

Matthew 24–25

The Christian Calling and Hope as Distinguished from the Portion of the Jew and Gentile

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The Great Prophecy of Matthew 24-25

The twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew contain the great prophetic discourse of the Lord Jesus, delivered on the Mount of Olives to His disciples privately, in answer to their questions: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world [age]?" {Matt. 24:3}. This discourse is one of the most important and comprehensive prophetic passages in the whole of Scripture, covering the entire period from the Lord's rejection to His second coming in glory.

But it must be carefully noticed that the prophecy is addressed primarily to Jewish disciples, standing in the position of Israel's faithful remnant, looking for the kingdom. It is not addressed to the church as such. The church hope -- the rapture, the catching up to meet the Lord in the air -- is not taught here. That is the subject of John 14 and 1 Thess. 4. What Matthew 24-25 teaches is the Jewish and Gentile aspect of Christ's coming: the signs that precede it, the judgments that accompany it, and the establishment of the kingdom that follows.

The Lord begins with warnings about deception: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" {Matt. 24:4, 5}. This is the characteristic danger of the last days -- religious deception, false Christs, false prophets. The disciples are warned not to be deceived, not to mistake these things for the end.

The Signs of the End: Tribulation and the Abomination

The Lord then speaks of the general course of the age: wars, famines, earthquakes -- "the beginning of sorrows." Then He speaks of persecution of the faithful witnesses, of apostasy and betrayal, of false prophets -- all of which characterise the long course of the present age. But then He comes to a more specific sign: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world

for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" {Matt. 24:14}.

Then follows the decisive sign of the abomination of desolation, set up in the holy place, of which Daniel the prophet spoke {Matt. 24:15}. This is the sign that the great tribulation is at hand. When this is seen, the faithful in Judaea are to flee without delay. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" {Matt. 24:21}.

This great tribulation is specifically connected with Judaea and Jerusalem, with the Jewish remnant who will be in the land at that time. It is "the time of Jacob's trouble" {Jer. 30:7}. It is the period described in Daniel 12:1 as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." The Lord's directions for those in Judaea at that time are entirely consistent with an earthly, Jewish, and national context: "Let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" {Matt. 24:16}.

After this tribulation, the Lord comes in power and glory: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" {Matt. 24:29, 30}.

The Parables of Matthew 25: Christendom and the Nations

The twenty-fifth chapter contains three parables or pictures that together cover the judgment of all classes at the time of the end: the ten virgins (representing professing Christendom), the talents (representing individual responsibility in the Christian profession), and the sheep and the goats (representing the judgment of the Gentile nations).

The ten virgins represent professing Christians waiting for the Lord. Five are wise -- they have oil, the Holy Spirit -- and five are foolish -- they have the profession without the reality. When the cry goes forth at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," the foolish are found unprepared. Their lamps are going out. They go to buy, but when they return the door is shut. "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" {Matt. 25:12}. This solemn parable teaches the importance of reality in Christian profession, and the impossibility of borrowed grace at the last moment.

The parable of the talents teaches individual responsibility. Each servant has received a trust from his lord, and must give account of his use of it. The servant who hid his talent in the earth -- who was characterized by fear and distrust, not by love and faithfulness -- loses even what he had. The lesson is one of faithful stewardship in the absence of the Lord.

The judgment of the sheep and the goats is the judgment of the living nations at the manifestation of the Son of man in His glory. It is distinguished from the judgment of the great white throne, which is the judgment of the dead. Here it is the living nations who are judged, on the basis of their treatment of "these my brethren" -- the faithful Jewish remnant who will have proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom through the tribulation period. The principle of the judgment is: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" {Matt. 25:40}.

The Christian Hope Distinguished from the Jewish

It is of the utmost importance that the Christian hope should be carefully distinguished from the Jewish hope as set forth in Matthew 24-25. The Jewish hope is the hope of the kingdom -the manifestation of Christ in power and glory, the restoration of Israel, the judgment of the nations, the establishment of Messiah's reign on earth. These things are the subject of the great prophecy of

Matthew 24-25.

But the Christian hope is the hope of the Father's house -- of being with Christ in heaven, of the rapture, of the morning star. This hope is taught in John 14 and 1 Thess. 4, not in Matt. 24. The Christian is not waiting for the signs of Matt. 24 before expecting the Lord. The Christian is to be ever expecting the Lord, without waiting for signs. "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" {Matt. 24:42}.

With the church, on the contrary, the case is wholly different. Her hope is not the times of restitution of all things, but to be with the Lord in heaven as His bride: and as her hope is unearthly, so is it wholly unconnected with the times and seasons which characterised the expectations of Israel. Not that we are ignorant of these dates and epochs; but we know perfectly that the day of Jehovah so comes as a thief in the night -- a day of destruction whence there is no escape. But we are not in darkness that the day should overtake us as a thief. We are already children of that day, and when the day arrives we shall come with the Sun of righteousness Who ushers it in. We shall have been with Him before the day breaks; for we know Him as the bright, the Morning Star, and the morning star He will give to him that overcomes.

The Christian calling is higher, the Christian hope is heavenlier, the Christian position is more intimate than anything that is set before the Jew or the Gentile in these chapters. This is not to despise or neglect the teaching of Matt. 24-25; it is to receive it in its proper character and context, as the great prophecy of Jewish and Gentile destiny in the last days, against the background of the greater and more intimate hope that belongs to the church of God.