

## Matthew 25 – Being prepared

### 1. How to respond – 5 parables

- a. Jesus taught 5 parables highlighting how we are to respond to Him with vigilance (24:32-25:30). There is an important progression in the five parables that Jesus taught in Matthew 24-25. These parables are incomplete by themselves. *They bring together the love of God and the fear of God.*
  - i **Parable #1: The parable of the fig tree** (24:32-35) exhorts us to see the value of recognising the signs of the times and connecting them to the approach of the return of Jesus.
  - ii **Parable #2: The parable of the thief** (24:42-44) exhorts us to “watch” the signs of the times as they unfold so that we might be ready to respond faithfully to Jesus in the growing crisis.
  - iii **Parable #3: The parable of the faithful and wise servants** (24:45-51) exhorts us to be faithful and wise servants who work diligently, with good motives, as we give spiritual food to others in a way that is appropriate to each season. Jesus contrasted faithful servants with evil servants. This parable highlights that *Jesus’ delay may be shorter than expected.*
  - iv **Parable #4: The parable of the ten virgins** (25:1-13) alerts us to the fact that faithful service can only be sustained by cultivating a heart connect with Jesus as our Bridegroom God. We can serve with good motives but work with a wrong spirit by inadvertently neglecting to maintain our intimacy with God. Jesus defined the essence of wisdom as prioritising this. This parable highlights that *Jesus’ delay may be longer than expected.*
  - v **Parable #5: The parable of the talents** (25:14-30) alerts us to the fact that faithful service is sustained by cultivating the fear of God or knowing that the Lord is watching us and that there are serious consequences to our actions. Faithful service is defined as not quitting but persevering with diligence in small and hard tasks even when some of God’s promises are delayed (25:21, 24). This parable highlighted that *Jesus’ delay may be harder than expected.*

### 2. Parable #1: The parable of the fig tree (24:32-35)

**Matthew 24:32-35** *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup> So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>34</sup> Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>36</sup> But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

- a. The lesson of the fig tree is easy to understand. A fig tree loses its leaves in the winter, and does not sprout new leaves until the late spring. So when we see the leaves of the fig tree begin to sprout we know that summer is near. So when the prophetic sign events and trends that Jesus has been talking about make global headlines, then we know that the end of the age is near. Once again, Jesus is giving us a timing indicator.
- b. The other significant thing about this parable is that the fig tree is often used figuratively in the scriptures as an illustration of Israel. So for us, this is also a prophetic sign. God always uses Israel as his prophetic time-clock.

- c. Between 70AD and 1948 there was no Israel. Then in May 1948 through a series of miraculous events, the nation of Israel was reborn back in her own land. What we are seeing in our own lifetime are the leaves of the fig tree sprouting and flourishing, again giving us a clear indication of where we are on God's end-times timeline.
- d. There is only one generation that will see all of the trends and events that Jesus outlines in this chapter making headline news on a global scale. For the first time in history, most of these trends are happening with greater frequency and intensity, pointing us to the compelling conclusion that we may well already be in the generation in which the Lord will return.
- e. There is an alternative translation of this phrase, because the Greek word "genea", often translated "generation", can equally mean "race". So the idea here is that Israel as a race will not pass away, which is confirmed by many prophetic scriptures concerning their continuing role in the purposes of God both through the end times and into the Millennial Kingdom.
- f. Many misinterpret Jesus' statement that we will not know the day or the hour to mean that we cannot know when He will return. This is not what Jesus was saying. We can know the season by watching for the signs in the same way we know when a tree is about to bear fruit by seeing the leaves appear and know that it is approaching summer and the time for harvest.

### 3. Parable #2: The parable of the thief

**Matthew 24:43-44** *But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

- a. We need to be faithful during the time of Jesus' delay. Watch the signs of the times so that we will be ready to respond faithfully to Jesus during the growing crisis of the end times.
- b. Being prepared means that we will not be caught out or taken by surprise. In the parable it appears that the master of the house was unprepared and suffered loss. Being prepared for the end times means investing time and effort into knowing and understanding what the Bible has to say so that our hearts do not become offended or fearful and cause us to fall away.

### 4. Parable #3: The parable of the faithful and wise servants (24:45-51)

**Matthew 24:45-51** *Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>47</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, <sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know <sup>51</sup> and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

- a. Jesus knew there would be a delay between his first coming and his second coming and didn't want this to lead to his followers living ungodly lives. If we are walking with the Lord then we will not be taken by surprise; we shall be expectant, prepared and equipped and ready to join in the great celebration on the Day of His Return.
- b. Readiness will always promote faithfulness. Having focused on our state of preparedness for the end times, Jesus now shifts his focus to highlight how we should then live in the meantime. If the previous parable was about uncertainty, this one is about certainty.

