

Chapter 25

The Ten Virgins (25:1–13)

Matthew 25:1 *Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*

kingdom of heaven.... The way this phrase is used requires us to understand that this kingdom is now in force here on this earth, now. That's made clear by the fact that the time of preparation is still available to all the virgins. That last stage of the kingdom, when the doors are closed, has not yet arrived. The phrase is a synonym for the Church age.

This is the second time that Jesus gave a parable about a wedding feast; earlier we read:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.” (Matthew 22:2–3, ESV)

In this first story, those called were **not willing to come** to the wedding. In this story, the virgins were **not prepared to come**.

will be like.... “This phrase “speaks not of how things are now, but of how they will be at the *parousia* of the Son of Man. This future perspective is underlined by the opening “Then,” which refers back to the “day” and “hour” which have been the focus of this discourse since 24:36.”¹

ten virgins.... These would have been very young girls in the 8 to 12-year-old range. Girls soon after that age would have been married and no longer virgins.

The ten virgins were probably escorting the bridegroom, with his bride to be, to the wedding and the feast to follow.

As you can tell from the story, **in the ancient Near East the bridegroom is the center of attention** and is escorted by the maidens unlike our Western custom in which the bride is the center of attention escorted by the bridesmaids.

took their lamps.... “That all ten take their lamps and go out to meet the bridegroom suggests, as the parable will corroborate in a moment, that all ten are professing Christians coming to meet their Lord.”²

lamps or torches.... “The portable torches for outdoor use ... would be bundles of cloth mounted on a carrying stick and soaked with oil. The jars held the oil into which

1 France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 948). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

2 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 543–544.

the torch was dipped before lighting. A torch without a jar of oil was as useless as a modern flashlight without a battery.”³

“So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.” (John 18:3, ESV)

“From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,” (Revelation 4:5, ESV)

“The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.” (Revelation 8:10, ESV)

“He will have already had to find his own way to the point where he is to be met. The light is to make for a grand arrival: the bridegroom will be illuminated as a focus of attention; this is his moment of glory as he is on his way to take his bride.”⁴

bridegroom.... Earlier in a different context, Jesus had identified himself as the bridegroom and of course he is here doing so again.

“And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”” (Matthew 9:15, ESV)

meet⁵.... This is an interesting word. “The word *apántēsis* (ἀπάντησις) was used for the public welcome accorded to important visitors.”⁶ It is used four times in the New Testament, two in this story. The sense in each case is to meet and then return with.

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.” (Matthew 25:1, ESV)

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’” (Matthew 25:6, ESV)

“The *apantēsis*, or “meeting,” “rendezvous” (25:6), often suggested going out to meet someone and forming his escort into the place where he would be honored.”⁷ These two verses describe how the virgins escorted the bridegroom to the bride.

Brothers also went to meet Paul.

3 France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (pp. 948–949). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

4 Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text (p. 1004). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

5 meet ἀπάντησις “...to meet coming from different directions. A meeting (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15). In 1 Thess. 4:17, the expression eis (unto) apántēsin (meeting) indicates that the Lord will be coming from one direction and we shall be coming from another to meet together in the air.” Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

6 Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 64.

7 Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 597.

“And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.” (Acts 28:15, ESV)

And then the brothers escorted Paul back to Rome.

On the last day, we will again meet Jesus.

“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17, ESV)

And that brings us to I Thessalonians 4, which is the purpose of my comments. If this word functions here like the other three examples, those caught up to meet Jesus in the air then immediately return to earth to reign with Christ in his new Jerusalem—**there is no seven years of tribulations first and then another return after the tribulation.** Dispensationalists teach that Jesus comes for his bride, and then seven years later, he returns with his bride to set up a millennium. In fact, in I Thessalonians 4 both actions take place at the same time. He returns for his bride and immediately returns with his bride.

Matthew 25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

foolish, wise.... The Bible commonly uses these categories to describe spiritual conditions. The themes of the wise and foolish are common to scripture. We see it used by Jesus in the summary of the Sermon on the Mount. The key idea is that wisdom is demonstrated in obedient action to Jesus’ teachings.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” ... “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” (Matthew 7:25, 26, ESV)

In a previous verse, we saw the same point. The wise man is faithful, acting in keeping with the master’s instructions.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?” (Matthew 24:45, ESV)

Matthew 25:3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, Matthew 25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

It turns out here that five were foolish, were disobedient to their call and took no action to prepare although they knew the bridegroom was coming. Although talking the talk is good, walking the walk is even better.

“There is a coming to Christ “just as I am, without one plea” that is right—where it is sincere trust in him. There is also a coming “just as I am, without one plea” that is wrong—where it is careless disbelief masquerading as faith. “Nothing in my hands I

bring, simply to thy cross I cling.” Yes. But the cross is a fructifying tree and will produce in those who cling to it the fruit of Christian life.”⁸

Matthew 25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

“But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’” (Matthew 24:48, ESV)

As in the previous parable, it is the apparent inordinate passing of time that sets up the story. Although all slept, five had prepared for this contingency.

Matthew 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

“Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—” (Mark 13:35, ESV)

“The parable thus illustrates both the fact that the time of the *parousia* is unknown, and may not be as soon as people might expect, and also its sudden, unexpected nature when it does come, the middle of the night being the time when people are at their least alert.”⁹

midnight.... The least expected hour.

meet¹⁰.... See verse one.

