

Matthew 25 – Be Prepared

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. Enter into the joy of your master!'

– [Matthew 25:21](#)

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

– [Matthew 25:13](#)

Earlier, we've looked at *Matthew* chapter 24 in some detail because it is so closely related to the End Times events that we see in *Revelation*. Here, we will take a much briefer look at *Matthew 25*, its relationship to *Revelation*, and especially how that relates to us today.

An excerpt from:

A Revelation of Love: A study of the Bible book of Revelation by Karl Schank.

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25.Aug.2025

Parable of the ten virgins – Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the ten virgins is based on wedding practices that were very different two thousand years ago than now. That would be a fascinating study in itself. However, we needn't go into either the cultural differences nor the details of the parable to understand Jesus' main point about His return and the End Times. It is summed up in its last few verses.¹

The bridegroom, who in this parable represents Jesus at His Second Coming, was expected, but not at a specific time. Some of the virgins (people expecting Jesus' return) were not alert and prepared for Him and were literally asleep on the job. While they got ready, He came and they missed their only chance to greet Him and join the wedding party. They not only were not allowed in, but the groom (Jesus) denied even knowing them. Jesus concludes by telling us the "moral of the story":

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour [of His Second Coming].

– [Matthew 25:13](#)

His intentional implications are both that since we don't know when it will be, we need to be always prepared and always alert and ready for His return, and that if we are not ready, we may not be included.²

What would we be excluded from?

We'd miss out on a banquet; but this isn't just any banquet. It's the wedding supper of the Lamb of Revelation 19.³ It's His welcome banquet into Heaven for His followers. In other words, if we aren't ready, we can miss Heaven and eternal Life.

What makes us ready? How do we stay alert?

Anticipating this natural question, Jesus tells another parable.⁴

¹ **Summary:** [Matthew 25:11-13](#) -- Later the other virgins arrived and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us!' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

² A secondary "moral of the story" is *don't be foolish*.

³ **Wedding supper of the Lamb:** [Revelation 19:7-8](#) -- Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. She was given clothing of fine linen, bright and pure." For the fine linen she wears is the righteous acts of the saints.

⁴ We know the two parables are related because He begins the second one, "For it [the previous parable] is just like ... " ([Matthew 25:14](#)).

Parable of the talents – Matthew 25:14-30

What's a "talent"?

First, let's clarify our terms. Some modern translations render this as "bags of gold" or "of silver" (which is more likely), others as "money" or even "investments"; many simply transliterate the original word from Greek letters to Latin letters as "talent". But a talent was not a skill or ability⁵, it was a weight – about 75 lbs / 35 Kg or so – usually of silver⁶. It was worth 15-20 years' wages. So, the five talents that the man gave the first servant to invest was worth about 100 years' wages⁷. That's a lot of money!

As above, we needn't go into the details of the parable to understand Jesus' point about His return and the End Times. This is not about clever investment strategies any more than the parables of the seed and of the weeds are about agricultural techniques.

In this parable, a man who represents Jesus, was going far away for a long time and gave his servants (people expecting Jesus' return) various amounts of money to manage and invest during his absence. As above, they did not know when he would return. Two of the servants did their job well and were good stewards of their master's money, so their investments earned large returns.

The third servant, however, essentially hid the money under a mattress (literally, buried it in the ground), earning no return on it because he failed to invest it. So, his master took his money from him and gave it to the wise servant to steward and invest in his master.

The crux of the issue wasn't how much the servants' investments earned but was whether they had been wise or foolish and whether they had done what their master (Jesus) expected of them or not.

Jesus' conclusion was,

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has, will be taken away from him. And throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

⁵ The modern usage of the word as a skill or ability, through the twists and turns of history, eventually traces back to this very parable.

⁶ The exact weight of a talent varied quite a bit from time to time and culture to culture, but that need not concern us here.

⁷ A denarius or drachma was worth about one day's wage.

– [Matthew 25:29-30](#)

That's chilling! Because the third servant didn't do his job, he was "worthless" and was thrown into Hell! ("outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth").

This, of course, refers to Revelation 19-20's description of eternal Hell as the Lake of Fire and brimstone for eternal torture forever and ever.⁸

To reiterate: Jesus is not saying that poor investors will be condemned to Hell; He's saying that unready, disobedient servants (whether followers or unbelievers) may be.

Sheep and Goats judgment – Matthew 25:31-46

As above, the third parable relates to the first two⁹, and clearly is about judgment and its causes. Jesus continues,

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 from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

– [Matthew 25:31-32](#)

The distinction between the sheep and goats ("blessed" and "accursed" people, respectively, on His right and left) is again a question of works – how they have treated other people. The result for the "sheep" is,

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.

