

Before the Glorious Throne of the King

Matthew 25:1-46

Key verses 31-32

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Today we conclude our study of Jesus’ teaching on his second coming. History is pressing forward to a final conclusion: the glorious return of Jesus Christ as King. **In that day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord** (Php 2:10-11). We will all come before his glorious throne. There are many kinds of people in our world: joyful and boisterous people, serious and somber people, creative and not so creative, faithful and unfaithful people. But before the throne of Jesus, there will be only two kinds of people: those who are blessed, and those who are cursed.

Concluding the Olivet Discourse, Jesus gives us two parables and a revelation. Jesus wants us to know that what we do until he comes is important. Many of us have labored, sacrificed and prepared for God’s kingdom. At times we feel discouraged. But Jesus knows everything we have done, and he wants us to believe in his reward. When we see him, it will be worth it all. But there is another kind of person, whom Jesus wants to soberly warn. I pray through this message that Jesus’ words may greatly encourage and inspire us to live with the end in mind, seeking to please King Jesus.

First, foolish and wise virgins (1-13). Verse 1 reads, **“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”** To all who are in love with Jesus, Jesus’ coming again will be like the joyous event of a wedding. To understand this parable, we need to think about ancient Jewish weddings. A couple would first enter into a contract, like Mary, who was pledged to be married to Joseph (1:18). One year to seven years after that, the bridegroom would set a date to claim his bride. On that evening all

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would await his passing to join the procession to the banquet¹. These virgins were bridesmaids. The lamps were important. In Chicago at night we have street lamps, so it never gets dark, but in those days they used long poles with oil-soaked rags at the end as torches to light the way.

Verse 2 reads, **“Five of them were foolish and five were wise.”** It seems the wise ones respected the bridegroom and thought about how best to prepare for his wedding. They knew their lamps were important, so they prepared extra oil in jars. But the foolish ones didn’t seem to take the task seriously. Maybe they worked hard to get their hair done well, get the best dress, and to make regular tanning bed appointments so they would be beautiful, but neglected the lamps. Lugging around oil was burdensome. They wanted to be free to party, not tend lamps all night. Surely the bridegroom would come right away! But the bridegroom was a long time in coming, and all ten became drowsy and fell asleep.

When the cry rang out, **“Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”** they all awoke. The torches had burned down and needed to be trimmed and oil added. At that time the foolish virgins were in trouble. They couldn’t borrow oil, so they had to try to buy some. While they were knocking on merchant’s doors at midnight, the bridegroom came. The five who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later the others also came, but it was too late. They cried out, **“Lord, Lord, open the door for us!”** But he replied, **“Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”** They were left out.

What an interesting story! What is Jesus’ point? Jesus says in verse 13, **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”** He wants us to be wise as we watch for his coming. The telling statement here is, **“Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”** Jesus had said previously, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell**

¹see <http://newjerusalemcommunity.blogspot.com/2011/05/jewish-wedding-customs.html> also <http://www.bible.ca/marriage/ancient-jewish-three-stage-weddings-and-marriage-customs-ceremony-in-the-bible.htm>

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them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (7:21-23)” How can we be wise? Wisdom begins with the fear of God (Pr 9:10), and grows through relationship with Jesus Christ, in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). Paul advises us in Ephesians 5:15-17, **“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”** He goes on to explain the Lord’s will is to encourage one another in spiritual songs and submission, giving thanks to God. If we focus on Jesus, we will be ready. If we look for distractions, we will not be. This Easter season is a great opportunity to gain wisdom from Jesus and to understand God’s will through preparing messages, memorizing passages, writing life testimonies, Bible studies, and many other ways. Please don’t miss it. I still remember Easter 1996. At 19 years old, I was a slave to sin. But through memorizing 1 Corinthians 15 that year God opened my eyes to see that in the gospel I could be changed. I had hope to live a new life that year.

Second, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (14-30). Jesus’ second parable is about business. **“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey (14-15).”** The master trusted these servants, and knew their ability level. Each talent was worth roughly \$600,000². In total, the master handed out \$4.8 million. This wasn’t a competition, but rather an investment to reveal his servant’s true attitude and character.

The first two were very industrious. Wasting no time, they at once put it to work, and made 100% profit. The third guy seemed totally disinterested in the master’s business. He buried the gold and did as he pleased. What was their motivation in this?

When the master returned, all was revealed. He had been gone a long time, but he didn’t forget his servants. He wanted to know how they had fared, and so he settled accounts with them. **“The man who had received five bags of gold**

² ESV Study Bible: 1 Talent is 20 years a day laborer’s wage. \$15/hour, \$30k/year, \$600k.

