

## Week 29: *Matthew 25*

### Hook



**Main Point:** While we are waiting for His Second Coming, we are to do God's work as His stewards on earth.

Many of us were forced out of our normal routines and into quarantine/lockdown at some point during the coronavirus pandemic. With few options for entertainment or work to keep busy, many turned to baking. During the last week of March 2020, sales of baking yeast were up 457 percent compared to the same week the previous year (flour was up 155 percent, baking powder was up 178 percent, butter up 73 percent and eggs up 48 percent).<sup>i</sup> However, by May, it seems that interest had waned and the baking frenzy cooled off.<sup>ii</sup>

**Q:** How did you spend your time waiting for the lockdown or quarantine to be over? Did you take up any new hobbies?

**Q:** If you had to do it over again, would you have used the time differently? Would you label your time in quarantine/lockdown as "productive"?

**Transition:** Today we will discuss what we are to do with our time as we wait on the return of the Lord.

## Week 29: Matthew 25

### Book

**Main Point:** While we are waiting for His Second Coming, we are to do God's work as His stewards on earth.

**Matthew 25:1–13 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** We need to be ready when Christ comes again.

**Q: Why was the one set of bridesmaids foolish?**

**Q: What does it mean that the door was shut, and the bridegroom said he didn't know them?**

This chapter contains three parables that each tell us what the kingdom of God will be like in the future eschatological sense. The two-part coming of the kingdom is called “inaugurated eschatology.” Jesus' first coming ushered in the *spiritual* kingdom of God – defeating sin and death on the Cross. But the complete physical kingdom of God – when He will conquer all His enemies, rid the world of evil, and reign on the throne (the consummation) – is still yet to come. So the kingdom is both “already” here but also “not yet” here in all its fullness. In the meantime, the kingdom of God is expanding through His disciples.<sup>iii</sup>

All of Matthew's parables describe the kingdom, but some are about the way the kingdom has begun – like a sower sowing seeds in different kinds of soil (Matthew 13:1–30). Some describe how the kingdom will expand – like a mustard seed that grows into the largest tree in the garden (Matthew 13:31–33). Some describe how valuable it is – like a pearl worth trading everything you have to get (Matthew 13:44–46). Because of their context here, right after Jesus talked about the end times and just before the section on His suffering and death, we know that these parables all describe what the kingdom will be like in the end times. Not quite the consummation, but His Second Coming, the time of judgment.<sup>iv</sup>

This first parable continues the same theological point from the last chapter. Jesus' Second Coming would seem “delayed” compared to what His disciples were expecting, so they should always be ready. To emphasize the point, Jesus used a parable about a wedding, which would have been very clear to His audience but may be hard for us to understand because weddings are different in our culture today. In the ancient Near Eastern Jewish world, weddings were not just a fun event or a celebration of love, they were an important social and economic transaction. Matches were honor-based and arranged by parents, with a negotiated price paid to the father of the bride. Because the couple would live with the groom's family, the family of the groom gained and the family of the bride lost a valuable family member. The wedding took place in two parts: the betrothal, during which a bride was considered legally married but still lived in her father's house, and the marriage, when the bride was actually taken to the house of the groom, accompanied by a procession of bridesmaids, groomsmen, family and friends. This

is analogous to the two stages of God's kingdom, Christ's first (betrothal) and Second Coming (marriage), between which we are married to Christ, but still live in the world.<sup>v</sup>

The wedding procession typically happened at night, with the bridesmaids carrying torches (lamps) made of sticks wrapped with oiled rags as they sang and danced.<sup>vi</sup> Some of these homemade torches could only burn about fifteen minutes before needing to be rewrapped with oiled cloth, so the bridesmaids would have needed extra oil.<sup>vii</sup> Sometimes the procession could be delayed when the families were haggling over the bride price. In this case, the parable simply said the groom was delayed in coming. The reason was not important.<sup>viii</sup> These foolish bridesmaids were unprepared for the delay; they didn't have enough oil to keep their lamps going.<sup>ix</sup> But the wise bridesmaids who wouldn't share their oil weren't being mean. If they had shared, there wouldn't have been enough oil for any of their lamps, and the procession would have ended up in total darkness. At least this way, half of them had working torches.<sup>x</sup>

