

The Son of Man on His Glorious Throne
Matthew 25:1-46
Key Verse: 25:31

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne."

This passage is the culmination of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. The main point is that when Jesus comes again in power and great glory he will come as the Judge of all mankind. Most people sense that there will be a final judgment. As human beings, made in the image of God, we have a deep sense of justice. Justice can only be truly satisfied when there is a proper judgment with appropriate consequences. You might have heard about an event that occurred in our neighborhood on July 10, at about 5:00 a.m. A 62 year old Mexican man was attacked by three teenage boys on the 6300 block of N. Artesian Avenue. One of them was playing a "game" to see if he could knock the man unconscious with one punch. As another videotaped, the youth hit the man so hard that he fell to the ground, slamming his head on the concrete, and died within a few hours. It turns out that this man had lived in West Rogers Park for years. He recently celebrated his 40th wedding anniversary and was a father of 12 and a grandfather of 23. He was known as a loving family man with a good sense of humor. He had been a construction worker, but an injury to his right arm forced him to quit. This is why, when he was attacked, he was unable to lift that arm to defend himself. He had gone out early in the morning to collect cans, which he could redeem for a few pennies each, so he could earn some extra money to feed his family. After the vicious attack, the young men left the scene, laughing in scorn at their victim. Later, they posted a video of the event on Facebook. Through this, the police apprehended them and charged them with first degree murder as adults. Upon reading the news report about this, many people posted comments expressing outrage and demanding justice.

When we read the Psalms, we find that often the psalmist cries out due to injustice. He is satisfied only upon realizing that God will judge all things justly in the end. This brings peace to our souls. In telling of the final judgment, Jesus wanted his disciples to have assurance of his final victory. The Lord wanted them to hold in their hearts the image of him seated on his throne in glory. This enables us to overcome injustice, endure persecution, and live godly lives. When we think about final judgment, we may have many questions. Jesus does not try to satisfy our curiosity. But he tells us what we really need to know and how we should live.

We will study this passage in three parts. In the first part, the parable of the ten virgins in verses 1-13, we can learn the importance of being ready for Jesus when he comes again. In the second part, the parable of the bags of gold in verses 14-30, we can learn what we should be doing while we wait. And finally, in verses 31-46, Jesus pictures for us the final judgment.

I. The parable of the ten virgins (1-13)

Jesus said in verse 1, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." Jesus refers to the typical Jewish marriage of his day. Usually, a bridegroom and his friends went to the home of the bride, where the marriage would take place, often at night. The time of arrival was not definite. Whenever the bridegroom arrived, the wedding began. In

truth, Jesus is the bridegroom; his people are his bride. His coming is most joyful, like a marriage. And his people wait for him in eager expectation, like pure virgins.

Jesus tells of two kinds of virgins. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish did not think beyond the immediate moment. They just grabbed their lamps and went out. The wise, however, planned ahead. They realized they might need extra oil, and took some. At first, all of the virgins were very excited to talk about the upcoming wedding. They might have practiced singing and dancing as they waited. But as time passed, with no sign of a bridegroom, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. It is a comfort to some that both the wise and the foolish fell asleep.

At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (6) The virgins awakened with a start. They hurriedly tried to prepare for his appearance. They cut away pieces of burnt wick on their lamps to make them shine brighter. But they found that their lamps were going out, for their oil was almost gone. The wise took out their jars of extra oil and poured them into their lamps. The foolish asked the wise to share their oil, but the wise told them, "No. Go and buy your own, please" (9). This implies that there is something that one must have which cannot be shared with others at the time of Jesus' coming. It is personal faith. Being among other Christians does not save a person, even if they are one's family members or close friends.

While the foolish were on their way to buy oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later, the foolish virgins arrived, knocked at the door, and begged to go in. But the Lord replied, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you." Though the foolish looked similar to the wise, they were unrecognized by the bridegroom. The Lord sees our faith. We must have personal faith in Jesus when he comes. Where there is faith, there is hope and love (Col 1:5). How can we have faith? Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. In John 5:24, Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." We are saved the moment we accept Jesus' word with faith. We may not have an emotional experience. When we simply hear Jesus' word and believe it, we are saved. When Jesus comes again, it won't matter how many Christian meetings we attended or how many Christian activities we engaged in. All that will matter is that we have personal faith in Jesus in our hearts. Those who do are ready for his coming.

II. The parable of the bags of gold (14-30)

Jesus told another parable. It has some similar emphases to the first, but makes a different point. Look at verses 14-15. "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey." In this parable, the master refers to God and the servants are his people. The wealth, or "bags of gold," refers to the things entrusted to us by God to use for his glory and benefit. It obviously includes money. Yet it also includes our natural talents in academics, music, art, sports, and so on, as well as good character traits, spiritual gifts, knowledge, physical strength, time, and privileges. It includes our children and our opportunities--both at work or

school, and in ministry. To sum up, we can say that it is our very life in this world. God knows and trusts each person as an individual. We should not compare ourselves to others. Rather, we should know what God has entrusted to us and use it most wisely in the short time we have.

In the rest of the parable, we can find a great contrast between the first two servants and the third servant. Let's consider this contrast carefully, for it gives us insight into what kind of servant God wants us to be.

