

Matthew 25:10–30 — The Door Was Shut

The Virgins, the Talents, Profession and Responsibility in the Kingdom, and the Signless Coming

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:1–30

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

“For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The Recovery of Expectation and the Door That Was Shut

The great leading point of the parable of the ten virgins is this: there was a proper expectation of the bridegroom’s coming; the whole profession went to sleep with respect to it; a midnight cry went out; there was some awakening; and the readiness of those who were ready consisted in their having taken oil with them. The foolish virgins took their lamps but took no oil with them. Many expositors get lost in questions about who sells oil and why they were sent to buy it. Oil is a type of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is not for sale — those are not the points. The points are: the recovery of the expectation, the distinction between those who were ready and those who were not, and what that distinction consisted of.

The door was shut. This is a great point of the parable. When Noah and his family entered the ark, God shut the door. In Acts 21, when Paul was drawn out of the temple and an uproar arose, the doors were shut. Here, the door shuts on those who came afterward saying Lord, Lord, open to us. There is no second chance in view here. The door is shut and nothing undoes it. The parable does not encourage the thought that there might be a second opportunity after the Lord has come; it explicitly closes that door. Those who came afterward got no answer but I know you not.

The I know you not of verse 12 connects with Matthew 7:23, where many will come in that day saying Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And I will profess unto them, I never knew you. This is an important anti-Arminian statement. John 10 says the Lord knows his sheep, and he knows them — meaning he would have known them at some time if they had ever been his. But Matthew 7 settles it: I never knew you. There is no moment of knowing that was followed by unknowing. These came in profession; they were never known by him; and the profession is exposed.

The Marriage: What Going in with the Bridegroom Implies

Verse 10 says they that were ready went in with him to the marriage. Revelation 19:6–9 gives the content of what that implies. The marriage of the Lamb has come; his wife has made herself ready. The voice of a great multitude is as the voice of many waters and mighty thunderings: the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him. Going in with the bridegroom to the marriage implies, first of all, giving honour to him. That is what characterizes the inside. The outside is outer darkness; the inside is the presence and glory of the Lord. Those who entered did not enter into a vague and pleasant eternity; they entered into a marriage in which everything was occupied with Christ as the centre.

The Parenthetical Section: Matthew 24:45–25:30

The section from Matthew 24:45 to Matthew 25:30 is parenthetical in character. The first part of Matthew 24 — up to verse 44 — concerns the future of the Jews in connection with the great tribulation and the appearing of the Son of Man. The last section, from 25:31 onward, concerns the judgment of the nations preliminary to the millennial kingdom. The parenthetical section in between concerns the future in connection with the assembly of God. The three great classes — Jew, Gentile, and the assembly of God — are each addressed as the Lord looks into the future.

Within the parenthetical section, both parables deal with profession and responsibility. A person can make a profession, and the consequent responsibility attached to that profession does not require that the person is genuinely the Lord's. The kingdom of heaven in mystery form is a sphere here below that contains both the genuine and the merely professing. This is the consistent character of the similitudes of the kingdom in Matthew 13: there is always something wrong in them, something that offends and must eventually be removed. We call this whole sphere Christendom. And the Lord is not deceived by the Lord, Lord of mere profession.

The Talents: Responsibilities, Not Merely Gifts

The talents are best understood as spheres of responsibility rather than gifts in the sense of spiritual endowments. Each servant had a responsibility given him according to his ability — five, two, or one — and they were to put the Lord's goods to work in his absence. The five-talent man and the two-talent man did so; they are each told exactly the same thing: Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

The fact that both received identical commendations regardless of the difference in their starting amounts speaks of the Lord's equity and grace: it is not the size of the responsibility that is measured but faithfulness in the discharge of it. He was looking for trustworthy persons to set over many things. What he found in the first two was men who had entered into something of his own heart — who could therefore enter into the joy of their Lord. The one-talent man had entered into nothing of the sort. He buried what he had in the earth. He was an earth-dweller in moral character, and the earth is where he put what was committed to him.

That this third man was a false professor is established by the pattern of these kingdom parables, not by reading anything foreign into it. Just as there were five foolish virgins among the ten, so there is one unfaithful servant among the three. The point is not to prove or disprove doctrines about falling from grace — it is to show that in the sphere of profession and responsibility, reality is not assumed by profession. The outer darkness to which this servant is consigned is not a special dispensation for missing kingdom blessing — comparing scripture with scripture, it is the same place as where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, the gloom of darkness reserved for those of whom Jude speaks, who crept in unawares.

Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God: Two Distinct Expressions

Matthew uses the expression kingdom of the heavens exclusively — it appears throughout his Gospel — while the other three Gospels use the kingdom of God. Some argue that Matthew used kingdom of heaven as a Jewish reverent substitute for kingdom of God, avoiding the name of God. But that theory cannot explain the five instances in Matthew itself where the expression kingdom of God is used. There must be a real distinction.

The real distinction is this: when the Lord was speaking of something about the kingdom that was true at the moment he was speaking — when the kingdom had a present reference in connection with his own presence here — the expression kingdom of God is used. When the expression has a view to his absence, the term used is kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven in mystery form began when the Lord went on high. Hence in Matthew 13 the seven similitudes of the kingdom all begin at parable two, not parable one — because the first parable of the sower is speaking of the Son of Man sowing in his own presence, and that is not yet the kingdom of heaven in the mystery form that began at his going up.

Neither the Day Nor the Hour: Signless for the Church

The warning to watch in verse 13 — ye know neither the day nor the hour — has a different application from the same phrase in Matthew 24:36, even though the words are closely similar. In Matthew 24, the day and the hour are unknown to men and angels, but the Jews in the great tribulation will have prophetic numbers to count: the 1260, 1290, and 1335 days of Daniel 12. They will be counting; they will be fairly close; they will be crying for the day to come (as the Psalms show). But they will not know precisely the day or the hour.

In verse 13 of Matthew 25, the bearing is wider. In connection with the rapture, there are no prophetic events given in Scripture that must transpire before the Lord comes for the church. No signs are given. The coming is signless and timeless, and the only appropriate posture for every Christian generation is constant expectation. Not because Israel is back in the land, not because certain political events have transpired, but because the Lord is coming and the day is his Father's own. The Lord's word to the disciples was: watch therefore. That watch is without qualification, without condition, without calendar. It is for all Christian generations from the ascension to the moment of the shout.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour.