

## “Where is your hope?”

January 21, 2024

Matthew 25:1-30

### I. Introduction

As the Master teacher, Jesus used a variety of ways to teach and keep His listeners' attention. Two methods that He often used were parables and analogies. A parable is a story designed to give some truth or moral lesson. An analogy is a comparison—sometimes in story form—in which, unlike a parable, there is almost a 1-to-1 correspondence between the things being compared. The two stories in today's readings are parables. If you look at the headings in your particular Bible, they are probably identified as parables. This is a warning to not to get too nitpicky—not every item in a parable can be applied to the real-life situation being discussed or taught.

Looking at chapters 24 and 25, it is interesting to note that in Jesus' teachings about His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, He spent more time warning His disciples about their attitudes than He did about the signs preceding His return. As God, Jesus knows how humans function—He created us ([John 1:3](#)). He knows that in some cases we have the attention span of a slug. So, to emphasize the importance of His followers' attitudes, He gave all these warnings. Last week He said that His followers should be watchful, ready, and faithful. In today's 2 parables Jesus warned that as the time of His return comes near, those that belong to Him need to be prepared and they need to be productive.

### II. Two Parables

#### A. The Parable of the Ten Virgins: Be Prepared

**1. The setting** The setting for the first parable, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, is a typical Jewish wedding ceremony or process. A traditional Jewish marriage consisted of 3 parts, the first of which is the engagement. The engagement amounted to a contract of marriage which was usually arranged by the father of the bride and the father of the groom; sometimes negotiated by a matchmaker. The couple themselves would usually have little or no involvement. The second stage was the betrothal, which began with a marriage ceremony at which the bride and groom exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends. At

that point, the couple was considered married; their relationship could be broken only by a formal divorce. However, during the betrothal, the two would not live together. The betrothal could last for many months, sometimes even a year. During this time, the groom would establish himself in a business, a trade, or some other means of support and would make provision for a place for the couple to live.

At the end of the betrothal period, the wedding would be held. The entire community would be involved in the wedding, the feast, and the related celebrations. This celebration, which could last a week, began with the groom coming with his groomsmen to the bride's house, where her bridesmaids were waiting with her. Together the bride and groom and their attendants would then parade through the streets. Taking the longest way possible, they would proclaim to everyone that the wedding feast was about to begin. The procession was generally at night and lamps or torches were used by the wedding party to light their way and to attract attention.

At the end of the feast period, a close friend of the groom, someone who acted like the best man of today, would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom, and the couple for the first time would go away to be alone together. From that time on they would live together in their new home.

**2. The bridesmaids** In this parable there are 3 major elements beginning with: the bridesmaids. In Jesus' parable there were 10 bridesmaids, and they were virgins. The 10 virgins represented professed believers in Jesus; the lamps or torches represent their outward identity with Him and His church. The lamps may even represent the Word of God itself. In [Psalm 119:105](#) we read, "**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.**"

To outward appearances the ten bridesmaids were the same. They were dressed appropriately, and all had the required lamp to carry in the procession. But on closer observation, they really weren't the same. Some of them were not prepared—"5 of them were foolish." The proof of their being unprepared was the fact that they did not take any oil with them. They carried lamps that looked just like everyone else's, but they had nothing to burn in them; nothing that would give off light. A lamp without fuel is obviously

worthless. Similarly, a profession of faith in Jesus Christ without a saving relationship to Him is infinitely more worthless—the end result is being left in spiritual darkness where there is no light.

The five foolish ones represented those who are committed to Jesus intellectually, socially, and even emotionally. They know all the right words and actions, but they do not belong to God. They don't really trust Jesus and they haven't given Him their hearts. Paul describes them in [2 Timothy 3:5](#) as “[having a form of godliness but denying its power.](#)” [Turn to Luke 6:46-49.](#) The five foolish ones had the appearance of faith but lacked a foundation. [1 Corinthians 3:11](#) says, “[For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.](#)” Like the house without the foundation, in the end, they would collapse.

**3. The bridegroom** The bridegroom is Jesus Christ Himself. In [2 Corinthians 11:2](#) Paul wrote, “[I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.](#)” At midnight when the groom came, because they weren't expecting anything, everyone was asleep. The bridegroom coming at that time represented the unexpectedness of Christ's return.

The foolish bridesmaids didn't seem to be surprised by their lack of oil. They just hadn't been concerned enough about it to purchase some before the bridegroom's arrival. Perhaps they thought that they would have time to run and buy some, or they could borrow some. Since we aren't given a reason, the reason isn't important. [The bottom line is they weren't ready and there was no excuse for this failure.](#) In the same way, the people living during the end of the Tribulation will have seen all the signs of His coming. Because of God's special messengers ([see Revelation 11:1-12; 14:1-7](#)) and the many signs around them, they will know that Jesus' appearing is imminent. But some of them won't be ready when they see Him “[coming on the clouds of the sky](#)” ([Matthew 24:30](#)). But, because of all they have seen and heard, there will be no excuse for their not being prepared.

