

MATTHEW 25 –Ready for Jesus’ return? - Safe and Secure for the Day of Judgement?

From chapter 23 onwards the narrative becomes more and more grave and alarming. There is much talk of destruction, catastrophes, death, judgement, punishment and warnings about the end of the age, which is linked with the return of Jesus as God’s supreme judge. We are warned that there will be a day when the secrets of men’s hearts will be revealed and **all** will receive God’s righteous justice. Some will be welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom and the rest cast into outer darkness.

How does such talk make you feel? Does it make you feel a little uneasy? Perhaps it should, if only for the urgent passion with which Jesus warned about these things and the parables he told where people were surprised that they were not safe from God’s wrath.

A lot of the parables in Matthew were aimed at the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law - and they knew it. As a result they were all the more determined to do away with him. Perhaps one of the most devastating judgements on them came when Jesus said,
“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” Matt 21:43

And then in chapter 23 he openly accuses them of hypocrisy, so serious that he says,
“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

Matt 23:33

They were condemned for play acting. They were all show on the outside, but inside they were full of corruption.

In any story, don’t you just love it when the baddies get it in the neck, when their sins are revealed and their deception exposed? Whether or not they were deceived, the Jewish leaders’ hypocrisy was gross and obvious. But what about us, are we hiding some hypocrisy, some deception and worst of all will we be surprised if, on the last day, we are not welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom.

In chapter 23 Jesus is clearly addressing the Pharisees and teachers of the law, but from chapter 24 and into 25 he is talking to the disciples and telling them, through parables, of people (probably mostly referring to the Jews) who thought they were OK, ready, prepared for the Master’s return, but when that day came, they were surprised to be shut out. (Wrong queue)

Our title today: **Ready for Jesus’ return? - Safe and Secure for the Day of Judgement?**

But being ready for Jesus’ return, being safe and secure for the day of judgement is not a lottery, a guessing game or a total mystery. Listen to what the apostle John says: This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment. 1 John 4:17

There is something about God’s love that should give us confidence that we are not waiting in the wrong queue, or as we might say, living in a fools paradise. What is it? Let’s look at the chapter.

Chapter 25

Let’s look at these three parables.

The wise and foolish virgins.

The unprofitable servant

The sheep and the goats.

These are all part of a climax of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God, before he enters into his suffering and death.

2

At first glance these parables might seem as if we are saved by storing up something, being industrious and being merciful and generous to the less fortunate. This is surprising when we know that the heart of the Gospel is that we are not saved by works, but by grace through faith in Jesus. It is not earned it is a free gift.

In the main, Jesus told parables to make one major point, although we can sometimes draw more than one lesson from them. If we get bogged down in the details, we may miss the one thing Jesus wants to get across. The bottom line of each of these stories is similar and tells us something about the true essence of the Gospel.

Although we can learn something about how to behave as a Christian from these parables, the ultimate issue is clearly salvation. For we have foolish virgins locked out from the wedding banquet, a servant thrown into the darkness and those separated as goats from sheep sent away to eternal punishment.

We'll look at each of them briefly, identify the "bottom line" issue and then finish by reminding ourselves of how, in spite of the awesomeness and terror of Jesus return and the Day of Judgement, we can have confidence that we are absolutely safe and secure and destined to share in the joy of our Master in his eternal kingdom.

The first one:

For us Westerners, the context is quite unfamiliar, but apparently, even today it is not uncommon for a Middle Eastern wedding to take place at night. And don't get excited men, the bridegroom was not expecting to marry ten virgins, these girls were most likely part of the wedding procession to accompany the bride, lighting the way with their lamps, more like bridesmaids. But we don't need to concern ourselves with this detail. The question we must ask is: what caused five girls to be excluded from the wedding banquet, representing the Kingdom of God?

Here are some key points:

1. They all looked the same; they all had lamps.
2. Going to sleep was not a problem.
3. What the foolish lacked could not be obtained from others.

An obvious question is: what does the oil represent? It looks like something needs to be stored up. Could this be good deeds, spiritual disciplines, financial giving or serving faithfully in the church?

Jesus makes it clear that it is not a failure to do these things that will cause you to be shut out of the Kingdom. This is because none of these things, however well we do them can qualify us for a place. Just think about it. If they were, how could we have the confidence that John speaks of, because we would never know if we have done enough.

No, the story is just a way of asking: are you prepared to meet Jesus?

So how can we be sure that we are prepared? Look at verse 12, here is the crucial issue: "I tell you the truth, I don't know you."

So it is not about good deeds. It's about our relationship to Jesus. It's about being genuine family members. It's about being known by God as his child. It's about being born again.