Matthew 25:7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

all those virgins.... “...every last one sets out to respond to the call, which only heightens the tragedy of the development to follow.”¹¹

Matthew 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

“Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine.” (Job 18:5, ESV)

Matthew 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’

8 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 547.

9 France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 949). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

10 meet ἀπάντησις “...to meet coming from different directions. A meeting (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15). In 1 Thess. 4:17, the expression eis (unto) ἀπάντησιν (meeting) indicates that the Lord will be coming from one direction and we shall be coming from another to meet together in the air.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

11 Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 1007). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

This must have been a bitter message to the foolish girls. Where would they find a dealer of lamp oil in the middle of the night?

“...the foresight and preparedness of the wise virgins cannot benefit the foolish virgins when the eschatological crisis dawns (vv. 8–9). **Preparedness can neither be transferred nor shared.**”¹²

Matthew 25:10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

ready¹³.... Why must one be ready? Because, “the time of the parousia of the Son of Man cannot be known in advance.”¹⁴

“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matthew 24:44, ESV)

The fact that some were ready or prepared was of no benefit to those who had not prepared.

the door was shut. “The closing of the door is another element in the story which seems out of place in the open hospitality and conviviality of a village wedding; late arrival is not normally an issue in oriental society, certainly not penalized in such a dramatic fashion. But this has become, like so many of the other parables, a story of insiders and outsiders, of the saved and the lost, and **the closing of the door symbolizes that final division at the last judgment**, as we have seen it in 13:30, 48; 21:31, 41; 22:8–10, 13.”¹⁵

“Because this parable concerns the consummation, the refusal to recognize or admit the foolish virgins (v. 12) must not be construed as calloused rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the kingdom. Far from it: it is the rejection of those who, despite appearances, **never made preparation for the coming of the kingdom.**”¹⁶

Matthew 25:11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’

“The girls in the parable plead, “*open up for us.*” They have no lack of desire to be numbered among the guests. And they are there, on the spot. Presumably they had been invited earlier and they are sure that there must be a place for them. The door

12 Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke (Vol. 8, pp. 513–514). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

13 ready ἑτοιμος “pertaining to a state of readiness—‘ready, prepared.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 682.

14 Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14–28 (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 721.

15 France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (pp. 949–950). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

16 Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke (Vol. 8, p. 514). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

shut in their faces is mystifying. There must be a way for them to get in. So they plead to the bridegroom.”¹⁷

“A mindless coziness with the Lord and feelings of warm devotion toward him (“Lord, Lord,” v. 11) are dangerous if we think they substitute for obedience to Jesus’ ethics....”¹⁸

This is an interesting observation: “Superevangelical Christianity often teaches that a dramatic conversion will do the trick (just have a *lamp* and you’ll be all right) and that such an experience will so change a person that “moral” lessons on how to live a Christian life need not be learned. This same Christian teaching often scorns education, preparation, and even church and liturgy (“churchianity,” “rites and ceremonies”) as so many externals and thus as obstacles to true inward Christianity. Nothing is *really* necessary except a Christian experience—“once saved, always saved”; the lamp with its oil is life—forget any reserve oil.”¹⁹ It would seem their faith was not a “blessed assurance” but a “cursed assurance.” It is an assurance of salvation they should have never embraced. And from which we so often hear, “I’m spiritual, I’m just not religious.” Which for the most part means, I’m spiritual, I’m just not Christian. And for such a person....

Matthew 25:12 But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

““I don’t know you” was a Semitic idiom, used especially by rabbis who dismissed certain students, meaning “I don’t want anything more to do with you””²⁰ The same thought was found earlier:

“And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:23, ESV)

“But the point is simply that readiness, whatever form it takes, is not something that can be achieved by a last-minute adjustment. It depends on long-term provision, and if that has been made, the wise disciple can sleep secure in the knowledge that everything is ready.”²¹ **“One-shot Christianity is misleading and finally fatal. The *lamp oil* of experiential Christianity, without *the reserve oil* of disciplined Christianity—that is to say, an experience of Jesus without obedience to his teachings—betrays unbelief and will not find entrance into the end-time kingdom.”**²² “When we teach only Jesus’ mercies

17 Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 625). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

18 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 544.

19 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 544–545.

20 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550.

21 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 947.

22 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 546.

but not his judgments, we *disfigure* the gospel.”²³ But, the *midnight cry* will not leave the wise unprepared.

This might be a good time to note that the teachings of Liberals that all enter the kingdom by one means or another is in fact false. The kingdom is not inclusive, all religions lead to the same place. Instead it is exclusive, the kingdom is reserved to those who enter by faith in Jesus the Christ; but note, not to those who enter by *faith in faith* or whatever, but only to those who enter by the door, faith in Jesus Christ.

