

Watching With Faithful Expectation

As we eagerly watch with expectation and desperation for a cure to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and observe calamities and crises of all sorts across the planet, seemingly on the cusp of a massive reset of the global economy, it is important as Christians that we too, eagerly “watch”. In order to maintain a biblically centered perspective in these unprecedented days, we must remind ourselves regularly of God’s providence, power and love. A very familiar verse in Lamentations 3 says this: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”(v.22-23) Sometimes we must humbly confess in an unpretentious and childlike manner, “God, You know all about it.”

I have been preparing for a future study on the Parables for a couple months. The Parables in the Bible are stories that Jesus told that revealed the mysteries of God’s Kingdom; they were illuminations of crucial spiritual truth. The Parables had a two-fold purpose: they *hid* the truth from self-righteous or self-satisfied people who fancied themselves too sophisticated to learn from Him, while the same Parables *revealed* truth to eager souls with childlike faith – those who were hungering and thirsting for righteousness. In the process of this study I discovered three Parables in close sequence to each other in the Gospel of Matthew that have a single, simple point about the importance of faithfulness in the light of Jesus’ return. They are found in Matthew chapters 24-25 (Jesus’ teaching ministry during the Olivet Discourse), and are as follows: the Parable of the wise and evil servants (24:45-51), the Parable of the foolish bridesmaids (25:1-13), and the Parable of the talents (25:14-30). There is significant application here and frankly too much to cover thoroughly in this format, thus I’ll just be hitting some highlights.

In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks to His disciples privately regarding His second coming. Specifically, the disciples ask, “What shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?” Of course, that has prompted a barrage of “so-called” prophets over the decades to a never-ending volley of date guessing, speculation, and various forms of sensationalism in persuading multitudes to sell their homes, cash-in stock, put on a robe, and stand on a mountain waiting for the sound of a trumpet and the Lord’s return.

This flies in the face of Jesus’ direct statements – “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only”(v.36), “You do not know what hour your Lord is coming”(v.42), “The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”(v.44), and “You know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”(25:13) What could be clearer? Very simply, these parables are an extended exhortation from Christ to His disciples, urging them to remain faithful until He returns.

The Parable of the Wise and Evil Servants

“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 in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” [Matt. 24:45-51]

The wise and evil servant both understood that the master’s absence increased the burden of responsibility. The wise servant pictures the Christian and his eternal reward. The evil servant represents the self-deluded unbeliever who has identified with the church and pretends to be serving his master. He does not really love the master or look forward to his return.

Scripture tells us that “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:12-13) Beware of those who scoff at His return: “Know this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’ “ (2Pet. 3:3-4a)

This is the lesson underscored by the Parable – Christ’s return is imminent! “The Lord is at hand!” (Philip. 4:5, see also Ja. 5:8-9) We should be ready, expectant, busy, obedient, loyal, fully prepared, like the wise servant in this Parable.

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

The parable of the two servants reminds us that we must not assume Christ will delay His coming, but be ready that He could return at any time. The parable of the ten bridesmaids reverses the point. Being “ready for Him to return at any time” means we must be ready if He *does* delay.

Again, there seems to be no end in our age for self-styled “prophets” and amateur numerologists who believe they have figured out the chronology of the end times. Their efforts have only proven themselves to be wrong, and subsequently discredited.

As Christians, we absolutely believe that Christ’s return is imminent. “It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” (Rom. 13:11) “The time is short. . . .For the form of this world is passing away.” (1Cor. 7:29) “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and *watchful* in your prayers.” (1Pe. 4:7) We need to remain patient, diligent, and faithful to our responsibilities no matter how long the Lord delays His coming.

So Jesus tells this parable about “ten virgins”, or ten unmarried girls, that are waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Their only responsibility was to keep their lamps lit while they waited.

“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. 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 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.” (Mat. 25:1-13)

Keeping a burning lamp was their only duty. The five irresponsible girls woke from their slumber and tried to buy more oil at night – assumingly impossible at that hour of night. The bridegroom came and they were shut out. They had bungled their one duty, and now the response was “I do not know you.”

The point of the parable is simple: Christ (the bridegroom) is coming. He may arrive later than we expect, and we must be prepared for that possibility. That means remaining awake, staying at the watch, and being ready for Him no matter how late the hour. Furthermore, as time passes and His arrival grows closer, the need for watchfulness is greater, not less. When He does arrive, those not expectantly watching will discover their opportunity is over.

The Parable of the Talents

All three parables give us a complete understanding of what it means to be faithful as we await Christ's return. To recap, the parable of the two servants reminds us to *expectantly watch* for Christ's return. The parable of the bridesmaids is a lesson about *patiently waiting* for Him. Now, the parable of the talents speaks of diligently *working* while we look for Him.

The faithful believer must continue to work and plan with an "eye" to the future. Prudent planning does not negate living by faith. I would refer you to Luke 14:28-30 and "counting the cost". In this parable, a rich man travels to some faraway place. He appoints three servants as managers over specific areas of his wealth until he returns. Two of them put the money to work and were able to double their portions. The third buried his treasure and thus gained nothing for the master.

"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 those 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.' 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.' 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 you have what 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. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. '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.' " (Mat. 25: 14-30)

Again, this parable is a good reminder that while we wait, we are to prepare for that day by working faithfully for the Master. The Master is obviously Christ who has given these servants full power of attorney with an assigned responsibility. It is important to keep in mind that the emphasis is on the labor and effort the two servants undertook to maintain the responsibility given to them, and that they were both rewarded *equally for their faithfulness, not on the basis of the profit they earned*. The third servant literally did nothing but bury his master's money, and took advantage of his boss's absence to do whatever he wished. His lack of responsibility guaranteed the resources given to him would never earn any profit due to his inactivity. He exhibited NO effort; he did nothing. This shiftless servant believed that the master was severe and demanding, indicating that he lacked both fear and respect for his master.

It is certainly clear that this irresponsible servant represents the unbeliever. It is a picture of the typical careless worldling, disobedient to his master, self-willed in his behavior, and unfaithful in his duties. The man is caught unprepared, exposed in his guilt; his punishment is frightfully severe.

All these parables give us a profound exhortation about how we should think about our Lord's return. One shows the folly of thinking He will not return, another the folly of presuming that He will come soon, and the last the importance of remaining faithful regardless of when He returns. Also, they all speak of the absolute certainty of His return and future judgment. All three exhort us to be ready. A person is no true believer if he has no real expectation of Christ's return, no eagerness to meet Him, and no love for His appearing. "That, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:12-13)

Keep watching, waiting, and working faithfully.

– Article submitted by Chuck Wetzel
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