

Faithful and Wise

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[0:00] Tonight, we are going to continue the study of the Olivet Discourse.

! Jesus answered the questions in reverse order.

Most of chapter 24 covered the signs of his coming. Last week, we reached the verses where Jesus finally gave the answer about when these things will happen. And in case you missed it, here is that answer.

It comes from 24:36, and Jesus said, But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Then Jesus followed that answer with examples of how unbelievers will be taken away in judgment when they least expect it. He followed that with a parable about preparedness, and that parable was summarized in 24:42-44.

[1:23] He said, So do you think that answer is what the disciples were wanting to hear?

No, they certainly would have wanted more details about precise timing, but God, however, has chosen to keep the precise timing a secret.

The question, then, is how Christians should live while we wait for the rapture and the second coming to happen. We know that we've seen people that sell all their possessions and wait for Jesus to return on a specific day.

A day, of course, that never comes because if no human knows the day or the hour, you can be pretty sure that if somebody thinks it's going to be that day, it won't be that day. Really, though, we as Christians have no need to guess about how we should live because Jesus tells us how to live using three parables that we find at the end of chapter 24 and all the way through chapter 25, verse 30.

Don took us through the first of these parables last week, but we're going to touch on it just briefly again tonight because its message ties with the next two. Together, the three parables tell us that until the end comes, believers should be watching, waiting, and working.

[2:50] So, in the parable of the faithful and wise servant, we have Jesus teaching about the importance of watching. The importance of watching, that's what goes into your first blank there.

Look at verses 24, 45 through 51. Jesus said, Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?

Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him into and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Just as the master in Jesus' story entrusted all his possessions to his servant, God also has entrusted the care of all things in this earth to his servants.

And the responses of the servants are indications of their inward conditions. The Lord wants to find his servants like the faithful first steward, faithfully carrying out God's will.

[4:14] Such a servant will be rewarded for his faithful service when the Lord returns. But if the servant fails to carry out his stewardship, that servant will be judged severely.

We saw that in the parable, because such a servant, concluding that his master was not returning for a long time, took advantage of others. You notice it says, He beat his fellow servants and lived wickedly.

It says he ate and drank with the drunkards. And like the wicked people of Noah's day, he was unaware that the sudden coming judgment would happen a lot sooner than he expected.

So that judgment will come, and that judgment will come and end in a separation of God that is eternal. So he will be apart from God for all of eternity.

And likewise, the judgment of the wicked at the Lord's second coming will separate them eternally from God. The evil servant represents an unbeliever who refuses to take seriously the promise of Christ's return.

[5:16] Though he is an unbeliever, and we know that because of his punishment, he's nonetheless accountable to Christ for the stewardship of his time on this earth. So Jesus was teaching there that every person in the world holds his life, his natural abilities, his wealth, and his possessions in trust from God, and must give an account to God of how those things were used.

Notice what it says will happen to him. He's going to spend the time where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And weeping and gnashing of teeth speaks of inconsolable grief and unrelenting torment.

Jesus commonly used that phrase to describe hell. And we're going to see that phrase several more times tonight as we go through the other verses. Before we leave this first parable, though, notice again how the good servant is described in verse 45.

He's described as faithful and wise. And this next parable expands on what it means to be wise.

The third parable we'll see tonight expands on what it means to be faithful.

So that's how they all tie together. In this second parable, Jesus illustrates how believers should be waiting for his return.

[6:38] So waiting for his return is your next main heading. We also could subtitle the parable as, Here Comes the Bridegroom. That fits as well.

The chapter break there, though, is unfortunate because this parable is related to the story that we just read because the parable of the wise and foolish servants tells how to be prepared if Jesus returns sooner than what people expect.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins that we're about to read tells how to be prepared, even if Jesus' coming is delayed longer than what people would expect.

So let's read that parable. It's in verses 1 through 13 of chapter 25. So Matthew 25, 1 through 13 say this, Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Now five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

[7:44] But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard, Behold, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him.

Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you, but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves.

And while they went out to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Before we look at the parable itself, let's remind us what Jesus means when he talks about the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom of heaven is used almost exclusively in Matthew's gospel, and it's a Jewish way of saying kingdom of God.

[9:00] If you remember, the Jews avoided saying the name of God out of respect for him, so therefore they often used the word heaven as an alternative way to refer to God.

It also has another meaning there, too, that's equally applicable because it points to the heavenly nature of Jesus' kingdom. His kingdom didn't involve a political restoration of the nation of Israel, as many of the Jews had hoped.

Instead, he brought a heavenly kingdom with a spiritual domain, which of course is the hearts of his people. And his kingdom demands internal repentance, not just external submission.

And it provides deliverance from sin rather than from political deliverance. And we're going to break this second parable into three subsections, and verses 1 through 5 introduce us to the wise and foolish.

So you'll see that wise and foolish come straight from the text. Let's read verses 1 through 5 again. They say, Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

[10 : 11] Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

Instead of faithful and unfaithful servants, now we have wise and foolish bridesmaids. The word translated virgins there refers to young women of marriageable age, and in that time they were the ones who were eligible to be the bridesmaids.

And the imagery of this parable accurately reflects typical customs of first century Palestine. In that day, the wedding would begin at the bridegroom's house when the bridegroom arrived to observe the wedding ritual.

And then after the wedding ritual, they would all proceed to the bridegroom's house, where the bridegroom would take them for the final festivities. And for a night wedding, lamps, which were actually torches, were needed for the procession, and all the bridesmaids had to take enough oil to keep the lamps burning for as long as necessary.

Notice something about the women, though. The two groups of women are described as exactly alike in everything except their preparations. What's different about their preparations?

[11 : 36] One tough and one didn't. The five foolish ones had enough oil to only last a period of time.

They didn't have enough to last the whole time. Their lamp was full. Why would they need more? Exactly. And actually, the word translated foolish is from the Greek word from which we derive our word moron.

So you can really see how Jesus felt about those people. So the five foolish ones were introduced first. They took enough oil to do what they wanted to do, but not enough to keep them burning for a long period of time.

And although they wanted to participate in the celebration, they really showed a lack of respect for the bride and bridegroom through their neglect of the responsibility to come prepared enough.

They also demonstrated their unworthiness of participating in the celebration. But think about the five wise bridesmaids. They demonstrated their respect and love for the bride and groom by coming well prepared.

[12 : 37] They had enough oil to not only keep their torches burning for a little while, but to keep them burning throughout the entire procession. Notice that everything else is exactly the same.

It doesn't even say there's anything wrong with all of them slumbering and sleeping while they were waiting on the bridegroom. It's just that some were prepared and some weren't. So we've seen the wise and foolish.

In verses 6 through 12, we see the welcomed and forgotten. So that's the welcomed and forgotten. And here are 6 through 12 again.

And at midnight a cry was heard, Behold, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you, but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves.

[13 : 38] And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. So finally, at 12 a.m., perhaps when they least expected it, the sleepers awake to a cry that their groom is coming. And at this point, the five foolish bridesmaids realize their mistake and they beg the others to share their oil with them. And the wise young women show that they are indeed pretty wise because they refuse.

They realize that if they share their oil with them, everybody might be left in the dark before the procession is over. And it's kind of interesting that it says that the wise ones told the others to go out and buy some oil when it's midnight.

But actually, one of the notes I saw said it wasn't unusual for that time for the shopkeepers to stay open if they knew something like that might happen because they saw an opportunity then to possibly make some more money.

[14:50] They were Jewish. And Jesus apparently wants to teach that spiritual preparedness can't be transferred from one individual to another.

Every person is responsible for himself or herself. And the people who are prepared are the ones who are welcomed. The people who are unprepared are forgotten.

You notice Jesus doesn't say, I knew you once. He says, I do not know you. So he's never really known those people.