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9, ESV)

Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

“The Christian life is not just the initial thrill of a conversion, nor is it the series of thrills in praise services with their wonderful music; the Christian life is often dog-day service to households, in season and out, with or without ecstasy, in the simple determination to give faithful and creative service to others, with the correct sense that *one day we will give an account....*”²⁴

the day nor the hour.... This is the conclusion of the day/hour inclusio and therefore the end of a section. “This parable is a warning that the time of the *arrival of the bridegroom is unknown* and that speculation regarding the hour is pointless. **The enormous amount of energy that in certain Christian circles is poured into such speculation is here declared misguided.** For “*of that day or that hour no one knows*” (Mk 13:32).”²⁵

Giving an Account Matthew 25:14-25:46

Earlier, Jesus instructed his disciples on the coming destruction of the temple:

“But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”” (Matthew 24:2, ESV)

In response the disciples asked:

“...Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3, ESV)

This section was set off by the inclusio:

*“Truly, I say to you, **all these things** will come upon **this generation.**”* (Matthew 23:36, ESV)

23 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550.

24 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550–551.

25 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 275.

“Truly, I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until *all these things* take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

Notice the chiasm (X) in these two verses; this greatly strengthens to power of the inclusio making this section stand out as a stand-alone pericope. There is no way you can run the material in this section into the next as if they are one unit. They are not.

Jesus answered the first two questions in 24:1-24:35—but not the question “*and of the end of the age*,” that was the message of Matthew 24:36 –25:13. That section was set off with another inclusio *day and hour* which in addition has its own chiasm (X). Clearly, these are two unique teaching units.

“But concerning that *day and hour* no one *knows*, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36, ESV)

“Watch therefore, for you *know* neither the *day nor the hour*.” (Matthew 25:13, ESV)

The Talents (25:14–30)

With the completion of these two inclusios, we have the conclusion to the Olivet Discourse. Here, at 25:14, there is a new focus—what is it? The material from 25:14 till the end of the chapter, 25:46, deals with two aspects of the final judgment. The first, on the talents deals with our obligations in the interim between Jesus first and last coming. The second, deals with the final judging of the nations.

This parable goes beyond the first four:

The Days of Noah,	24:36-24:41
The Homeowner and Thief	24:42-24:44
The Two Servants	24:45-51
Wise and Foolish Virgins	25:1-25:13

In these prior sections, the theme was the unexpected return of Jesus which received a particular stress with the words *know* and *day and hour*. In the next section, the master “expects the watchfulness of the servants to manifest itself during the master’s absence, not only in preparedness and performance of duty, even if there is a long delay, but in an improvement of the allotted “talents” till the day of reckoning.”²⁶

“Here, although the parable alludes to a delay in the master’s return (cf. v. 19), hence relating this parable to the preceding parables, the attention of the reader is directed not to the surprise of his sudden return but more directly to the servants’ conduct during the time he has been away.”²⁷

Matthew 25:14 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

26 Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke (Vol. 8, p. 515). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

27 Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14–28 (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 732–733.

For²⁸.... “The connective γάρ [**for**] makes this parable an exposition of v. 13.”²⁹ The word “for” expresses the reason for what was just said? “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour*” (Matthew 25:13, ESV) **for** “*it will be like a man....*”

Luke tells us why he went on this journey.

“He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.” (Luke 19:12, ESV)

Daniel gives us details about the event.

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV)

He has gone, but he will return.

It will be like.... “...since the story follows on a parable explicitly said to refer to “*the kingdom of heaven*” (v. 1), there is no reason for doubting that **it** carries on the teaching about the kingdom....”³⁰

a man going on a journey.... This man would be Jesus Christ.

servants.... The servants are pictures of Jesus’ disciples.

Matthew 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

talents³¹.... In silver one talent would be about 16 years of wages for an unskilled worker or about \$600,000.

“Modern English uses the word “talent” for skills and mental powers God has entrusted to men....”³² And this is a very good way on how we might actually view these talents. But at the same time, let’s not forget that “few activities index true or false faith as

28 γάρ “a causative particle standing always after one or more words in a clause and expressing the reason for what has been before, affirmed or implied.” Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

29 R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 971.

30 Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 627). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

31 talents τάλαντων “...a talent of money (of silver valued at c 6,000 day’s wage; gold 180,000 day’s wages); ... a measure of weight (varying from about 57 to 80 lbs.). In any case, vast, rhetorical, hyperbolic amounts of money are meant (Mt 18:24; 25:15).” Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

32 Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke (Vol. 8, p. 516). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

clearly as the use of money.”³³ So, if we were to limit the parable to one’s use of the money God gives them, it would be a most interesting indicator of one’s love for God.

five talents, to another two, to another one.... These various amounts are descriptive of the reality of human life. Some are born into great wealth or find unexpected opportunity to acquire it. Some are born with great intellect while others are not. Some are gifted with unique abilities, but many are not. But each, no matter what his state, is expected to do *something* with what God has given him. So, most believe that talents “represent not the natural gifts and aptitudes which everyone has, but the specific privileges and opportunities of the kingdom of heaven and the responsibilities they entail.”³⁴

In summary we have three possibilities as to what talents address: 1) money, 2) gifts and 3) opportunities. I think we should view all three as from God and all to which we must give account.

to each according to his ability.... Their responsibility did not exceed their gifts. What they were asked to do, they were capable of doing.

Then he went away.... Jesus would be referencing his own departure from this world for an undetermined amount of time.