- c. We are to be faithful and wise servants seeking to live holy and righteous lives. We are to be those who feed on the word and “give food” to others (v.45) by sharing the gospel of the kingdom and the message of Jesus’ return. Then we will rule and reign with Him in the Millennial Kingdom and see the “restoration of all things”.

## 5. Parable #4: The parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13)

**Matthew 25:1-13** *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”*

- a. At the centre of this parable are 10 virgins. All believers stand as virgins before God by receiving the free gift of Jesus’ righteousness when we were born again (2 Cor. 5:17, 21).

**2 Cor. 11:2** *I betrothed you to one husband...I present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

- b. Each of these virgins had **a lamp**. Lamps speak of ministry that brings God’s light to others.

**Mt. 5:15-16** *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*

- a. All ten went out to meet the Bridegroom – they all had insight into Jesus as the Bridegroom and went to meet or encounter Him. This would be understood by the disciples as they would be familiar with a Jewish wedding. At any Jewish wedding the wedding party went out to meet the Bridegroom and welcome Him in. Similarly when a king came to visit the village or town they would send out a welcome party to escort him in.
- b. So here we have a wedding party going out to welcome the Bridegroom. They’re not sure of when he is coming but they know he is and they want to be there ready to welcome him.
- c. There is a cry going out today – “The Bridegroom is coming”. It is a cry to awaken us to our bridal identity and a cry that the Day of His return is at hand. At the end of the age we want to be those who are ready to welcome our Bridegroom back to earth.
- d. But Jesus tells us that half were wise and half were foolish. He doesn’t say they were good and evil. They are all virgins, they are all expecting His coming, but some are wise and some are foolish. The issue at the end of the age is wisdom. What is wisdom?

**Psalms 1:1-3** *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

**Proverbs 2:1-6** *My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, <sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight and raise your*

voice for understanding,<sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,<sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.<sup>6</sup> For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

- e. This is how we become wise; by delighting in His word, by meditating on it day and night, by receiving revelation from His word and seeking understanding in communion with Him. Crying out to Him from our hearts to know Him more, to grow in revelation and experience of who He is. To grow in intimacy and encounter.
- f. Jesus goes on to describe why he has declared them thus.

*For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,<sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.*

- g. So what is the oil? The result of wisdom is that we have oil. A lamp without oil is useless – it does not bring any light. In this parable, Jesus’ warning is that the wise can become foolish if they neglect to continue to cultivate intimacy with Jesus (as they previously did when they went to meet the Bridegroom in 25:1).
- h. **Oil** here speaks of the presence or the anointing of the Spirit touching our heart as we spend time with God and seek after the wisdom and knowledge that come from His heart and word

**1 John. 2:20, 27** *But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.....<sup>27</sup> the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him*

- i. **Five were foolish:** They took their lamps (ministry) but **took no oil**. They pursued ministry as their first priority, instead of acquiring the “oil of intimacy” in their walk with Jesus. Here, Jesus defined foolishness as seeking to serve faithfully without the “oil of intimacy.”
- j. **Five were wise:** The wise ministries **took oil** in their vessels with their lamps. They pursued acquiring oil as their first priority before seeking to expand their ministry. Their relationship with Jesus is their most important priority, or “dream,” instead of their ministry assignment.
- k. The oil of the Spirit touches our hearts in different ways including the following:
  - i. *It tenderises our heart*, enabling us to feel more of God’s desire for us.
  - ii. *It enlarges our desire* for Him by encountering His desire for us.
  - iii. *It illuminates our understanding* with growing insight into God’s beauty.
  - iv. *It imparts zeal for righteousness*, which helps us to overcome various temptations.
- l. As it got late they all became drowsy and slept. Sleeping in this parable is not bad. The wise and unwise both sleep. This speaks of cultivating oil in the midst of the natural processes of life. We sustain intimacy with Jesus in the midst of the rigours, routines, and mundaneness of life. Living in a rhythm of encounter, service and rest, living in intimate relationship with Him in all we do and ensuring that we are storing oil.
- m. The cry goes up at the midnight hour. At the midnight hour of history, the Lord’s messengers will cry out with a 3-fold message.
  - i. First, *Jesus is coming* – a call to everyone to be ready for the coming of our Bridegroom
  - ii. Second, *Jesus is coming as a Bridegroom God* with deep desire for relationship with His people. A call to revelation that we are His bride and He is our Bridegroom King

