

Matthew

Chapter 25

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 25

Chapter 25 continues the parables of Jesus—the story about the ten virgins and the evil slave.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (25:1-13)

Jesus further illustrates the need to be ready with the parable of the ten virgins or bridesmaids who are going out to meet the bride. In this parable it is the bridesmaids, not the bride herself, that is the focus of this parable.

Matt. 25:1 Then the kingdom of heaven will be compared to ten virgins, who took their own lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts have *and the bride* after *the bridegroom*.

Then the kingdom of heaven will be compared to This introductory formula is similar to 13:24; 18:23; 22:2 but here it is spoken of in the future tense.

ten virgins, The kingdom is compared to the story about ten “virgins” or “bridesmaids.” The word translated virgins is used in the general sense of unmarried maidens attending the bride. We should *not* press the term to find any other meaning (such as mature believers as opposed to carnal believers, those who are celibate, etc.). Neither should we attach any special meaning to the number ten. There does not seem to be any specific reason for this number. The analogy also breaks down when comparing the bridegroom to the character of God. As we saw with Jesus own interpretation of His parables (ch. 13) it was only the main details that had meaning.

who took their own lamps, They were apparently oil lamps attached to poles or torches, not the small hand-held lamps.

and went out to meet This was the actual historical practice. The members from the party of the bride would meet the members from the party of the groom. These processions, accompanied by much singing and dancing, were generally held at night. Hence the need for the lamps or torches.

the bridegroom. The groom would have his own procession with his male friends. Jesus has already been identified as the bridegroom in another parable in Matthew (9:15). Note that the bride is not mentioned, it is her attendants that are the focus of the parable, the groom is mentioned his attendants are not.

Matt. 25:2 And five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

And five of them were foolish, The foolish ones are mentioned first because they are the focus of the parable.

and five were wise. This does not mean that half of the people will be saved and the other half will not.

Matt. 25:3 For when the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take oil with them.

Note on a variant reading: A small number of manuscripts have *in their flasks* after *them*.

For when the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take oil with them. The foolish ones did not take oil in their flasks. This could refer to either extra oil or no oil whatsoever. Whatever the case, they did not have the foresight to be prepared in case of a delay of the bridegroom. It is probably not wise to place some symbolic value on the oil (i.e. good works, the Holy Spirit, etc.).

Matt. 25:4 But the wise ones took oil in the flasks along with their own lamps.

But the wise ones took oil in the flasks The wise ones took extra oil, anticipating the delay of the bridegroom.

along with their own lamps. They would not be caught unprepared.

Matt. 25:5 And when the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and began to sleep.

And when the bridegroom was delayed, In the traditional weddings, it would be possible for the messengers to repeatedly announce the coming of the groom, yet there could be a delay of hours. The delay of the bridegroom in the parable is linked to the uncertainty concerning the time of the return of the Son of Man (see also verse 19, “after a long time). The inference, therefore, is that mankind will wait for a long time before the return of the Lord.

they all became drowsy and began to sleep. The hours wore on as the bridegroom was delayed and all of them began to nod off. There is no fault attached to them for sleeping. Their preparedness was seen in the extra oil they brought for the possible delay.

Matt. 25:6 But in the middle of the night, there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

Note on variant readings: A few manuscripts have *rise up* instead of *come out*. Some manuscripts do not have *him* after *meet*.

But in the middle of the night, there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom!’ This signifies the bridegroom is coming.

Come out to meet him!’ Several hours had passed, apparently enough time for the lamps to become low.

Matt. 25:7 Then all the virgins arose and trimmed their own lamps.

Then all the virgins arose The loud cry caught the attention of everyone.

and trimmed their own lamps. They cleaned and oiled their torches so that they would burn brightly. The word translated “trimmed” means put in order. It is the Greek word *kosmeo* where we get our English word cosmetics.