Some have noted that “before departing the Master *gave no instructions* on what to do with the Talents, as though he was leaving *that* to the freedom and creativity of the recipients.”³⁵ And to some degree this is true but, did God not leave instructions on how to use money? In fact, the scripture is filled with instructions and insight into the use of wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:17 Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ Deuteronomy 8:18 You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

2 Chronicles 1:11 God answered Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king,

Job 27:19 He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more; he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone.

Psalms 49:10 For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.

33 Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 554.

34 France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 951). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

35 Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 554.

Proverbs 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;

Proverbs 8:18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.

Proverbs 12:27 Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

Proverbs 13:11 Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

Proverbs 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.

Proverbs 14:24 The crown of the wise is their wealth, but the folly of fools brings folly.

Proverbs 22:16 Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.

Proverbs 28:22 A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him.

Ecclesiastes 5:19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

Ezekiel 28:5 by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth—

Mark 10:23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

Luke 16:9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Luke 16:11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

"give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38, ESV)

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:6–8, ESV)

To these verses add those that address the dangers of debt, the benefits of savings and our responsibility to care for the poor. So, with all this in mind, let's not move to quickly from the subject of money to gifts and opportunities but instead consider all these as responsibilities from God.

Matthew 25:16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

received.... Soon we will read about the work of the servants, but we must not forget that **grace precedes work**. Before they could do anything of value, they needed to **receive** from the hand of God. However, when work precedes grace, there is in fact no grace, just an attempt to earn salvation by one's own merit.

at once.... "The first slave's eagerness—he "went straight off and..." ...is a model for enthusiastic discipleship."³⁶ It is an example for us to follow as well; serve with enthusiasm not with grumpiness or dismay. It is also the opposite response of those who would use the Lord's coming return as an excuse for laziness: "**Why get involved with the world's messes, after all, the Lord is coming soon.**"

Matthew 25:17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

Like his colleague, he also made 100% on his talents. It no doubt took him many years to achieve this return but, this is what the parable is about, for it was after "*a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*" (Matthew 15:19). "Waiting for the Lord is not for Matthew a fact of religious *inwardness* or of a unique fervor or even of prayer; it is *an active engagement* that mobilizes the believer in the invitation to risky initiatives"³⁷ Proclaiming the gospel in a world that hates Jesus is risky.

Matthew 25:18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

"...clearly there was a risk involved, which their other colleague was unwilling to face. No doubt he would have justified his action as prudent rather than cowardly...."³⁸ Basically, he didn't want to bother with the task to which he was assigned. He had other plans for his life, serving the master was not high on the list. Let's not forget that vacation home, his new RV and the boat! Was any of this wrong? Only if it got in the way of his eternal calling—and it did.

The faithful servants **went, traded** and **made** (25:16). The lazy servant....

went, dug, and hid.... This statement may have been directed to the Qumran community of Jesus' day that went away into the desert, dug caves in the hills and hid itself from the world. If so, it reminds us that the monastic life of withdrawal from the world is not God's intent for his Church. In our era, there is something very much like

36 France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 954). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

37 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 555.

38 France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 954). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

this in those that do a holy huddle, refuse to polish brass on a sinking ship (become engaged with our culture) and quietly wait for a secret rapture to take us out of this mess. The point? God has called his people to participate in this fallen world and proclaim the gospel, not hide from the world in pseudo perfect religious communities.

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

after a long time.... Notice, at this point, a soon return is not anticipated. The soon return was dealt with earlier (24:1-24:35).

“But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’” (Matthew 24:48, ESV)

“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.” (Matthew 25:5, ESV)

A major part of the story is that the parousía is to be **after a long time**. This is an important point for it is in stark contrast to the judgment on Jerusalem in the lifetime of Jesus’ audience. Notice the building tension in that earlier material....

“...but the end is not yet.” (Matthew 24:6, ESV)

“...the beginning of the birth pains.” (Matthew 24:8, ESV)

“...you know that summer is near.” (Matthew 24:32, ESV)

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

This helps clarify the passage, the first part (24:1-24:35) addresses the soon judgment coming of Jesus on Jerusalem and his Temple, the rest (24:36-25:36) addresses a distant coming of Jesus at the end of the ages.

settled accounts.... This is a picture of the activities at the time of the final judgment at the end of the world. God will settle accounts with each and every one of us!

Matthew 25:20 *And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’*

Matthew 25:21 *His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

Well done.... “The single great goal of Christians can be to hear their Lord’s “Wonderful!” [well done] spoken to their life work at the Judgment.”³⁹

39 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 557.

faithful.... Faithfulness is the common denominator in all the Judgment Parables.

I will set you over much.... “The reward of fulfilled responsibility is *greater* responsibility! There will be a call up a corporate ladder—a great promotion—that will be eternal.”⁴⁰ “**Heavenly rewards are not beds of rest; they are posts of duty.**”⁴¹

“...here one encounters the principle that only those proved in small leadership positions would be prepared for bigger ones.”⁴²

Matthew 25:22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’

Matthew 25:23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

“Thus, even if our work is on a lower level than others in this life, that is not important. **Important is what we did with what we received.** ... in service it is quality, not quantity ... that exults in Judgment.”⁴³

I will set you over much.... One should “envisage heaven as a state not of indolent pleasure but of active cooperation with the purpose of God as well as enjoyment of his favor....”⁴⁴

Enter into the joy of your master. The joy that Jesus looked forward to he shares with the good and faithful, those that glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.⁴⁵

“*looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV)

Matthew 25:24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,

Master or Lord.... The servant considered himself a Christian, Jesus was his Lord.