- iii Third, God's people must *go out to meet Him* or to make the necessary effort to position themselves in worship, obedience, prayer, the Word, and fasting to encounter Jesus.
- n. The foolish ministries recognized their mistake in neglecting to acquire oil and asked the wise for some of their oil. The foolish did not understand that the wise cannot impart their spiritual preparedness to them. We must all develop our own personal history in God; it is not transferrable.
- o. Many "ministry lamps" will go out, lacking the Spirit's oil. Christian self-help and pop psychology sermons will not meet the need of the hour in that day.
- p. The wise virgins knew they were not able to give their oil – they said "no". Faithful servants (24:46) must be able to say no to people at times. This is difficult because it involves being misunderstood and rejected by those to whom we say no. The snare for some who serve with diligence is basing their identity or deriving their sense of importance from being known as always being "available"—this sounds good, but is not realistic. It means we will give to others at the cost of not storing up our own oil.
- q. Jesus exhorts us to "buy oil." That is, to engage in the God-ordained process of acquiring intimacy with God. We do not earn this, but invest ourselves in a costly way to receive it. It takes time to go deep in relationship with Jesus and to get prepared to prepare others.

***<sup>18</sup>"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich..." (Rev. 3:18)***

- r. We need to be people of the word and the spirit – growing in intimacy as we gain wisdom and revelation from his word and fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit.
- s. When Jesus comes back as the Bridegroom, some ministries (lamps) that had once encountered Him as the Bridegroom (25:1) will not contribute in the events associated with His coming (25:10-12) because they will not have the wisdom and revelation of who He is to recognise what He is doing. It is our confidence in His love that will enable us to walk through.
- t. Only those who were *ready* (25:10) by engaging with the Bridegroom were called to participate in the celebration on the *first* night. This may speak of those who will be prepared to help others encounter Jesus as Bridegroom—a main emphasis of the final end-time revival.
- u. A wedding feast might continue for seven evenings for wealthy families. Those closest to the married couple were invited to the first night and subsequently to the following nights. We see Jesus teaching on this in the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14. Many are too busy with their lives and ministries to accept the call.
- v. What does Jesus mean when He says He does not know them? This may have two applications—loss of usefulness and/or loss of salvation. Firstly, He did not know them as ones who had been engaging with Him as the Bridegroom. He called them *foolish*, not evil, wicked, or cursed as some were called (Mt. 24:48; 25:26, 41). Or, secondly, because they are lacking intimacy with God, they will not stand in the pressures seen in the Great Tribulation, and thus they fall away from the faith.
- w. I think it's most likely that this is referring to being ready to partner with Jesus, our Bridegroom, in the end time revival. It was customary for a Jewish family to celebrate a wedding over several nights (sometimes seven nights for a wealthy family). Those closest to the married couple were invited on the first night and subsequently on the following nights. We can compare this to the Lord inviting His servants to participate in the increasing "waves" of the Spirit's activity that will eventually lead up to the fullness of the end-time revival, culminating at the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

- x. Only those who were ready by growing close to the Bridegroom celebrated on the first night and, thus, on the nights that followed in the wedding celebration. Earlier, Jesus called them to watch and be ready (24:44) to respond to His leadership. Jesus will use people in the end-time Bridegroom revival who are ready by having engaged with Him as the Bridegroom God.
- y. Are we prepared? Are we so intimate with the Lord that we long for His return and are hungry for more of Him? Or are we happy with our present condition – knowing He will come but with no hunger or desire for that day. Imagine a bride just preparing for a wedding day as just another day. No! This day changes everything. It is the fulfilment of her desire to be united with the one she loves forever.
- z. We don't know the day or the hour but we know the season. We are betrothed and our wedding day is coming. We can see the signs of the times and we need to store oil so we can "enter in" to the end time scenario with light bringing in a great end time harvest. Jesus exhorted us to watch, to recognise the signs of the times (24:42) and to develop intimacy with Him. The most effective way to acquire oil is by pray-reading God's Word.

## 6. Parable #5: The parable of the talents (25:14-30)

- a. This parable alerts us to the fact that faithful service is sustained by cultivating the fear of God or knowing that the Lord is watching us and that there are consequences to our actions (rewards or loss of them). Faithful service is defined as not quitting but persevering with diligence in small and hard tasks even when some of God's promises are delayed (25:21, 24).

*<sup>14</sup> "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants<sup>14</sup> and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup> So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.*

- b. The Lord holds each of His people accountable to diligently use the talents that He gives them. According to one's own ability, God gives each of us a specific assignment for our life based on the capacities that He gave us physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, etc.