You may hear other interpretations of this parable where the speaker tries to take the symbolism even further by suggesting that the lamps, and particularly the oil, represent spiritual things.

You want to be very careful of those and generally avoid those because the lamps and the oil simply are necessary elements for the illustration that Jesus used.

[15:51] We know that you can't buy spiritual preparedness. It's something that is a gift from God. So we've got one other thing to talk about too.

And the parable is given to underscore the importance of being ready for Christ's return in any event, even if he delays longer than expected. And when he does return, there will be no second chances for the unprepared.

And we see that from verse 13 where Jesus wraps up this second parable. Jesus reminds his hearers to be watchful and faithful. So verse 13 is where he says, be watchful and faithful.

You see right off that watchful is listed in the verse. Faithful is implied. And verse 13 says, watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Does that verse sound familiar? Sounds very much like what we read in 2436. Here's 2436 again. Jesus said, but of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but my Father only.

[17:02] Do you think Jesus is trying to reinforce the point that humans don't know when he's going to be coming again? So the distinctive warning then of this second parable cautions would-be disciples against refusing to count the cost of persevering in their discipleship.

So like we said before, this is not a case of true Christians losing their salvation, but a people whom Jesus simply doesn't recognize because they've never been his.

From the first parable, we saw that Christians should be watching for the return of Christ. From the second parable, we just saw that Christians should be waiting for the return of Christ.

The third parable tells us what we should do while we're waiting. And here's some background on that before I give you the next main heading. Because in 2445, the servant was faithful and wise.

The ten bridesmaids illustrated the wisdom in more detail. The parable of the talents that we're going to look at in just a second will illustrate faithfulness in more detail.

[18:10] And so in the parable of the bridesmaids, the foolish young women thought that their task was harder than it turned out to be. And actually, it was pretty easy for them to do, but it was not as easy as they thought because they still had to be prepared for it.

In the parable of the talents, the wicked servant thinks that his task is even harder than it turns out to be. So this passage also expands on the nature of preparedness to which the previous parables were pointing.

It defines the task with which believers are to be occupied until Christ returns. And that's good stewardship for the benefit of all that he has loaned us. So Christians need to do more than just looking for the coming of the Son of Man.

They should also be completing the work of the Great Commission as well as being prepared and expectant because the time of Christ's return is unknown. So in other words, while we're watching and waiting, we should also be working.

So we should also be working. And that's the third main point on your outline. Let's go ahead and read the third parable. And again, this is the parable of the talents.

[19:26] It starts with the phrase Kingdom of Heaven. So remember that Kingdom of Heaven is just another way to refer to the Kingdom of God. And it comes in verses 14 through 30.

Jesus said, For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man traveling to a far country who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability.

And immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. And likewise, he who had received two gained two more also.

But he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his Lord's money. After a long time, the Lord of these servants came and settled accounts with them.

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents. Look, I have gained five more talents besides them.

[20 : 30] His Lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things. I will make you rulers over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.

He also, who had received two talents, came and said, Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Look, I have gained two more talents besides them. His Lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord. Then he who had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there what you have is yours. But his Lord answered and said to him, You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed.

So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore, take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents.

[21 : 44] For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will have abundance. But from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away and cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Before we break this parable into sections, let's remind ourselves what's meant by the word talent.

The temptation was to subtitle this parable Who's Got Talents? But that would be to distort the meaning of the parable there. A talent was a measure of weight, not a specific coin.

So a talent of gold in that day was more valuable than a talent of silver. And a talent of silver is what we're actually talking about here in this parable because the word translated talent really meant talent of silver when they talk about money in verse 18.

So it was a considerable sum of money even though it was less valuable than gold. The modern meaning of the word talent that we know of which talks about a natural ability stems from the fact that this parable is often misapplied to stewardship of our natural gifts.

[22 : 59] And of course we should stewardship should show stewardship of our gifts but the verses here are talking about being stewards of the owner's possessions. And the first section of this parable tells us about the delivery and that's the delivery of talents.