The unprepared bridesmaids weren't just foolish, they had insulted the bride and groom and their families. Weddings were a very serious affair in ancient Near Eastern Jewish culture. Weddings took precedence over some religious ritual obligations. A breach of etiquette was a serious affront to a person's honor.<sup>xi</sup> The expression of the groom – "I don't know you" – wasn't about him not recognizing them. It was an idiom indicating a breach of relationship. Because they had insulted his family, he no longer recognized their relationship.<sup>xii</sup> This is representative of how Christ will treat those who failed to place their faith in Him during their lives. At the end, it will be too late. But those who are ready for His return, living their lives for Him, they will enter into His wedding feast with joy.<sup>xiii</sup>

The point of the parable is simple, and a repeat of the last chapter – be prepared! It may seem as though Jesus is delayed in coming back. His return certainly seems delayed compared to what His disciples expected. They thought He would come back in their lifetimes. But that doesn't mean we should be worried or slack off on the job. It means we *always* need to be prepared for His return because it could be a thousand years off, or it could happen any day now.

**Q: If Jesus came back right now, would you be ready? Would you be proud of the way you are living your life?**

**Q: What have you been putting off that you could be doing now for the kingdom?**

### **Matthew 25:14–30 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** As we wait for Him to return, we are to expand His kingdom.

This parable is also about being ready for Jesus' return, but from a different angle. This parable tells us that our lives (time, talent and treasure) belong to God; we are just stewards of them.

He expects us to invest our resources to build and grow His kingdom, not our own wealth, fame or power. Jesus was telling His disciples that they weren't supposed to sit around waiting for His return. They had a job to do. Jesus started the kingdom, and He will bring it to consummation. But now, in the in-between, our mission is to expand the kingdom of God.<sup>xiv</sup>

This parable requires a complete 180 in what we think our lives are about. We are servants of Christ, stewards of *His* resources, not masters of our own. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.” Our time, our talents, our money, our families, our homes, our schedules ... all of it belongs to God. Paul continued, “So glorify God in your body.” Because it all belongs to Him.

Each of the three servants was given a different amount of money, “according to his ability.” The master didn't give them more than they could handle, but just what they needed, what he knew they could use and multiply. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul described how we are all given different gifts as part of the body of Christ. Some gifts may seem small, others bigger, but they are all equally important. The amount you have been given doesn't matter. *What matters is what you do with what you have been given.*

In the ancient world, a talent was a lot of money – about *20 years' worth* of salary for a day laborer. If we calculate that in today's terms, equating a day laborer with a minimum wage worker, it's about \$300,000. The first servant was given five times that, about \$1.5 million, and the second servant two times that – \$600,000. This is an astronomical sum to entrust to a minimum-wage worker, even the one given the least! It was hyperbole to make a point – God is overwhelmingly generous with *all* of us.<sup>xv</sup> Every one of us has been given an enormous allotment of time, talent and resources from the Lord, whether we realize it or not. Whether you're a billionaire or barely scraping by, on a spiritual level, every single one of us has been entrusted with a fortune from the Lord. Jesus encourages us to dream big about what we could do with all the time, talent and resources we have.

The first two servants both invested their money and doubled it. But the servant who received one talent hid his master's money in the ground. This may sound strange to us today, but it was pretty typical for that time period. If you had something of value and were worried it might be lost or stolen, you buried it in the ground.<sup>xvi</sup> But that was operating out of fear, not obedience. Because he was so afraid to lose what he had, he missed the opportunity to double it! Investing our time, talent and treasure into the kingdom is never a risk, never a waste, never a loss. It will always pay off.