John 1:11-13

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

This is not a second hand relationship The foolish girls could not "borrow" from others. Whilst church is a wonderful place of encouragement, support and growth, we cannot ride on the saving faith of others, not others in the church, not husband, or wife. It is about our personal standing with God.

Our preparation, our readiness, must be personal. Joining in with others who are ready will not do. There is no salvation by association.

Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' Luke 13:23-27

There are those in churches, possibly fully involved, looking like everyone else to whom the Lord will say, "I never knew you."

Do you remember the parable of the weeds in Matt. 13, where wheat and weeds are growing together? The master says, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their obvious hypocrisy and we say "Yes". But those whom Jesus does not know will share the same fate.

In all these parables, the people who thought they were safe, were actually in the "wrong queue" all refer to God as Sir, Master and Lord.

Jesus describes such in Matt. 7:21-23

"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. ²² 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?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

So what is the will of the Father? Jesus tells us in John 7:40.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Let's look at the other two parables.

The second: The parable of the talents

You might say, well surely this parable is about making the most of the gifts and abilities (talents) God gives us. It is true that we are accountable for being good stewards of what God has given us. As Christians we will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ. But this is not to determine if we are saved or not, that was already settled when we received Jesus as Saviour. But this parable **is about salvation**, because the wicked servant is thrown into darkness. So, why?

Again, the immediate application is that the wicked servant represents the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. They were the custodians of the privileges given to Israel. They had the Law of Moses, they had the Temple as a sign of God's presence, they had been given wonderful promises of how God would bless them and through them bless all the nations of the world. But instead of being light to the world, they had buried it and kept it fossilised for themselves. They had totally misunderstood the Master's generosity.

But what about us? Let's look at his attitude.

He has a religion of playing it safe, concerned only with **not** doing anything wrong. He does not know his master, that he is generous and someone who rewards faithful service with a share in his happiness. There is no relationship, no expectation of fruitfulness, only a life of nervously trying to keep the rules.

Truly knowing Jesus and being known by him sets us free from the tyranny of rules and the fear of condemnation for our failure to keep them. It sets us free to joyfully serve our master and live fruitful and productive lives for him.

Phil Moore writes in his commentary: The master does not throw the lazy servant into outer darkness because he is lazy. His laziness is an external symptom of the same internal problem. The servant has a false view of his master, which he uses to justify his lack of devotion. He has many excuses for not using his talent, but his master sees through them all. Those who truly know the Lord, work hard for him, and they receive his reward as "good and faithful servants". Those who refuse his commission simply reveal that they don't really know him at all.

Lastly, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats

The Son of Man is the judge and the one to whom all people are to respond in order to be declared righteous. In the Middle East sheep and goats look similar. This is about the judgement of those who up to this point have been mixed together, just like the bridesmaids and the wheat and the weeds. The criterion for judgement is not people's attitude to Israel, or the Law, but their treatment of Jesus' brothers. Nations = all people.

Who are Jesus' brothers?

Popularly, "my brothers" has stood for anyone in the world who has need. Verse 40 has become the charter for many Christian relief organisations. Of course we have an obligation as Christians to help the poor and needy of our world, but, whether we help the poor of the world is not a matter of salvation.

So what did Jesus mean by "my brothers"?

Without exception, elsewhere in scripture, Jesus uses the term only when referring to his natural brothers, or his disciples. Examples: Matt.12:49, 28:10, John 21:23 and Heb.2:11&12.

Jesus is here saying that he is so united with those who trust in him, that to help them is to help him and to neglect them is to neglect him. When we are told that we are in Christ and he in us, it is difficult to grasp the wonder of this. But Jesus has identified with our sin, taken the punishment and made us fit to be in his family. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to call his brothers those he has saved.

When Saul has a vision on the Damascus road Jesus says to him:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. Acts 9:4&5.

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me." Matt.10:40.

Remember, with all these parables it is not the behaviour that is the ultimate problem, but rather it may be a symptom of a lack of relationship with God which alone will determine whether we are safe on the Day of Judgement.

The apostle John drives this home when he says,

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother he is a liar, (remember, not showing love to our brother, or sister is not showing love to Jesus) . For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 1 John 4:20

Although these parables can teach us something about how to behave as Christians, they all conclude with a reference to God's final judgement. In other words, they all relate to salvation and are a warning to us to be ready, to be prepared.

Ready for Jesus' return - Safe and secure for the Day of Judgement

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John goes on in the next verse,

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

God loves you and wants you to know him, through knowing his love for you through Jesus Christ.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

Is God's love so complete in you that you know you will have confidence on the day of judgement? Make sure today. Open up your heart to him and receive him as your Lord and Saviour. This is the day of salvation!