40 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558.

41 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558.

42 Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 600.

43 Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558–559.

44 France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 955). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

45 What is the chief and highest end of man? Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, (Rom. 11:36, Cor. 10:31) and fully to enjoy him forever. (Ps. 73:24–28, John 17:21–23)

hard⁴⁶.... *Sklērós*, as in *arterio[sclerosis]*: hardening of the arteries. The wicked man calls Jesus hard, but Jesus says otherwise:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29–30, ESV)

The man is a liar. When faced with sin and irresponsible behavior it is second nature for the lost to blame God (“I didn’t ask to be born” “why did you make me this way?”) instead of taking responsibility for their own behavior.

reaping where you did not sow.... He continues the defense of his laziness by slandering the master and practically speaking, calling him a thief.

Matthew 25:25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

I was afraid.... In the parable of the two servants, the first servant was *too unfrightened* before his master’s return (24:45–51), he *“begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards* (24:49); in this parable the servant seems *too frightened* (25:14-30) “I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground” (25:25).

He concludes by making a virtue of his sin of indifference to the master’s instructions by magnanimously giving back the unused talent. “He felt that his preservation of the talent was something for which he should receive credit.”⁴⁷ Fear he possessed, love he didn’t.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” (1 John 4:18, ESV)

Matthew 25:26 But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?’

wicked or **evil and slothful**⁴⁸ or **lazy**.... The master is quick to identify the real factors lying behind his behavior; he wasn’t being prudent, he was simply evil and lazy.

Matthew 25:27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

46 hard σκληρός “Dried up, dry, hard, stiff; of the voice or sounds as hoarse or harsh; of things as hard, tough, not soft.”⁴⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

47 Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*, L. (p. 631). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

48 slothful ὀκνηρός “pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition—‘lazy, lacking in ambition.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 768.

invested my money.... This was “a procedure that he could have undertaken with safety and no great personal exertion.”⁴⁹ But he was too lazy to do even that.

bankers.... “... (the people who sit at tables). These were people who changed money from one currency to another, charging a fee for the service. They also seem to have loaned money at interest.... It is from such activities that modern banking evolved; hence the translation.”⁵⁰

“Jesus is saying that the service he expected from his servant was *light, not hard*; just don’t *bury* your talent....”⁵¹

Matthew 25:28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

take the talent from him.... The opportunity of obedient service has past. “The man has had the money for quite some time and has shown that he has no intention of making any use of it.”⁵²

““Use it or lose it.” Unused muscles atrophy, unused talents damn, unfruitful trees are felled for the fire (3:10; 7:19).”⁵³

give it to him who has the ten talents. “That man has shown that he knows how to use money profitably. He will make the best use of it, and therefore it should be left with him.”⁵⁴

“*For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*” (Matthew 13:12, ESV)

Matthew 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Jesus “is laying down a principle of the spiritual life, a principle of great importance. Anyone who has a talent (using the word in the modern sense) of any kind and fails to use it, by that very fact forfeits it. By contrast, anyone who has a talent and uses it to the full finds that that talent develops and grows. This is a law of the spiritual life, and we neglect it at our peril.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 631). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵⁰ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 562.

⁵² Leon Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 632.

⁵³ Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 562.

⁵⁴ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 632). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵⁵ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 632). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

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

At this point, our passage takes an unexpected turn. It is common in this study to view the talents as 1) money, 2) gifts and 3) opportunities to be used by believers in God's service. But now it becomes clear that Jesus is not simply calling believers to live the most productive lives possible, he is warning all people to turn in repentance and faith. It is only in God that our lives become something other than **worthless** and **useless**. And without God, that is exactly what we prove to be—for eternity.

worthless or **useless**⁵⁶.... "Jesus uses two adjectives to describe the one-talented servant: "shiftless" (v. 26) and now "useless" (v. 30)."⁵⁷

outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Notwithstanding this verse and many others like it, Pope Francis recently said, "but those who do not repent and cannot therefore be forgiven disappear ... There is no hell, there is the disappearance of sinful souls."⁵⁸

"Instead of eternity in the lighted banquet, persons whose preoccupation in life was self-pleasing will find themselves out in the dark, feeling forever the regrets of lost opportunities, misspent chances, stupid choices. Jesus does not end this parable grimly from a macabre pleasure in telling horror stories—Jesus *loves* human beings and wants to save them from messed-up lives and eternities, and that's why he tells his scary stories."⁵⁹

"while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:12, ESV)

The Sheep and The Goats (25:31–46)

"Our text is the last before the story of the passion begins, and at the same time it is Jesus' last instruction to his disciples. **It therefore carries great weight.**"⁶⁰

The Olivet Discourse, "the Eschatological Discourse now comes to a climactic end with this account of the final judgment. The ... preceding parables about being ready to meet the master have all defined readiness in terms of *an abstractly expressed principle*.... In this final scene the basis of judgment is concrete acts of compassion to

⁵⁶ worthless ἀχρεῖος "...pertaining to not being useful—'useless, not useful, worthless.'" Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁵⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 562.

