

## ***Rewards and Judgments...***

### **Matthew 24 v 45 to 51, Matthew 25**

#### ***Faithful and wicked servants (Matthew 24 v 45 to 51)***

The parable of the faithful and wicked servants illustrates Jesus' statement earlier in Matthew 14 v 36: "concerning that day and hour no one knows". Jesus tells us that we must carry on with diligence while he is gone – we must be like the "faithful and wise" servant who takes care of his master's business while he is away.

"But if that wicked servant says 'My master is delayed'" (v 48): Jesus warns us about complacency – we must always live in anticipation of Jesus' imminent return...

- How is the faithful and wise servant rewarded (v 46, 47)?
- What happens to the wicked servant, and why (v 51)?
- In what practical ways can we be ready for Jesus' return? See 2 Peter 3 v 10 to 14.

#### ***The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25 v 1 to 13)***

There were three stages to an ancient Jewish wedding: the first was *engagement* – a formal agreement made by the fathers; the second was *betrothal* – the ceremony where mutual promises were made; the third was *marriage* – about a year later when the bridegroom came at an unexpected time for his bride. In this parable, the first two stages have already taken place. Now the wedding party (the ten virgins) await the coming of the bridegroom for his bride. The five foolish virgins *appeared* to be prepared for the bridegroom, because they had their lamps. But they were not prepared, because "they took *no oil* with them" (v 3) – it wasn't that they had simply run out of oil. Throughout the Bible, oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit – see Zechariah 12 v 10a, Acts 10 v 38, Hebrews 1 v 9.

- Did the foolish virgins have the Holy Spirit?
- And therefore, did they belong to Christ (Romans 8 v 9)?
- Did they know the Lord?
- Did the Lord know them (v 12)?
- So, were they 'saved'?

"The door was shut" (v 10) – compare with Genesis 7 v 15, 16.

#### ***The parable of the talents (Matthew 25 v 14 to 30)***

A talent was a unit of money, worth about a year's wages, but in the application of this parable, it is valid to see these talents as resources in our lives – including time, money, abilities, and authority.

- The reward was the same for the first two servants, even though one was given five talents and the other was given two talents. What did the master look for – the 'bottom line' or something else?
- What did the third servant do and why? How did he rationalize his behaviour (v 24, 25)?
- What was the master's charge against him (v 26)?
- What happened to his talent, and how was he 'rewarded'?

***[MORE OVER...]***

### ***The judgment of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25 v 31 to 46)***

There are three future judgments in Scripture:

- (i) the βῆμα (*bema*) “judgment seat of Christ”, where Christians (after the ‘*harpazo*’ or rapture) are rewarded for their faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5 v 10);
- (ii) the judgment of the “great white throne” (at the end of the millennium), where individuals whose names are not written in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20 v 11 to 15); and
- (iii) this ‘sheep and goats’ judgment of the nations, after the great tribulation and Armageddon, but before Jesus establishes the millennial kingdom on earth (v 34).

In this parable, the nations are judged on the basis of their treatment of “one of the least of these my brothers” (v 39). Are these ‘brothers’ Jesus’ fellow Jews, or are they ‘tribulation saints’? Perhaps Jesus has both of these groups in view here. Both those who are declared innocent (i.e. the sheep, on the right hand) and those who are found guilty (i.e. the goats, on the left hand) are *surprised*, wondering when it was they helped or neglected Jesus...

- How do the actions of the “righteous” (v 37) show their true motives?
- What charge does Jesus bring against “those on his left” (v 41)?
- What have they actually done wrong? Or are they just indifferent?

***Take home message: We cannot afford to be indifferent towards (i) Jesus and his return; (ii) the Holy Spirit who makes us ready for his return; (iii) the resources that God has given us for stewardship; or (iv) the needy people all around us. And we cannot afford to be indifferent towards a lost humanity that will one day stand in judgment...***