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

And the foolish ones said to the wise ones, ‘Give to us some of your oil,

for our lamps are going out.’ The foolish ones were not prepared and they now notice their lamps are becoming dim. The image of the lamps of the wicked going out is used in Proverbs 13:9 and Job 18:5 and may lie behind the imagery of the parable at this point.

Matt. 25:9 But the wise ones answered and said, ‘No! There would by no means be enough for you and us; go instead to the ones selling and buy for yourselves.’

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the strong negative *by no means*. Rather they have the simple and softer negative *not*.

But the wise ones answered and said, ‘No! There would by no means be enough for you and us; The wise virgins do not comply with their request to share their oil (from their reserve flasks).

go instead to the ones selling They are to get their oil elsewhere.

and buy for yourselves.’ Instead they direct them to go and buy some more for themselves. Buying oil late at night likely would not have been difficult, even in a little village in full celebration of a wedding.

The fact that they were told to go out and buy the oil seems to indicate that oil is not symbolic of the Holy Spirit or of good works. We cannot buy the Holy Spirit neither can we be saved by our good works.

Matt. 25:10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and the virgins who were prepared entered with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut.

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, The foolish ones were caught unprepared.

and the virgins who were prepared entered with him into the wedding banquet, At the coming of the bridegroom to the wedding banquet (the coming of Christ) it is the “prepared ones” who go into the feast. The term “wedding banquet” has already been used with Messianic associations in 22:1-14.

and the door was shut. The shut door points to the time when it is too late to alter the division between the saved and the lost (cf. Isaiah 22:22; Luke 13:25; Revelation 3:7). It also reminds us of God shutting the door to Noah’s ark (Genesis 6).

Matt. 25:11 And later the remaining virgins also came, saying, ‘Sir, sir, open it up for us!’

And later the remaining virgins also came, The foolish ones arrive, presumably with a fresh supply of oil, only to find a locked door.

saying, ‘Sir, sir, open it up for us!’ Their cry becomes the same thing as the “Lord, Lord” of 7:21-22. After the coming of the Son of Man, it is too late for the knocking to which the door will open (cf. 7:7-8).

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

But he answered and said, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ There are no last-minute conversions here. Instead, they hear the dreaded words that He does not know them. The foolish virgins, by being unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom with its unanticipated delay, are shut out from enjoying the wedding banquet and no appeal can change that reality.

Matt. 25:13 Therefore, be watching, because you do not know neither the day or the hour.

Note on a variant reading: After *nor the hour* some manuscripts read *in which the Son of Man is coming*.

Therefore, be watching, because you do not know neither the day or the hour. The final exhortation indicates the main point of the parable—one is to watch. The point is not the avoidance of literal sleep (the wise virgins did sleep) but spiritual wakefulness, that is, keeping in a state of constant readiness for the coming of the Son of Man. The vigilance is required because the day and the hour cannot be known in advance.

We can learn the following lessons from this parable:

1. There will be a long period of time between the First and Second Coming of Christ (25:5; see also 24:9; 25:19).
2. Each one of us must be personally prepared for the coming of the Lord (25:7-9). We cannot expect the preparedness of those close to us to compensate for our lack of preparedness (see also Psalm 49:7; Proverbs 9:12).
3. Because we do not know the time of His coming we must always be prepared (25:13; Psalms 95:7,8; 2 Corinthians 6:2).
4. Those who profess belief in Jesus are similar, in many respects, to those who truly believe (see the parable of the Sower in chapter 13).
5. There will be no doubt when Christ returns (25:6). It will be visible to everyone (24:31; Revelation 1:7).
6. When the Lord returns, there will be no second chance for those who have not received Him (25:10-12). This is an important theme in the New Testament (see also 7:22,23; 10:32,33; 24:37-42; 25:34-36; 2 Corinthians 5:9,10; Galatians 6:7,8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; Hebrews 9:27).

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (25:14-30)

Next Jesus gives the parable of the talents.