To the first two servants, the master responded with the exact same words. This is so significant theologically. They weren't praised for their bottom line; they were praised for their faithfulness. It isn't the result but the work you put in that matters. It's not *how many* people

you lead to Christ. Someone like Billy Graham will amass higher numbers than a typical lawyer or plumber, or even pastor. It's not *how many* hungry children you fed or *how many* mission trips you went on. Bill Gates has the ability to give more money to the poor than you or I could ever dream. It's not how much you do. It's whether you did the best you could with what you were given. The third servant was punished, not because he didn't do "enough" with his resources, but because he did *nothing*. Are you doing all you can where God has put you? God measures your faithfulness, not your numbers.<sup>xvii</sup>

Those who invested their resources were invited to share in the master's abundance. They invested their talents *for* the master. The talents didn't belong to them, they were just stewards. But the master invited them to come share in his wealth. They were no longer just servants, they were part of the family, sharing in the inheritance like sons (Romans 8:17). They had stored up their treasures in heaven by investing in the kingdom of God rather than their own kingdoms and the things of this world (Matthew 6:19–21). This doesn't describe a works-righteousness kind of religion but the truth that those who truly love Jesus will be all about expanding His kingdom. The Christian life is about investing in the kingdom, offering whoever you are and whatever you have as a living sacrifice for God.

**Q: How is God challenging you to think differently about your time, talent and resources?**

**Q: What resources have you been holding back from using for God's kingdom? How could you use more of your resources for the kingdom?**

**Q: If you really thought of your money as God's money, how would it change the way you used it? What about your time? Your gifts? Your family? Your career? Other things?**

**Matthew 25:31–46 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** We will be judged on the two greatest commandments – loving God with everything we are and loving others as ourselves.

**Q: How can we know this passage is talking about the final judgment?**

**Q: Why is this *not* a works-righteousness kind of parable?**

One could possibly read this passage as supporting a works-righteousness theology if it weren't for the context of the parable and all we have heard Jesus say leading up to it. Out of context, it may sound like Jesus was saying we will be judged on how much we help the poor, but like the parable above, this one isn't about doing "enough" to get into heaven. It simply shows us that what James said is true – faith without works is dead (James 2:14–26). Those who truly love Jesus will care for His people (John 21:15–21). Just as we learned in the lesson on the two greatest commandments, our love for God and our love for others are inextricably linked. You

cannot say you love God and hate your brother (1 John 4:19–21). Jesus states this even more forcefully here – whatever you do to the least of these, you do to Him.

The imagery of Jesus in the beginning of this parable shows both divinity and judgment. “The Son of Man” alludes to the vision of the heavenly throne in Daniel, where the Son of Man was given all authority over all the nations by the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9–14). In this parable, Jesus sits on His glorious throne and judges all the nations. In rabbinic literature, the king and final judge is always God. Here it is Christ, another claim to divinity by Jesus.<sup>xviii</sup>

As in all His parables, Jesus used a normal part of everyday life metaphorically to make a point; there is nothing inherently evil about goats. In the ancient world, shepherds separated sheep from the goats at night because sheep liked to be in the open air and goats needed to stay warm. In Scripture, sheep are always representative of the people of God.<sup>xix</sup> However, here the sheep were not all Israel nor the goats all Gentiles. Individual “sheep” and “goats” will be separated out of every nation, including Israel. *All* the nations will be judged, including Israel, by how they loved God and loved their neighbors.<sup>xx</sup>

Devout Jews were required by the law to offer *tzedakah* (justice/charity) to those in need. The prophets and Proverbs tell us that acts of *tzedakah* are more acceptable to God than sacrifices (Proverbs 21:3). This doesn’t just mean giving money but also personally helping those who need it in any way you can. The law also requires that *tzedakah* be done generously, not with a begrudging heart (Deuteronomy 15:10). This was one of the things Jesus criticized the religious leaders for missing just two chapters earlier. They followed the tithing laws so carefully that they divided a tenth of their spices to give, but completely missed the “more important matters” of the law, the *tzedakah* – justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23–24). Jesus gave a few examples – feeding the hungry, showing hospitality to the stranger, and visiting those who are sick and in prison – but they are just representative samples of all acts of lovingkindness toward anyone who is in need in any way, physically, emotionally or spiritually.<sup>xxi</sup>

The way Jesus equated the treatment of the least of these with the treatment of Himself reminds us of what He said a few chapters earlier, that the greatest commandment is to love God *and* love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40). The love of God and love of neighbor are dependent on each other. The way we treat our neighbor shows whether we really love Jesus, no matter what we say. Because God *is* love, those who know God will love others. If you do not love others, you do not really know God (1 John 4:19–21). It really is that simple. The law of God is love and the love of God is an others-focused love defined by self-sacrifice (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10). Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8–10).