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brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more (20).’” “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more (22).’” These servants seem eager to show the master what they had done. After all that time, they kept a positive attitude toward the master, and worked hard. Why? The words, “**You entrusted me**” are telling. They never forgot the great grace and trust of their master. They never forgot how well he knew them and to what a great degree he trusted them with his property. This grace encouraged them when business was bad, and humbled them when business was good. In this way they spent all the time he was away thinking about his grace and working hard.

The master was not indifferent to their results. Verses 21 and 23 read, “**His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness!’**” The master praised them for being good and faithful. The money was just a small thing in the master’s eyes, used to reveal their faithfulness to him. He elevated them to be partners, in charge of many things, and to share in his happiness (he let them keep the gold too). For these servants, the master’s praise and the privilege to share his happiness was the greatest reward. It was worth it all.

Then the third servant came. What had he been doing all that time the master was away? He didn’t steal the master’s money, but he didn’t invest it either. Since he wasn’t working, maybe he spent a lot of time reading bad reviews of his master’s business on Yelp! He became crooked. Every time he walked by the mound of dirt in his backyard where the gold was he felt burdened, then paranoid, and afraid. He was bitter and full of complaints without really knowing why. Still he did nothing with his master’s gold.

The master didn’t accept his excuse. He used his own logic against him to show how the servant had been living in a fantasy world, not the real world. “**His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant!’**” This was the summary of his life:

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wicked and lazy. He was excluded from the master's happiness, and deemed "worthless."

What is Jesus' point for us? In verse 29 Jesus says, **"For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."** Jesus invites us to have an abundant life in him, concluding in sharing his happiness forever. Jesus has entrusted each of us with something. As we faithfully obey Jesus, we grow, and reveal ourselves his good and faithful servant.

Daniel Sohn recently moved to the suburbs to serve Harper ministry, and formed a prayer partnership with faculty there. Last Sunday a guest pastor was invited to the Church of Barrington, where one faculty member worships, on the subject: "Bold Evangelism." The first paragraph of his dynamic message was the story of a missionary family whom God called to serve Harper campus. Fourteen years ago, after praying, they invited one student, taught him the word of God, and helped him repent and put his faith in Jesus. He was now the pastor. It was Pastor David Lovi of CJF ministries. Being faithful to what Jesus entrusts us bears fruit. Dr. Paul Koh told me he is looking forward to retirement, so he may join M. Daniel and continue to be faithful to what God had entrusted to him. They have joy and abundant life that grows and spreads, all because of Jesus' grace.

Do you know what Jesus has entrusted to you? His saving grace and his gospel have been entrusted to us. We have our lives, our families, our jobs, our talents, our money, our time. Many of us have been investing these, at great sacrifice. Jesus wanted his disciples and us to know that all that we have done in joyful service of the king will be worth it all when we see him. He will say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share in your master's happiness!"** How can we be fruitful? Jesus gives the secret, saying: **"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit (Jn 15:5)."** Let's keep remembering Jesus' grace to motivate us to work for his kingdom.

Third, the sheep and the goats (31-46). This final story is not a parable, but a revelation from Jesus about what will happen when he comes. Let's read verses

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31-32 together. **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”** Jesus often referred to himself as the “Son of Man” as a prophetic title for the Messiah. He did not come as expected, but rather very humbly as a baby laid in a manger. There was nothing glorious about his appearance. He lived as a servant. During his ministry on earth he was despised and rejected by the religious and political establishment. Even today people despise Jesus. But he is coming again in his glory, the glory he had with the Father before the world began (Jn 17:5). In that day, he will take his glorious throne. No longer will he be called “Son of Man” or Messiah; he will be King (34, 40) and Judge. All people, regardless of whether they are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Atheist, homosexual, faithful, faithless, red, yellow, white, tall, short, rich, poor, Russian, Canadian, dead, alive, educated, illiterate, etc.. All people will be gathered before his throne as one great herd or flock. Jesus will separate the people one from another. As long as shepherds have herded animals, sheep and goats flocked together. But when sheep shearing time came, the shepherd would easily identify who was a goat and separate them. It will be that easy for Jesus in the day of judgment. There will be no courtroom, no lawyers, no jury or evidence or witnesses. As a shepherd separates sheep and goats, Jesus will divide all humanity into two groups, and there will be no objection or appeal.

