

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part X)

25:1-13, The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Then the kingdom of heaven...: Matthew 24 ended with a parable of sorts about wise and wicked servants meant to emphasize the importance of being ready for the 2nd and final coming of Jesus. Matthew 25 starts off with another parable emphasizing the same message.

...will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom: Jewish weddings had three distinct parts: engagement, a formal agreement made by between the fathers, etrothal, a ceremony where mutual promises were made (we would probably call this a negotiation!), and finally marriage, about a *full year* later, when the bridegroom finally came – on an appointed day, but at an *any* time -- to claim his bride. The bride's maids would meet the bridegroom with lamps lit, to accompany him and his companions into the house, and to his bride.

According to Rabbinical and Talmudic authorities ten lamps should normally be carried in the bridal procession. This would be pretty typical number of the bride's invited attendants.

So in this parable, the first two parts have already happened, and now the wedding party (the ten virgins) waits for the coming of the bridegroom for the bride. Commentator R. T. France:

"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.)."

Five of them were foolish, and five were wise: Half of the maidens in the wedding party were wise, meaning they were prepared for the coming of the

bridegroom at any time. The rest were foolish, or unprepared. No “bad” or “evil”, but foolish, perhaps careless.

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept: Must’ve been a long day waiting! All ten of the young ladies slept, both the wise and foolish, but the wise ones were prepared to act immediately, knowing that they could be awakened suddenly at any moment.

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

“It is apparently a torchlight procession, the lamps probably being ‘torches’ (of oil-soaked rags wrapped on a stick) rather than standing lamps, which are described by a different word in Matthew 5:15 and 6:22; the word used here regularly means ‘torch’.”

Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out: Some commentators and teachers draw a straight line from the oil here to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as oil is sometimes symbolic of the Spirit (e.g., 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.

And of course there’s a New Testament connection drawn straight from the Holy Spirit to Faith in Jesus. Romans 8:9: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him”, and 1 Corinthians 12:3: “...No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

In this parable I believe Jesus does not mean to draw a distinction between so-called “Spirit-filled” Christians and other Christians; the distinction instead is between believers and unbelievers.

The door was shut... “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you”: The penalty was for the foolish maidens was exclusion from the wedding. And there is no indication in scripture that there is any additional chance to come to faith in Christ after His coming.

Hebrews 9:26-28: *“...But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been*

offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

25:14-30, The Parable of the Talents

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property: This was not an unusual idea in that time, where slaves (servants) were given much responsibility. In fact, this was often the safest and smartest thing a man could do with his goods and money. Consider faithful servants like Joseph; a foreigner, a slave, and the best and most effective administrator in Pharaoh’s court!

France:

“This parable takes up the question which that of the bridesmaids left unanswered: what is ‘readiness’?”

To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: A talent was money, not an ability as we use the word today. A talent was actually a weight, and could refer to any kind of coinage. Commentator D. A. Carson says it is generally regarded as equal to 6,000 denarii, or about twenty years’ wages for a day laborer. I’m not sure if inflation is calculated into that or not.... Anyway, he gave a lot of money to each of the servants.

To each according to his own ability: So even though the one servant only received one talent, we should see that as still being a significant amount. True, the others received more, but all received a large amount.

He who had received the five talents went and traded with them: “Went at once and traded” implies direct action without hesitation on the part of the firsts two servants. We’re not told how they traded with their talents. The point is that they used what they had, and gained more by using what they had been given by, and to manage for, their master.

He who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money: This fellow took care that the money with which he had been entrusted wouldn’t be lost, but he did nothing positive with, in contrast to the first two servants.

After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them: The long delay puts to the test the servants’ respective attitudes towards what they were doing with their master’s money. The productive

servants remained productive, and were not influenced by the fear of the “hider” servant. And the unproductive servant never learned from his fellows and started putting those resources to work.

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.

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.

Charles Spurgeon:

*“It is not ‘Well done, thou good and **brilliant** servant;’ for perhaps the man never shone at all in the eyes of those who appreciate glare and glitter. It is not, ‘Well done, thou great and **distinguished** servant;’ for it is possible that he was never known beyond his native village.”*

“It is better to be faithful in the infant-school than to be unfaithful in a noble class of young men. Better to be faithful in a hamlet over two or three score of people, than to be unfaithful in a great-city parish, with thousands perishing in consequence. Better to be faithful in a cottage meeting, speaking of Christ crucified to half-a hundred villagers, than to be unfaithful in a great building where thousands congregate.”

Enter into the joy of your lord: This has echoes of heaven to it! There is a place of joy belonging to the master of these servants, and they are invited to join the master in that place.

Then he who had received the one talent came forward, saying, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, an gathering where you scattered no seed”:

Commentator Matthew Poole: *“It is the genius of wicked men to lay the blame of their miscarriages upon others, oftentimes upon God himself.”*

Look, there you have what is yours: The third servant seems proud of himself. Because the master was so rich and powerful and didn’t really need *his* help to be so rich and powerful, the servant thought that the master

would actually be pleased that he *did nothing* and could say, “Look, there you have what is yours back, safe and sound.”

You wicked and lazy servant...: The condemnation of this third servant is harsh! The servant wasn't dishonest, didn't devise evil schemes, or anything like that. His error was... indolence, timidity, and idleness. His guilt was borne of his unwillingness to take what he had been given to the world and do something productive with it. To bring glory to his master by using what his master had given him to use.

He was fearful of his master, but the wrong kind of fear.

So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest: The master did not expect this servant to be a superstar; he did not give the servant more than he could deal with. He did nothing.

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. There is some mystery about how this works out in all its fullness, but at this extreme Jesus is very direct. If you don't have faith to use the master's gifts, you don't have faith in the master.

Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: Why? Because the third servant demonstrated that he was *not a true servant of his master at all*. Therefore he was not allowed to remain with those who were.

Just as there were echoes of heaven in the destiny for the two faithful servants, there is a sense of hell in the destiny for the wicked and lazy pseudo-servant.

It may be easy to think that readiness for Jesus' return is merely a spiritual or abstract thing. It really isn't! It's a matter of doing those “good works that he prepared beforehand” for us (Ephesians 2:10). Putting to use the gifts he has given us, whether those gifts be finances, knowledge, time spent serving others, using our abilities to encourage and build up the mission of His church, etc.

Thinking about it this way and in light of this parable about readiness, “sins of omission” – the stuff that we *don't* do; the gifts we “hide” – are just as dangerous as the sins we actively commit.

25:31-46, The Final Judgement

When the Son of Man comes in His glory: There's a notable shift in Jesus' teaching here; this section is not a parable; it is a description of a future judgment after His second coming , which he referred to in the previous chapter (Matthew 24:30).

He will sit on the throne of His glory: The “great white throne of judgment” is described in Revelation 20:11-15. While this is problematic for the dispensational premillennial school of theology (prevalent in modern western protestant churches), it is one reason among many why through its history most of the Christian church has not adhered to that school of thought.

That school teaches that the throne Jesus speaks of here must be on Earth, and that this event occurs before the “millennium”, a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on Earth before Armageddon and the final judgement. Note that Jesus Himself never makes such a division, nor does He speak of His throne being earthly, nor does he speak of a prolonged progression of events. Here in Matthew, in fact, it's just the opposite; these events come suddenly, unexpectedly, and finally, all at once. It's on a heavenly timeline, not an earthly one.

The description Jesus offers here is in many ways more descriptive than the one John sees and reports in Revelation, which makes sense, as John is amongst Jesus' audience here, as are all the other disciples. This is intense training, while the description in Revelation is a reminder of this same event and a message of hope to a church under severe persecution.