⁵⁸ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/03/30/vatican-tamps-down-report-that-pope-francis-denies-existence-hell.html>

⁵⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 563.

⁶⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 264.

those in particular need. Even such acts, done for ‘nobodies’, the Son of Man values as done for him in his own moment of pressing need.”⁶¹

Jesus began his public ministry in the Sermon on the Mount making this point.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
(Matthew 5:11–12, ESV)

He now concludes his public ministry in the Olivet Discourse addressing this subject one last time.

We concluded verse 30 reading *“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 25:30, ESV). Jesus will now give greater detail about that terrible event. “This depiction of the Last Judgment is especially important because it is the final story in Jesus’ public teaching ministry. *This is the teaching Matthew wants imprinted on readers’ consciences as Jesus’ final teaching.*”⁶²

Matthew 25:31 *“[Now] When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.*

[Now] When.... This phrase *now when* refers us back to verse 30. *“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 25:30, ESV). Jesus will now give greater detail about that event.

comes.... The Greek word is (έρχομαι) érchomai not (παρουσία) parousía. This is an important illustration on the interchangeability of these two words.

in his glory.... “Jesus’ whole earthly life had been one of lowliness and service; now he looks forward to a coming that will be strikingly different. He does not define *in his glory*, but clearly he means that when he returns at the end of this age he will come in majesty and splendor.”⁶³ As he stated earlier:

“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” (Matthew 16:27, ESV)

⁶¹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 1023). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁶² Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 563.

⁶³ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 635). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

all the angels.... ““All”? The whole heavenly world will also be present at this spectacle—world history’s consummation, examination, and judgment.”⁶⁴ No one will miss this event.

“.... *The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.*” (Matthew 13:39, ESV)

“*So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous*” (Matthew 13:49, ESV)

glorious throne.... It is recorded that “When Rabbi Akiba (who died about AD 135) spoke of David’s sitting on the divine throne, he was accused of blasphemy....”⁶⁵ But here Jesus is so bold as to say just that but even more, he will from this throne judge the nations. Only God could do such a thing! “...there can be no doubt that our text transfers the authority of *God* to the coming Son of Man, since glory, angels, and throne are all God’s exclusive accoutrements; yet here they are emphatically the Son of Man....”⁶⁶

Jesus mentioned this glorious throne previously.

“*Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world [in the regeneration], when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*” (Matthew 19:28, ESV)

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus identifies this as occurring “*in the new world*.” “*New world* is a translation of *παλιγγενεσία* [*paliggenesía*]. It is often translated regeneration and in fact, that is a good translation. It consists of two words, the “noun from *pálin*..., again, and *génesis*, generation, nation. Regeneration, restoration, renovation, rebirth.”⁶⁷ It is a re-Genesis or as the ESV translates it in Matthew 19:28, “*the new world*.”

The “**glorious throne**” of Matthew 19:28 and 25:31 occurs when the old world is destroyed and replaced by *the new world*. *This truly is an end of the world scene not an AD 70 scene.*

Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Before him.... It is before Him that all must give an account, not before Buddha, or Mohammad or Vishnu, or as some hope, no one at all, but before Him, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

⁶⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 566.

⁶⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 565.

⁶⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 565.

⁶⁷ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12, ESV)

all the nations.... Not only all the angles, but **every human being that has ever lived will be there.**

“...and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,” (Isaiah 66:18, ESV)

Jesus addressed the *judgment on Israel* in Matthew 23:36-24:35 in A.D. 70. But now we are at the last judgment, one in which *all the nations of the earth* will be judged for the last time—not just Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple.

he will separate.... “**He**,” the one who does the separating and judging is Jesus. Jesus is the final judge of the world. This is not a new revelation, Jesus has spoken of this day from his first major discourse, the Sermon on the Mount to his last one, the Olivet Discourse.

“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 mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)

Also, in the parable of the net Jesus addressed the same event saying:

“So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:49–50, ESV)

In these passages we have a reminder that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity and as such the judge of man. “...the central biblical and Jewish role of eschatological judge that Jesus here assumes normally belongs to God himself....”⁶⁸

he will separate people.... The great separation on the last day is both denied and dreaded. But, at that time the lie that we are all children of God will be exposed. Although we are all the creation of God, only the regenerate, the sheep, are the children of God.

*“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to **the resurrection of life**, and those who have done evil to **the resurrection of judgment**.”* (John 5:28–29, ESV)

Matthew 25:33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

sheep, goats.... “...of the two *the sheep* were prized the more highly. The two groups of animals would graze together, but in due course *the shepherd* would separate them out....”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 602.

⁶⁹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 636). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

“As Palestinian shepherds separated sheep from goats into separate enclosures at night, so the Shepherd Son of Man will separate the unrighteous and the righteous into separate eternities at the Judgment....”⁷⁰

right, left.... “...the right-hand side was generally seen as the favored side; for example, to be at the ruler’s right hand was to be in the place of highest honor the ruler could give. The *left* was thought of as the side of ill omen... so it is the appropriate place for the less favored *goats*.”⁷¹

Matthew 25:34 *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

King.... This is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus uses this term to identify himself, although he does approve of others using it of him.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38, ESV)

It is of course also used in the Book of Revelation to refer to Jesus.