Matt. 25:14 For it is like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

For it is like There is no specific subject mentioned. This could refer to the “kingdom of heaven is like” or simply “this situation is like”

a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. The underlying theme of this parable is the absence of the master (the Son of Man) and the interim responsibility of the servants. He calls His servants together and puts them in charge of his possessions. This is a parable related to the commissioning in 24:45. Here the responsibility is in terms of money.

Matt. 25:15 And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, to each according to his

own ability, and he went on his journey.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *he went away on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went out* some manuscripts read *and he went on his journey immediately.* The next sentence starts with *The one who had received the five talents.*

And to one he gave five talents, The talent was a large amount of money, probably silver coinage. Our English word *talent* meaning “ability” is derived from this term.

to another, two, and to another, one, The issue is not the amount of money given to each but what each did with that which was given to him.

to each according to his own ability, Since the amounts are different it probably refers to personal gifts and abilities rather than the gospel itself. The key is that we are to be faithful with the gifts God has given us (1 Corinthians 4:2; Luke 12:48).

and he went on his journey. This represents the period of time between His ascension and return.

Matt. 25:16 Immediately, the one who had received the five talents went out and worked with them, and gained another five.

Note on variant readings: Instead of *gained* some manuscripts read *made.* After *another five* some manuscripts read *talents.*

Immediately, the one who had received the five talents went out and worked with them, The man went to work immediately.

and gained another five. The parable does not describe how the man doubled that which was given to him, because it is unimportant. It is important the he made good and effective use of what was given to him.

Matt. 25:17 So also, the one with the two talents gained another two.

So also, the one with the two talents gained another two. The same is true of the second servant who doubled the talents given to him.

Matt. 25:18 But the man who had received the one talent went away, dug into the ground, and hid the master’s money.

But the man who had received the one talent went away, dug into the ground, and hid the master’s money. By contrast the third servant hid the money in the ground to preserve it.

Matt. 25:19 Now after a long time the master of the slaves returned and settled the accounts with them.

Now after a long time The master gave the slaves a lot of time to use the money. It also reflects the lengthy time before the Second Coming (see verse 5).

the master of the slaves returned and settled the accounts with them. The idea of settling accounts refers to judgment.

Matt. 25:20 And the man that had received five talents came and brought him another five talents saying, ‘Master, You entrusted me with five talents, behold, I have gained another five talents.’

Note on a variant reading: After *I have gained* some manuscripts have *in addition to them*.

And the man that had received five talents came and brought him another five talents saying, ‘Master, You entrusted me with five talents, behold, I have gained another five talents.’ The first slave “gained” or “earned” another five talents.

Matt. 25:21 And his master said, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things, I will put you charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’

Note on a variant reading: Before *you were faithful* a few manuscripts read *since*.

And his master said, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave;’ The good slave is commended.

You were faithful over a few things, I will put you charge over many things. This echoes the policy stated in 24:45-47.

Enter into the joy of your master.’ Refers to the final joy of the believer.

Matt. 25:22 And the man with the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents, behold, I have gained another two talents.’

Note on variant readings: Instead of *with the two talents* some manuscripts read *having received the two talents*. After *I have gained* some manuscripts read *in addition to them*.

And the man with the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents, Though he was given less than the first slave, he also doubled the amount of talents.

behold, I have gained another two talents.’ This is word for word what the first slave said except for the number of talents he earned.

Matt. 25:23 And his master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave, you were faithful over a few things, you will be put in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’

Note on a variant reading: Before *you were faithful* a few manuscripts read *since*.

And his master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave, you were faithful over a few things, you will be put in charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’ This is word for word what was said to the first slave.

Matt. 25:24 And the man who had received one talent came to him and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a harsh man, harvesting where you had not sown, and gathering where you did not scatter seed.

And the man who had received one talent We now come to the last man who is the object lesson of this parable.

came to him and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a harsh man, Unlike the first two slaves, the

third one does not give an account of what he has earned but rather begins by justifying what he did with his one talent.

harvesting where you had not sown, This means letting others do the work for him.

and gathering where you did not scatter seed. This seems to be two different ways of stating the same thing. Others were doing the work for him.

Matt. 25:25 And because I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground; behold, you have that which is yours.'

And because I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground; behold, you have that which is yours.' Fear was the motivation for this man not increasing the master's wealth. This man did nothing with his life.

Matt. 25:26 But his master answered and said to him, 'Evil and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I harvest where I have not sown, and I gather from where I did not scatter seed?

But his master answered and said to him, 'Evil and lazy slave! The word "evil" is a different Greek word than in verse 30.

You knew, did you, that I harvest where I have not sown, The master is not necessarily agreeing with the assessment of him by the slave. The language could be sarcastic.

and I gather from where I did not scatter seed? The man's guilt is greater because he knew the master expected a profit..

Matt. 25:27 Then it was necessary, was it not, for you to put my money with the bankers, so when I returned I could receive that which was mine with interest.

Then it was necessary, was it not, for you to put my money with the bankers, so when I returned I could receive that which was mine with interest. Knowing that his master expected a profit, the least he could have done is put it in the bank to gain interest.

Matt. 25:28 Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

Note on a variant reading: One ancient manuscript has *five* instead of *ten*.

Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. This is the beginning of his judgment.

Matt. 25:29 And everyone who has will be given more, and it will be increased; but whoever does not have, even that which he has will be taken from him.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *even that which he has* some manuscripts read *he seems to have*. Some manuscripts have at the end of the verse *The one who has ears to hear, let him hear*

And everyone who has will be given more, and it will be increased; but whoever does not have, even that which he has will be taken from him. Here is the principle that is set down.

Matt. 25:30 And throw out that worthless slave into the outer darkness, where there will be the crying and the grinding of teeth.

And throw out that worthless slave into the outer darkness, where there will be the crying and the grinding of teeth. The evil slave is placed with those who are lost. He did not further the interests of his master. The idea behind the parable is that not everyone is entrusted with the same amount, but one must be faithful to that which he has been given.

The following lessons can be learned from this parable:

1. Jesus did not expect to return immediately. From this parable we learn that a long time will elapse before He comes again (25:18,26,41-45; James 4:17).
2. Believers should do everything with the view that there will be a day of judgment. For the believer the judgment will be the receiving of rewards, not condemnation (Romans 8:1). Therefore, all of our actions should be done in light of a day of reckoning (25:19,25-35; Luke 12:47; Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:13).
3. On this earth we all have important responsibilities, however, their importance should be seen in light of eternity (25:21,23).
4. God gives us opportunities to serve Him based upon the ability He has given us. But all people have not been given the same abilities. Since all of us will not have the same opportunities, each of us will be judged based upon our faithfulness with the specific opportunities that we have. The key issue is, "Have we been faithful to the use the gifts, abilities, and opportunities that God has given us?" (see 7:24-27; 25:15,16,19-23).
5. Any abilities or gifts that we have ultimately belong to God. We are not our own, we are His property. Therefore we are to be good managers with the abilities that He has given us (25:14; Luke 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; 6:19,20; 1 Peter 4:10).
6. Sin consists of not only doing wrong things such as murder, adultery, pride, and stealing, it also consists of not doing good things. Sins of omission are just as wrong as sins of commission (25:18,26,41-45, James 4:17).
7. In the afterlife, believers will share in the Lord's joy (25:21,23; Ephesians 3:15; 2 Timothy 4:8).
8. The evil and lazy person will not be faithful to the gifts that God has given him. When confronted with his sin he will make excuses rather than confessing his wrongs (7:22,23; 25:24-30,44,45; Luke 13:26,27). However no excuse will be accepted.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (25:31-46)

Jesus now explains what will happen at the judgment of the nations.

Matt. 25:31 But when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels with him, then he will sit upon His glorious throne.

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. We now consider the judgment of the nations which occurs at the Second Coming. As in the other references to His coming, the *fact* of His coming, rather than the exact time of His coming, is what is stressed.

Note on a variant reading: Many manuscripts read *holy angels* instead of *angels*.

Matt. 25:32 And all the nations will be gathered together before him; and he will separate them from one another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And all the nations will be gathered together before him; and he will separate them Though it speaks of the nations gathering together it is individuals that are judged. The word translated them in Greek is in a different gender (masculine) than the word referring to nations (neuter).

from one another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The shepherd separating the sheep from the goats would be a very common sight among those people.

Matt. 25:33 And he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

And he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. The right hand is the place of honor while the left hand is the place of dishonor.

Matt. 25:34 Then the King will say to the ones on his right, ‘Come, those blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’

Then the King will say to the ones on his right, ‘Come, those blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ The ones on His right hand inherit the kingdom.

Matt. 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, and I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in,

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, There are six different situations of need that the righteous met.

and I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in,

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

and I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. More needs.

Matt. 25:37 Then the righteous ones will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you to drink?”

Then the righteous ones will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you to drink?” The righteous people are surprised, they do not ever remember doing these things to Jesus.

Matt. 25:38 And when did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you?

And when did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? They remember none of these events.

Matt. 25:39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

And when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? They never saw him sick.

Matt. 25:40 And the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, for as much as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’

Note on a variant reading: A few early manuscripts do not have the words *of mine*.

And the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, for as much as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’ The least of my brothers refers to believers in Christ.

Matt. 25:41 Then he will say to the ones on his left, ‘Depart from me, cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *cursed ones* many manuscripts read *the cursed ones*. Instead of *prepared* a few manuscripts read *which My Father prepared*.

Then he will say to the ones on his left, ‘Depart from me, cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ The place of judgment was not prepared for humankind, but rather for the devil and his angels.

Matt. 25:42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.

Note on a variant reading: A few early manuscripts read *and* before *I was thirsty*.

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. The opposite response of the righteous.

Matt. 25:43 And I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, naked, and you did not clothe me, and I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

Note on variant readings: One early papyrus manuscript along with one other manuscript has *and* before *naked*. One early papyrus manuscript along with a couple of others have *I was* after *naked*.

And I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, naked, and you did not clothe me, and I was

sick and in prison and you did not visit me. When did they reject Him?

Matt. 25:44 Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungering or thirsting or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we did not minister to you?’

Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungering or thirsting or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we did not minister to you?’ They protest because they do not believe they have ever personally rejected Jesus.

Matt. 25:45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, because you did not do this for one of the least of my brothers, you did not do it to me.’

Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, because you did not do this for one of the least of my brothers, you did not do it to me.’ They rejected those who brought the message of Jesus.

Matt. 25:46 Then they will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous to everlasting life.

Note on a variant reading: One Latin manuscript reads *eternal fire* instead of *eternal punishment*.

Then they will go away to everlasting punishment, The punishment for those who do not believe in Jesus is everlasting.

but the righteous to everlasting life. Both the life and the punishment are eternal. No idea of conditional immortality can be found in this verse.

This judgment is not teaching salvation by works. The works are symbolic of a deeper reality, the acceptance of the message of Jesus (see James 2:14ff.).

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 25

Jesus continues His parables by urging the people to be ready for His Second Coming. He gives the parable of ten maidens, five who were prepared for the bridegrooms return and five who were not. The ones who were not prepared were not allowed into the wedding banquet.

He then gave the parable of the three slaves. Two of which doubled their talents. The third slave buried the talent of the master and was judged accordingly.

Jesus speaks about a final judgment of the nations where the people are separated as sheep are from goats. The sheep enter into His eternal kingdom while the goats are sent away to judgment. Those who do not enter into the kingdom are sent away to everlasting punishment.