So look at verses 14 and 15 again. For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

You can see I was very original in the outline there. And to one he gave five talents to another two and to another one to each according to his own ability. And immediately he went on a journey.

So according to verse 15 how did the man decide to distribute his wealth to each according to his own ability? That's something to keep in mind because not all servants are given the same amount because each has different capabilities.

I put this quote in your handout but in the kingdom of Christ not all are created equal nor is everyone expected to perform at the same level of competence but all are expected to be faithful stewards and to do their best to be those faithful stewards.

[24 : 16] So listen to that last part again. In the kingdom of Christ not all are created equal nor is everyone expected to perform at the same level of competence but all are expected to do their best as faithful stewards.

We're also told there that the owner went to a far country so that indicates that there would be ample time to test the faithfulness of the servants.

And we get that sense from the next verse though that the true nature of each servant manifested itself pretty quickly. In verses 16 through 19 we learn about the diligence of each servant.

More accurately stated we learn about each servant's diligence or lack of diligence as the case may be. Here are verses 16 through 19 again.

Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents and likewise he who had received two gained two more also but he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his lord's money.

[25 : 27] After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So the first two servants go to work at once and each earns a hundred percent yield on his investments.

But the servant given only one talent makes no investment at all. He just safeguards the money for his master's return. He has no chance of making any profit but unlike the others he risks no loss. But we'll see as the story keeps going along that to make no commitments on religious matters is really to make a damning commitment by default.

So listen to that last part again. To make no commitments on religious matters is really to make a damning commitment by default. You can't be neutral.

You have to be on one side or the other. Implied in the two faithful servants actions was a certain amount of risk but it was obedient risk.

[26 : 29] They were expected to do what was prudent and what would normally turn a profit based on their wisdom from life experiences. Believers also are required to obey Jesus in all things even when risk is involved and even when we don't see the end results.

So this is not the same as foolish extravagance or taking risk to test the Lord without the likelihood of a return on the investment and it doesn't mean taking chances without thinking ahead but it still implies a life lived on the edge of faith and a consistently obedient faith-filled life pleases the Lord and accomplishes his kingdom purposes.

Contrast that to the third servant though. He'd received one talent and he played it safe by burying his talent and waiting for his master's return. His life failed to realize any impact or show any gain for his master.

Instead he demonstrated an appalling lack of understanding of his master. He really didn't know his master at all. In the final verses of our passage tonight show what happens when the master returns we see the destinies of each servant.

The destinies of each servant. And we'll split these verses up into smaller chunks. Look at verses 20 and 21 first. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents saying Lord you delivered to me five talents look I have gained five more talents beside them.

[28 : 07] His Lord said to him well done good and faithful servant you were faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things enter into the joy of your Lord.

The first servant displays the results of his work and you can almost sense from reading it that the servant is very happy to show off what he's done and he's praised and rewarded with greater responsibility and he gets to rejoice in the company of his master.

So those who have been good stewards of all the time material resources and abilities that God has given them and not just with a tenth of those can expect commendation happiness and eternal life from God.

Notice verse 21 again it says his Lord said to him well done good and faithful servant you were faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things enter into the joy of your Lord.

Faithful servants whose discharge of duty shall meet with God's approval will share a blessed abundance of all good things. and I put this next quote in your handout because it's an old English quote from Matthew Henry and the English is a little awkward but let's look at it it says the state of the blessed is a state of joy not only because all tears shall then be wiped away but all the springs of comfort shall be opened to them and the fountains of joy broken up where there are the vision and fruition of God a perfection of holiness and the society of the blessed there cannot but be a fullness of joy in other words there must be a fullness of joy this joy is the joy of their Lord the joy which he himself has purchased and provided for them the joy of the redeemed bought with the sorrow of the redeemer it is the joy which he himself is in the possession of and which he had his eye upon when he endured the cross and despised the shame and of course that comes from