– [Matthew 25:34](#)

Jesus explains that this is because they treated Him right: fed him when He was hungry, gave Him water when thirsty, clothed Him when naked, visited Him when sick and in prison. But the

⁸ **Eternal Hell:** [Revelation 20:9b-10, 14-15](#) -- ... But fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the Lake of Fire and sulfur, into which the beast and the false prophet had already been thrown. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ... Then Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death -- the Lake of Fire. And if anyone was found whose name was not written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

⁹ It begins "but, ..." or "then ..." depending on the translation.

"sheep" protest: *But we haven't earned this! We never even saw you in these conditions nor treated you this way! Jesus' famous reply is,*

And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'

– [Matthew 25:40](#)

Similarly, His response to the "goats" is,

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.'

– [Matthew 25:41](#)

Again, they are condemned to Hell, a horrible consequence! And again, the reason is that they didn't treat Him kindly in the same way as above (didn't feed Him, give him water, clothe Him, visit Him, etc.). And again, they protest: Wait just a minute! We never even saw you in these conditions, so we couldn't possibly have mistreated you!

Jesus' conclusion is the same as before: "To the extent that you did this to the least of my brethren, you did it to Me." He so completely identifies with His people, whom He loves, that our actions toward each other are considered actions to Him also. Paul points out that we, His followers, the church are His body here on Earth. And He treats us as such and expects us to do likewise.

While eternal Hell may seem a severe sentence for not bringing someone a cup of water, when we realize that the sentence is passed against those who mistreat God the Son, Himself, it makes more sense.

This parable, then, is clearly about judgment and the Judge's ultimate sentence for the "guilty" is again the eternal Hell of the Lake of Fire of Revelation 19-20.¹⁰ Each parable has an increasing emphasis on our actions, our deeds.

This last parable of the chapter also emphasizes the judgment by God sitting on His throne.¹¹ Some view this Sheep and Goats Judgment as being synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20¹² because of their great similarity. Others, however, see them as

¹⁰ **Lake of Fire:** see [Revelation 20:9b-10, 14-15](#) reference above.

¹¹ **Judgment by God on His throne:** [Matthew 25:31](#) [see reference above]

¹² **Great White Throne Judgment:** [Revelation 20:11-13](#) -- Then I saw a great white throne and the One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. And I [continued...]

two separate judgments because this in Matthew 25 seems to be based solely on deeds or works, while the Great White Throne Judgment is based primarily on whether one is found in the Lamb's Book of Life and thereafter only secondarily on one's deeds or works. Some even see yet another judgment of reward for faithful believers,¹³ and some see it as but another aspect of the secondary, works judgment of the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. To me, they seem to be different writers' perspectives on the same thing, but "you pays your money and you takes your pick."

How do you see these judgments? Why?

But wait; do works save us? Salvation is by faith, isn't it?

Is Jesus saying here that it is works or deeds that save us? That doing good things to one another saves, but not doing them condemns? It may seem like it at first, but there's more to it than that. James (Jesus' half-brother) also seems to say this.¹⁴ On the other hand, Paul seems to be saying the opposite.¹⁵ But it's not what it seems at first glance. In fact, there is no conflict here at all.

Paul is quite right that we are indeed saved by God's grace and our faith in Him. But don't quit there. Read the next verse also.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as our way of life [or prepared in advance for us to walk in them or to do].

saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And books were opened, and one of them was the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their deeds, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead, and each one was judged according to his deeds.

¹³ **Judgment of believers for reward:** [2 Corinthians 5:10](#) -- For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his due for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.

¹⁴ **Faith without deeds is worthless:** [James 2:14-20](#) -- What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you tells him, "Go in peace; stay warm and well fed," but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that? So too, faith by itself, if it does not result in action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that God is one. Good for you! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder. O foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is worthless?

¹⁵ **Saved by grace through faith, not by works:** [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) -- For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

– [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) [emphasis added]

Because we are saved, we have God's gift of the Holy Spirit living in us and working in and through us. And because we have the Holy Spirit working through us, we will do the good works that He has for us to do. The works don't save us, they are the outcome or result of our salvation. Or put another way, because we are saved, we will consequently do good works.

James is saying that if we don't see those good works, that implies that we're not saved. Again, the works don't save us, but their absence is suspiciously indicative of not having been saved in the first place.

So (back to Matthew 25), if Jesus the King and Judge doesn't see any good works such as caring for others, then we mustn't have been saved, and we are condemned. But if He does see good works (which will have been done "in Christ" in the power of the Holy Spirit), then that indicates our salvation, so we will "enter into the joy of our Master" and "inherit the Kingdom prepared for us".

Cross References and Homework

There are many other verses regarding faith, deeds, love, submission to each other, and being the body of Christ. For your homework, look them up and check a few of them out.