“They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” (Revelation 17:14, ESV)

“On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Revelation 19:16, ESV)

inherit.... “Something that is inherited comes to one as a gift, not as the result of one’s own earnings....”⁷²

kingdom.... “What they are to inherit is *the kingdom*, which signifies a sure and accepted place in the kingdom of God....”⁷³

John the Baptist preached:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2, ESV)

Jesus preached:

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

⁷⁰ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 567.

⁷¹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (p. 636). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁷² Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 636). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁷³ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 637). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

He taught us to pray:

“*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:10, ESV)

And now in this verse, it comes in its fulness.

prepared for you from the foundation of the world. “This strong expression brings out the truth that **this has always been in the plan of God**. Jesus is not speaking of some afterthought, but of what God had always planned to bring about, and that will come to its consummation at the end of this age.”⁷⁴

“Some interpret the passage as though those on the King’s right merited their salvation by their good works, but here we have the kingdom prepared for them by God before ever they were born. We should not miss the implication that they are God’s elect.”⁷⁵

“*But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*” (Hebrews 11:16, ESV)

Because it was prepared from the foundation of the world, it could not be based on merit, no one was alive to merit anything at that point. It was by means of the election of God by grace through faith.

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

Matthew 25:36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

These six acts of mercy are not acts that must be done to secure salvation but acts that demonstrate the good works expected of the child of God—one who already possesses salvation.

“Four times this list is repeated in this and the following verses (**it is clearly meant to be remembered as a guide to practical discipleship...**)”⁷⁶ Obviously, we are expected to provide for those who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. Although these behaviors are not limited to caring for the Christian community, **it is primarily directed to them**. There are practical limits to what we can do in the world, but those limits are reached outside the family of faith, not within it. We must be able to depend on each other.

hungry... To a person overweight to be hungry means they crave *more* food. Jesus uses it here of those that are starving and need *some* food just to live. It may be that

⁷⁴ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 637). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁷⁵ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 637). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

⁷⁶ Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 637). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

the world will return to these conditions. We must be ready to fulfill this mission if it does and it may be wise to prepare *now* for that time as did Joseph in Egypt.

thirsty.... In our day this refers to finding a convenience store to stop at to buy a soft drink. But, in this era and in this arid land, clean safe water was the exception. Thirst even surpasses hunger in importance for a person can only live a few days without it. Guaranteeing safe water for ourselves is not something we give much thought to. We simply turn the handle and out it comes. In our country, even the poor have an abundance of water fountains from which to drink. But the day may come when the water stops. Again, preparing now to ensure the flow does not stop would be wise.

strangers.... In every age strangers have been dangerous. They are today as well. But the early church found themselves persecuted from town to town and in fleeing to a new community, they were strangers even to the church in that town.

“Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,” (Matthew 23:34, ESV)

“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1, ESV)

Clearly, Jesus expected the church to step up, identify those believers who were in need and take them in to their own homes—there were no hotels or boarding houses! We must be prepared to do this as well.

naked.... Throughout the centuries, many were stripped naked and beat, others had their goods stolen by anti-Christian mobs, and others were forced to flee without adequate clothing. Believers are required to step up and provide clothing for them. Earlier we read:

“and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.” (Matthew 24:18, ESV)

When you flee, you generally can take very little with you.

sick.... We all experience sickness. But it is especially dangerous when fleeing without food and clothing from an enraged mob. So, we must provide medical care for these members of the family of God.

in prison.... Christians over the centuries have been imprisoned for no other reason than that they were Christians.

“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1–2, ESV)

And the author of Hebrews commends the compassion the church expressed to those in prison.

“For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” (Hebrews 10:34, ESV)

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” (Hebrews 13:3, ESV)

you came to me.... There is more here than just a friendly visit to a believer in jail; if family and friends did not visit a person in jail and provide food, clothing and medical care, they would likely die; the Romans would not do this for prisoners. And very often the wife and children would suffer terribly as well, they had no breadwinner to care for them. They needed help as well.

By any chance are you looking for ways to minister for Jesus Christ? Jesus suggests six and no seminary degree is required!

I was hungry and you gave Me food;
I was thirsty and you gave Me drink;
I was a stranger and you took Me in;
I was naked and you clothed Me;
I was sick and you visited Me;
I was in prison and you came to Me.

The Church has through the ages attempted and still attempts to do these very things. It has provided soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters, orphanages, clothing closets, hospitals, and prison ministries. No other “religion” in the world has done such things—except as instructed by the example of Christians.

Red Cross, Goodwill Industries, Salvation Army, Downtown Missions, St. Jude’s Hospital, Samaritan’s Purse, the Dream Center of Easley, SC, women’s shelters, legal services to Christian ministries and a multitude more were founded by Christians to serve Christ. And “may we add, in contemporary witness, “I was a fetus and you brought me to term, I was conceived and you brought me to birth?”⁷⁷ Although many of these organizations are now Christian in name only, still, these make the point, **Christians have for millennia understood that they are to live out this passage in practical ways.**

But more can be done, *especially at the one-on-one level.*

Matthew 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’

righteous⁷⁸.... The righteous are the children of God.