The way we treat others *reveals* whether we really love God. As Bible scholar Darrell Bock

wrote, “Ethics is not an abstract question of options in a particular situation; it is a matter of character developed through a walk with God and a focus on Jesus.”<sup>xxii</sup> If we really love God, we will share His heart for people. *All* people. Not just those we naturally like or get along with or those in our family, our circle of friends, our tribe. Even “the least of these.”

In Hebrew thought, a neighbor was a fellow Israelite. In the ancient world, as with many around the world today, there was often a strong sense of division between “my people,” to whom I have a responsibility, and everybody else. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, human love typically says to “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43). But God’s love is for both friend and enemy, for those who loved Him and those who hate Him. “He causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Those who really love God don’t ask whom they *have to* love and serve (Luke 10:29) or how many times they *have to* forgive someone (Matthew 18:21). They naturally love and serve everyone, without even really stopping to think about it.

**Q: If Jesus were to judge you on how you have treated the least of these, what would He say?**

**Q: Search your own heart and mind and be honest. What kind of change of thinking or change of heart would it take for you to notice the least of these and notice when people needed help?**

**Q: Brainstorm ways you can serve the least of these in your community. Both you, individually, and our small group (class) or church as a whole. What are some ways we can reach out and serve others in the name of Jesus?**

## **Week 29: Matthew 25**

### **Took**

**Main Point: While we are waiting for His Second Coming, we are to do God's work as His stewards on earth.**

Research in October of 2020 found that 54 million Americans, around 16 percent of the population, faced food insecurity in 2020.<sup>xxiii</sup> Of these 54 million, 17 million are children. The previous year counted 19 million Americans as food insecure – between layoffs and furloughs, the pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the financial situation of many.<sup>xxiv</sup> Prestonwood has been in the fight against hunger through partnerships with ministries and organizations in Collin, Dallas and Denton counties to reach food-insecure individuals and families across North Texas. Through this effort, the people of Prestonwood have helped to provide more than 1,000,000 meals to food-insecure individuals and families across North Texas.<sup>xxv</sup> Many Prestonwood members had the blessing of contributing to this effort through donating food, helping to pack it, delivering it, etc.

**Q: In what ways did you help others during the pandemic?**

**Q: What opportunities did the pandemic provide you with to make a kingdom impact?**

**Q: Has the Lord placed a burden on your heart to make a difference for Jesus in the life of others? What's preventing you from being obedient in this area? What could you do this week to begin your journey of serving others?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Be honest with yourself. If Jesus came back today, would you be ready? Would you be proud of the way you are living your life? What are some ways you would change your life if you knew Jesus was coming back at the end of this year?

**PRAY:** For God to show you how to serve the least of these in your community. Pray for a heart that is broken by the things that break God's heart. Pray for empathy for those who are different from you. Ask for a heart of compassion, humility and service so you will see how you can serve others the way Jesus would.

**ACT:** Invest. Choose one way God is calling you to invest in His kingdom. It could be using a talent or resource to share the Gospel or serve someone in need. It could be changing the focus



of your whole life toward eternal things instead of earthly things. Any way God is leading you to make a change to be ready for His return, do it. Invest in His kingdom. You won't regret it.

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- <sup>i</sup> [https://time.com/5819006/flour-shortage-coronavirus/?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=editorial&utm\\_term=business\\_covid-19\\_retail&linkId=86209229](https://time.com/5819006/flour-shortage-coronavirus/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=editorial&utm_term=business_covid-19_retail&linkId=86209229)
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/16/877479936/the-great-pandemic-bake-off-may-be-over>
- <sup>iii</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000).
- <sup>iv</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972).
- <sup>v</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>vi</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).
- <sup>vii</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).
- <sup>viii</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972).
- <sup>ix</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1963).
- <sup>x</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).
- <sup>xi</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>xii</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew, The New American Commentary, 22* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
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- <sup>xvii</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
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- <sup>xx</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).
- <sup>xxi</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol 3* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/54-million-people-america-face-food-insecurity-during-pandemic-it-could-have-dire-consequences-their>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.today.com/food/50-million-people-may-experience-hunger-year-these-organizations-are-t203672>
- <sup>xxv</sup> <http://prestonwoodmissions.org/serve/prestonwood-cares/the-hunger-project/>