For many of us, this will be the day of great vindication, tearful reunion, and the overwhelming satisfaction of hope realized. Look at verse 34: **“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”** God has prepared a kingdom for his elect. Jesus knows who his elect are, as they are the ones the Father has given him. An inheritance is not earned by works but is a gift given on the basis of a right relationship. We were God’s enemies, but by his grace he forgave our sins in Jesus, opening the way for us to be adopted into his family. His blessed ones receive this inheritance to be with Jesus forever. We long for this inheritance. Peter calls it a living hope, which sustains us and fills us with inexpressible and glorious joy (1Pe 1:3-9).

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But then Jesus, the King, gives some validation of the blessed ones in verses 35-36: **“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”** What a surprising confession by the King! The righteous are just as surprised. It seems that caring for the needy was not unusual for them; they did so as opportunity arose, but surely if they had served Jesus, their king, they would have remembered! All their lives, they lived as debtors to Jesus, those who were forgiven much by his grace. How they wished they could show love to Jesus their King even one time, but Jesus had gone into heaven. So they continued to follow Jesus as his disciples, grow in his love and character, carry out the task that was entrusted to them, and care for all the needy people they came across. Verse 40 explains: “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Like the blessed, we have been given such great grace by Jesus. We have been forgiven our sins and owe a debt of gratitude beyond 10,000 talents (Mt 18:21-35). When we remember this grace, we long to love Jesus in return. But what is Jesus’ love language? Jesus’ love language is obedience (Jn 14:15,21,23,24; 15:10, 14; 1Jn 2:3-6, 10). What should we obey? Jesus said, **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you (Jn 15:12).”** The blessed are those who have loved the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters. We love Jesus by loving his needy people, living out his compassion.

This passage was a favorite of Mother Teresa. She received God’s call at the age of 12, and became a nun at 18. She began serving in India, educating poor girls in a high school there. But at the age of 36 she heard Jesus speak to her on a train to be his “fire of love amongst the poor, the sick, the dying and the little children.³” She dedicated her life to doing so, as an act of love for Jesus. The charter of her missionary institute was: “to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus on the cross for love and souls” by “labouring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the

³ <http://www.biography.com/people/mother-teresa-9504160>

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poor.⁴” She found personal inspiration in this passage to see the face of Jesus in everyone she served: “I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus.⁵” Not all of us have this as our primary calling entrusted to us. But we learn that to Jesus loving his needy brothers and sisters is loving him.

We don’t need to travel to the inner city or Calcutta to serve the needy. There are many opportunities to love Jesus, if we just open our eyes. I remember many missionaries sacrificing their lunch to feed me as a hungry student. We don’t even need to go outside our homes. Another quote by Mother Teresa in her address at the national prayer breakfast in 1994 (Clinton’s first term): “Maybe in our own family we have somebody who is feeling lonely, who is feeling sick, who is feeling worried. Are we there? Are we willing to give until it hurts in order to be with our families, or do we put our own interests first? We must remember that love begins at home...” Amy and I both work, but we have four active boys under the age of 10 at home. They need our love. Recently one boy came home crying because some friends abandoned him. His heart was broken. Amy didn’t ignore him, but cradled him and let him cry. He was healed. We just need to open our eyes and love.

What if we don’t love one another practically? The King deals with the goats in a fearful manner: **“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”** He points out how their behavior toward him was cold and indifferent. They had all the appearances of his flock, but they didn’t love the King. They left him cold, hungry, thirsty and alone. They were surprised. They thought they loved Jesus because they were religious. They may have been the ones driving out demons, and doing all kinds of good work. They established ministries and gathered large numbers of people. If they had seen Jesus in any need, surely they would have met it! But Jesus makes it clear in 45: **“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”** Love for one

⁴ <https://www.catholic.org/clife/teresa/>

⁵ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/550940-i-see-jesus-in-every-human-being-i-say-to>

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another is not optional. If we ignore our needy brother or sister because we are busy doing some activity, we become like the priest or Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who walked right by a man bleeding on the side of the road (Lk 10:25-37). Jesus won't be impressed by our labor and prideful accomplishments. He will look to see: Did we love the least of these?

Verse 46. **“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”** As there are only two kinds of people there are only two destinies. Through this passage we learned that what we do and how we live in these last days before Jesus comes is important. We either are growing in wisdom, faithful stewardship and love for the brothers, revealing our love and relationship with Jesus, or we are not. We need not compare with others, or compete with others, or judge others work. Rather, let's encourage one another all the more with the real reward. One day you and I will appear before the King on his glorious throne. When I hear him say, “Well done good and faithful servant!” It will be worth it all. May God bless us to be wise, faithful, and loving as we await Jesus coming.