus.
- We can't afford to be indifferent towards the resources that God gives us.
- We can't afford to be indifferent towards the needy people all around us.
- We can't afford to be indifferent towards lost humanity that will stand in judgment.

b. **Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:** Jesus clearly points out that hell was **prepared for the devil and his angels**. Men only go there because they have willingly cast their lot with the devil and his angels.

i. **Everlasting fire . . . everlasting punishment:** The literal meaning of this ancient Greek word is “age-long.” As Bruce says, “The strict meaning of [everlasting]: agelong, not everlasting.” Because of this, some have thought that the suffering of the **cursed** is not eternal. Some suggest that the **cursed** are eventually rehabilitated and brought to heaven (the *larger hope* idea); others believe they will eventually cease to exist (the *annihilation* idea).

c. **Everlasting punishment . . . eternal life:** This mention of **eternal life** makes most believe that Jesus spoke about the final judgment. But for those who survive the Great Tribulation, certainly entrance into the millennial kingdom *is the gateway* to eternal life. Those who do not enter the millennial kingdom will also certainly have **everlasting punishment**.

i. The purpose of this Judgment of the Nations is to separate peoples before the beginning of Jesus' millennial kingdom. The wicked and cruel will not enter; the moral and good will enter.