When the Lord appears at the end of the Tribulation or whenever one's relatively short life comes to an end, many professed Christians will frantically realize their lack of spiritual foundation. They may have trusted in their membership in a church and being involved with the things of God's people. Some may think that being raised in a Christian family is enough. Some will be trusting in their good works. [Turn to](#)

Matthew 7: 21-23. 2 Corinthians 13:5 warns, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.” Salvation cannot be earned, inherited, or transferred from one person to another. It cannot be bought. There is only one way to be saved from an eternity in hell: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

**4. The Moral** The moral of Jesus’ parable is really a warning. For the fifth time in this discourse Jesus called on those who will be alive during the last days of the Tribulation to “Keep Watch,” i.e., be prepared for His coming in heart, mind, and soul “because you do not know the day or the hour.”

### **B. The Parable of the Talents: Be Productive**

**1. The setting** In the 2<sup>nd</sup> parable, the Parable of the Talents, the “it” in verse 14 is the kingdom of heaven. The man who is going on a journey is Jesus Christ. The “going away” represents the time He is away from earth between His first and second Advents. The “servants,” like the ten virgins, represent those who profess to be believers—some are true followers of Christ but there will be some, like Judas, who profess to be followers of Jesus but really aren’t.

**2. The Talents** In this parable, which is different than the Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11-27, each servant was given a different amount of money or talents “each according to his ability.” The talents represent the opportunities one has to use his God-given abilities to serve God. The amount of talents isn’t important, what is important is that each servant produce something from the opportunities that come his way. As it says in 1 Corinthians 3:8 “Each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

**3. The 3 servants** These talents or opportunities are given to 3 different servants. These servants fall into 2 categories; faithful and unfaithful. The faithful servants took their talents and put them to work for their Lord. Both faithful servants were productive, they doubled what they had been given. They both demonstrated their commitment to their master by making the most of what they had.

On the other hand, the unfaithful servant hid his talent in the earth. Instead of using his opportunity, he buried it. He didn’t purposely do evil. But by doing nothing, he was committing sin and robbed the Lord

of any service and any increase. [James 4:17](#) says, “**Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.**”

**4. The moral** The amount of time the owner was gone isn’t mentioned except that it was “**a long time.**” The implication is that the master of the servants came back unexpectedly. Upon the master’s return, the first order of business was to “**settle accounts with them.**” This is the first 1<sup>st</sup> moral or point: *Jesus is coming back unexpectedly to settle accounts.* The two servants who put their money to work each received the same commendation, “**Well done good and faithful servant!**” The master commended each servant for his attitude and his excellent character.

But the master didn’t only praise his faithful servants, he highly rewarded them. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> point: *each person will be rewarded for what they do with their opportunities.* In the case of those who are faithful, the reward is going to be positive—they will be made rulers. They had been faithful with a few things, now the Lord was going to trust them with many things. And then, to top it off, they were going to “**share your master’s happiness.**”

However, the third servant—the unfaithful or wicked servant—didn’t present his master with any earnings and as an excuse accused the master of being a tyrant. This servant proved in 2 ways that he didn’t really know the master; i.e., that he was not a true follower of Christ. First, he produced absolutely nothing with the talent he had been given; he didn’t even make any attempt to use it for his master’s benefit and profit. He hadn’t misused his opportunities; he simply didn’t use them at all. There were no fruits by which he could be identified. In [John 15:8](#) Jesus said, “**This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**” By what he didn’t do, he demonstrated that he was not a disciple of Jesus. Secondly, he proved that he wasn’t a follower of Christ by how he saw Him as “**a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.**” He didn’t see Jesus as the one who said in [Matthew 11:28](#), “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**” Instead of seeing Jesus’ love, mercy and grace, this servant saw Jesus as being unmerciful and even somewhat dishonest. This incorrect judgment showed that this servant had no intimate or reliable

knowledge of the master. Such an attitude and actions are those of the unsaved church member who has no spiritual fruit in his life and no spiritual worship in his heart. He is blind to the Lord's kindness, grace, compassion, mercy, and love because he has never surrendered himself to the Lord. Unlike the first 2 servants who demonstrated their faith in God by being fruitful, this third servant wasn't just unfaithful and fruitless, he had no faith in God.

A true Christian who wastes his abilities, spiritual gifts, and opportunities will still be saved from hell. **Turn to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.** If one's foundation is Jesus, he will be saved. BUT the person represented by the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant has no faith at all and therefore no saving relationship with God. No matter how much he may appear to have been blessed by God and to have served Him, one day he will hear from the Lord's own lips the words from **Matthew 7:23**, "**I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoer!**" The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant was worthless. He was an unproductive, counterfeit servant of God and was thrown "**into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

### **III. Conclusion**

Although these 2 parables were really directed towards those who will live in the great Tribulation, they also apply to everyone else as well. Just as Jesus admonished them to be prepared and to keep working until the end, the same is true for every Christian today. No one knows when his or her time on earth will end. No one knows at what moment the opportunity for salvation will be past and all hope gone forever. **Hebrews 9:27** says, "**Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.**" Jesus' first admonition is to make sure He is Lord of your life—as He said in **John 14:6** , "**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" Make sure your hope is in the Lord!

Second, for those who have made Jesus their Lord and Savior, as you look forward to Jesus' return make sure that you are using your talents and gifts to serve Him. Paraphrasing **John 9:4** we must work for the night is coming. One author wrote that *Saving faith is serving faith*. Jesus is coming for each one of us—maybe through death; maybe in the clouds—make sure you are watching, ready, faithful, prepared, and productive. But most importantly: **make sure your hope is in Jesus Christ.**