*<sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup> And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

- c. The Lord sees and rewards His people for the "few things" in which they are faithful (25:21). Each person will be evaluated according to what God entrusted to them, not according to what they do not have or what others have.
- d. Our life vision should be to hear Jesus say, "Well done," at the end of our life. We want to be good and faithful servants. Faithful emphasises diligence in following-through in our commitments to do good in the face of pressure, difficulty, mundaneness, and temptation. The definition of being faithful includes persevering in our labors and service over the years. Most of us have a small personal assignment, yet it is very important to God. We must see the dignity of the small work that God entrusts to us.

- e. It is clear from this parable that there are rewards in the age to come which are related to how we use the capacities that He has given us. This is not about salvation (we will all enter into the Kingdom) but about our roles and position as we reign with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom. The saints will reign with Jesus in the age to come related to their diligence and humility in this age (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5; cf. Mt. 19:28; Lk. 19:17-19; 22:29-30). Our assignment in the Millennium has nothing to do with how big our impact is in this age, but our faithfulness, diligence, and humility. We will have great joy ruling in partnership with Jesus as He rewards us with the privilege of close partnership with Him. *Enter into the joy of your master (25:21, 23)*

*<sup>24</sup> He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup> But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

- f. Those responding wrongly worked with the wrong evaluation of God and of their work; thus they drew back from serving with diligence. They accuse God of requiring too much and offering too little help and too little reward for their struggles and efforts. The accusation is that the Lord takes more from His servants than He invests in them. But Jesus reveals that the root problem is sinfulness and laziness. *'You wicked and slothful servant!'*
- g. Jesus calls this man worthless and he is condemned to Hades. This is either
- i a servant of God whose heart became progressively hardened until he fell away from the faith (Rom. 11:22; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 5:15; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-6; 10:26-31, 39; Jas 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 20-22; 3:17) or
  - ii an unbeliever who never had a relationship with the Lord.
- h. Paul described a less extreme scenario—one whose heart grew progressively hard, but not to the point of falling away, yet suffering the loss of rewards that were within reach in grace.

***<sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved. (1 Cor. 3:15)***

## 7. Jesus judging the Gentile nations (Mt. 25:31-46)

- a. Having prepared us for how to be prepared to live through the end times Jesus then describes an event that will take place once He has returned.

*<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.*

- b. This event is also described in Joel 3:

**Joel 3:1-2** *"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations;*

- c. Jesus will come back to Jerusalem in great glory and majesty as the Son of Man as promised in Daniel 7:14 (25:31-32; cf. 19:28; 24:30). This judgment will occur when Jesus returns to judge the nations and people who survived the Tribulation to determine who will enter the Millennium.
- d. Joel's prophecy describes the "captives" of Judah and Jerusalem being regathered at the end of the age revealing Israel's condition at that time as described in Matthew 25:35-36. Jesus mentioned Israel's plight as prisoners in the end times earlier in this message in Luke 21:24 (as did the Old Testament prophets). This helps us understand what Jesus meant when He said,

*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*(v.40)

- e. Jesus is clearly saying that the way in which we treat Israel (his brothers) is a significant indicator of the state of our heart. Do we love His people for His sake?
- f. When Jesus returns he will gather together all those in the nations who have come through the tribulation to decide who will go on to live in the Millennial Kingdom. These are not the redeemed (we will now have resurrection bodies and will live in the New Jerusalem whilst ruling with Christ on earth) nor those who took the mark of the beast and have gone to Hades to await the final judgement at the end of the Millennium. These are the unredeemed who refused to take the mark of the beast.
- g. Jesus gathers them before Him and makes judgement on them based on how they have treated his people during the time of the Great Tribulation which is also referred to as Jacob's Trouble (Jer.30:7). Those who cared for them during this time will enter into the Kingdom

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (v.34)*

- h. But those who did not will be sent to the eternal fire. (It's worth noting here that God never intended that man should end up in the eternal fire. It was a place that was prepared for the devil and his angels.)

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

- i. Those judged at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are all non-Christians. Yet it will be certain to them at this juncture that Jesus *is* Lord because he has literally returned to the Earth, taken authority of the situation, and is now standing before them. Thus the criteria Christ will use at this judgment is *not* belief in Christ, but because they assisted persecuted and needy *believers* during the Tribulation and in particular the Jewish people.
- j. Jesus is clear, the way the nations treat Israel reveals how they view Him (25:37-40).

*<sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup>And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*