[30 : 11] Hebrews 12 too it is the joy of which he himself is the fountain and sinner it is the joy of our Lord for it is joy in the Lord who is our exceeding joy that last sentence kind of sums it all up where it says it is the joy of our Lord for it is the joy in the Lord who is our exceeding joy if you look at verses 22 and 23 now we see the reward for the servant who received two talents to begin with 22 and 23 say he also who had received two talents came and said Lord you delivered to me two

talents look I have gained two more talents besides them his Lord said to him well done good and faithful servant you have been faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things enter into the joy of your Lord so do you notice something about what Jesus said about the reward for each of those two servants it is exactly the same thing for both of them both the man with five talents and the man with two talents received exactly the same reward and that is why we can see that the reward is based upon faithfulness and not results this reward was based then on faithfulness and not the size of their responsibilities that goes to show that the smallest task in God's work may receive a great reward if we're faithful in performing it and that's an important sub point to remember the smallest task in God's work may receive a great reward if we're faithful in performing it a much different fate though awaits the man who received the one talent look at verses 24 and 25 then he who had received the one talent came and said

Lord I knew you to be a hard man reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed and I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground look there you have what is yours so how would you describe the third servant's explanation for why he still has just one talent lazy he had nothing but insults and excuses for his master because he accused the master of being hard and unreasonable he said he reaped where he had not sown gathered where he had not scattered seed and he tried to excuse himself on the basis that he was so afraid that he buried the talent so this servant was an unbeliever because no genuine servant would entertain such thoughts of his master and the master sees right through his excuses look at verses 26 through 28 but his Lord answered and said to him you wicked and lazy servant you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed so you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers and at my coming

I would have received back my own with interest therefore take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents the Lord rebuked him as wicked and lazy having such thoughts of his master the obvious question is why hadn't he at least deposited his money with the bankers and gotten some interest on it and incidentally of course in verse 26 the master is not agreeing with the charges against him rather he's saying that if that's the kind of master you thought I am that's all the more reason to have put the talent to work he was allowing the man's own words to condemn him because if the servant really believed the master to be the kind of man he said he was that's all the more reason for him not to be lazy his accusation against the master even if it had been true didn't justify his laziness and Jesus summarizes the third parable in verses 29 and 30 he says for to everyone who has more will be given and he will have abundance but from him who does not have even what he has will be taken away and cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth so notice that the third parable ends the same way that the first parable did using God given abilities wisely and productively is a bridal aspect of discipleship and it will be rewarded with additional opportunities to serve God faithfully and fruitfully all recipients of divine grace inherit immeasurable blessings in addition to eternal life and the favor of God but those who despise the riches of God's goodness forbearance and long suffering and instead bury those in the ground and cling instead to the paltry things of this world will ultimately lose everything that they have so as we said the wicked and lazy servant in this parable has a destiny identical to the evil servant at the end of chapter 24 the wicked and lazy servant here faces nothing but the prospect of eternal judgment described by Matthew's refrain of weeping and gnashing of teeth the three parables we looked at tonight all tie together in the parable of the two servants that we looked at first Jesus illustrated in greater detail that we should be ready at all times for Jesus his return because he could come at any time in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins we saw that like the bridegroom in that story Jesus may delay his coming longer than people expect and like the wise bridesmaids people alive at that time must be prepared for such a delay even though discipleship may be more arduous than the novice expects like the foolish bridesmaids though those who do not prepare adequately may discover a point at which there is no return when the end comes after it will be too late to undo the damage of neglect finally the parable of the talent stress the need to serve the king while he is away the point is clear here when the king returns he will require an accounting from all of us those who have consistently invested their lives obediently and wisely according to heavenly priorities will have a return to offer the king faithful stewardship in this life will result in being given greater responsibility and stewardship in the life to come taken together the parables show us that the faithful and wise serve the king by watching waiting and working every believer's goal should be to hear

Jesus say well done good and faithful servant you've been faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things enter into the joy of your Lord