“...the righteous” (a favorite word of Matthew’s...are understandably astonished at what Jesus has just said to them. They have taken it quite literally but remember no

⁷⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 571.

⁷⁸ *righteous* δίκαιος “...being in accordance with God’s compelling standards....” James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

circumstance in which they ministered to Jesus in these ways....”⁷⁹ But Jesus says they did so in caring for others.

Matthew 25:38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

Matthew 25:39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Truly, I say to you.... With this phrase Jesus is pointing out *the central point of this lesson*. “This is the heart of this section, the “moral of the story.””⁸⁰

one of the least of these.... Theological liberals take passages like this and interpret them to mean that God determines our salvation based on our good works to mankind. This of course is not the intent of the passage at all. **The focus of this service is by Christians (the righteous, 25:37) to Christians (brothers, 25:40).** It is not done to gain salvation but is done because one is already a Christian serving Jesus and his disciples, our brothers and sisters in the faith. Certainly, it should be said that such loving attention is most appropriate to all, believers or not. But the focus of the passage is to help the persecuted Church. “Jesus identifies himself with the fate of his followers and makes compassion for them equivalent to compassion for himself....”⁸¹

my brothers Jesus’ primary focus was on caring for the community of faith. “That the “siblings” are here “disciples” is the majority view in church history and among contemporary New Testament scholars....”⁸² But we are not limited to that.

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10, ESV)

“...the righteous are told that to the extent that they did these things ... “for one of the least of these my brothers,” they had in effect done them for Jesus himself.”⁸³ “So Jesus’ message is that the world will be judged on the basis of how it treats those “little people” whom God is sending to it....”⁸⁴ That is, how it treats Christians.

You remember how Jesus began his public ministry?

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7, ESV)

He now ends it in the same way—showing mercy. Mercy enveloped his earthly ministry. Should we learn something from this?

⁷⁹ Hagner, D. A. (1998). Matthew 14–28 (Vol. 33B, p. 744). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁸⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937.

⁸¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 520). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁸² Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 606.

⁸³ Hagner, D. A. (1998). Matthew 14–28 (Vol. 33B, p. 744). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁸⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937.

Matthew 25:41 *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

“The words spoken to those on the left are the mirror image of those spoken in v. 34 to the “righteous:” “go away” instead of “come,” “cursed” instead of “blessed,” “eternal fire” instead of kingship, and a fate prepared in advance, though in this case not specifically for “you” but for the devil and his angels, whose lot the unrighteous are to share.”⁸⁵

eternal fire.... A fire that burns forever.

“and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10, ESV)

“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:15, ESV)

“While the kingdom was “prepared” by God from creation (v. 34), now “eternal fire ... is prepared” ... for the sinners.”⁸⁶

Matthew 25:42 *For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,*

Matthew 25:43 *I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’*

“As v. 41 negates v. 34, so these are the negative counterparts to vv. 35–36, with the same six items but here **detailing what the nations refused to do for Jesus’ followers.** One could break these into two categories: acts of mercy for physical needs (hungry, thirsty, ill), and acts of charity toward social deprivation (stranger, naked, in prison). The unrighteous are unwilling to help in any way and so are condemned for this.”⁸⁷

Matthew 25:44 *Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’*

Jesus said something familiar in the Sermon on the Mount.

“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 mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)

Lord.... Notice that these surprised individuals address Jesus as Lord. At this critical point they want to publicly acknowledge Jesus as Lord. This is a warning to all that live their lives far from the standard of God’s word while glibly calling themselves

⁸⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 965). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁸⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937–938.

⁸⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 938.

Christians—and to prove it, wear a little cross around their neck! The lordship of Christ is demonstrated in obedience to his word, not in empty words.

Matthew 25:45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

Their lack of Christian works testified to their lack of a Christian faith.

From this we draw three conclusions, “(1) The sheep and the goats are not surprised at the judgment rendered **but at the basis of it**: the way they have treated Jesus. (2) This is not works righteousness—the actions reflected the heart attitude behind them. (3) The test here eliminates “the possibility of hypocrisy” in that the actions of each group have demonstrated the true condition of their hearts.”⁸⁸

Matthew 25:46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

“Jesus rounds it all off by telling his hearers what the eternal destiny of each of the two groups will be.”⁸⁹

eternal punishment.... This teaching is almost universally rejected—even by some Christians.

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2, ESV)

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41, ESV)

“and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10, ESV)

eternal life.... This is the hope of the faithful, life in the fullest and forever.

“and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:29, ESV)

“so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:21, ESV)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23, ESV)

There are those that do not believe in eternal punishment, that is—eternal damnation in a lake of fire. However, it is important to note that if there is no eternal punishment, then there is no reason to believe in eternal life either; they are spoken of as a unit.

⁸⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 938.

⁸⁹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 641). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

The *Least* of These My Brothers

I was hungry and you gave Me food;
I was thirsty and you gave Me drink;
I was a stranger and you took Me in;
 I was naked and you clothed Me;
 I was sick and you visited Me;
I was in prison and you came to Me.

This is Jesus' last public discourse in Matthew, the last of his communal instructions for our consideration.