First, their attitude toward their trust was different. The first two servants received their bags of gold as a trust from their master. This is reflected in their own statements, "Master, you entrusted me..." (20,22). The amount of the trust was significant. One bag of gold represents about a million dollars. So, one was entrusted with five million dollars, and the other with two million. This trust inspired confidence; confidence triggered energy and creativity. They were so happy to be trusted by their master that they went out "at once" and put the money to work. Soon the man with five bags had gained five more and the man with two bags had gained two more (16-17). On the other hand, the servant who received one bag of gold did not realize that he was trusted by his master. Rather, he was suspicious of his master. Then he fell into fear and buried his bag of gold in the ground (18).

Second, their rewards were different. After a long time, the master of the servants returned to settle accounts with them (19). The first and second servants brought their original capital plus the 100% profit they had earned and presented it before their master. Then he said them, one after the other, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (21,23) It was a rich reward. The master recognized their work as well done. He gave them an A+, and "excellent" on their job evaluations. He acknowledged that their work was a reflection of their character, which he recognized as "good" and "faithful." They were good in the sense that they were good servants to the master. They knew his intention and had his best interest at heart. They were also faithful. They held their master's trust dear to their hearts and worked day in and day out to do what he wanted them to do. They put forth the same effort when the master was not present as they would have when he was present. The master rewarded this kind of faithfulness by giving them many more things. Best of all, he invited them to share his happiness. His joy and sense of victory became theirs.

On the other hand, the servant who hid his bag of gold in the ground was rebuked as wicked and lazy (26). Why was he called wicked? There is no mention of abuse, immorality or debauchery on his part. But his wickedness lay in the way he thought of his master. He called him a "hard man" and implied that he was dishonest and ruthless in his dealings. This wicked thought made him fearful and was at the root of his laziness. To make matters worse, he did not take action based on what he knew. He should at least have put the gold in the bank to draw interest. But he did nothing. His thinking was futile. The master rebuked him severely, took his bag of gold and gave it to the one who had ten. Then the wicked servant was thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This was not a subjective judgment of the master, but was based on a principle that he applied fairly and equally. Look at verse 29. "For whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." In this part we learn that the secret to being a good and faithful servant is having truthful knowledge of God that leads us to a right

relationship with him. We should know that God is good. We should know that God is love. We should know that God is holy. God is compassionate and just. God is faithful to keep his promises both to bless and to curse. When we truly know God, accept his trust, and do our best, God blesses us abundantly. On the other hand, if we have bitterness, complaints or suspicion toward God in our hearts, we are wicked and will be unproductive and worthless.

III. All the nations will be gathered before him (31-46)

Jesus reaches the climax of his discourse as he describes the final judgment and what happens there. Look at verse 31. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne." While on earth, Jesus looked poor and ordinary. He accepted the limits of human flesh and humbly engaged with all kinds of people. He endured the slander and malice of his enemies. And soon he would be badly mistreated at the hands of evil men. But this Jesus is in truth the glorious Son of Man prophesied in Daniel 7:13-14. When he comes again, it is with the authority, glory and sovereign power of God Almighty. He comes as the King and Judge of all people. He will rule with absolute power and will assign to each person their eternal destiny (Jn 5:28-30). He will be arrayed by the hosts of heaven--myriad of angels--mighty in power, glorious in splendor, who will obey his every command. I believe that as he takes his seat on his glorious throne, all creation falls silent in holy fear. Yet there is another side to the Son of Man. This mighty Judge will be the same one who served all kinds of sinners while on earth. He experienced in the flesh what we also experience. He will understand us and can sympathize with our weaknesses.

As the Son of Man sits on his throne in glory, all the nations will be gathered before him (32). This refers to all people from every tribe and nation on earth. Whether people want to appear or not, they must come and stand before the Son of Man. The first thing he does is to separate the sheep from the goats. I believe sheep are the elect mentioned in the previous chapter. They were chosen by God before the creation of the world to believe the gospel and glorify him. During their lifetimes they often appeared weak and vulnerable. When they simply trusted in God, they were mocked, mistreated and persecuted. Who are the goats? Goats look similar to sheep in some ways. Yet they are rather mean-spirited and have horns that hurt others. They represent the pretenders whose inner being was never changed by the gospel of grace. The Son of Man will see into the heart of each person and discern the sheep from the goats. At that time, wealth, social status, or education are unimportant. All that will matter is faith. The sheep will be put on the King's right and the goats will be put on his left (33). Then the King will deliver the message and verdict appropriate for each.

To those on his right the King will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (34). The King invites them into his glorious kingdom to live with him forever. This blessing was not earned; it is an inheritance. It is given to God's children by the pure grace of the King. The kingdom where God reigns is an everlasting paradise. There will not be any evil, sin or imperfection, and no sorrow or sickness or death. It is the place of perfect happiness and eternal peace.

In verses 35-36, the King explains why he gives them the kingdom: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." The sheep are surprised to hear that they have done these things. They don't remember that they ever served the King. This tells us that the sheep were serving others out of genuine compassion, responding to their fellow human beings according to their need. They had learned to see others with the mind of Christ. They did not overlook even "the least of these," but tended to them with affection. It was the evidence that they were being changed into the likeness of Christ. Their lives of service were authentic expressions of their faith. As they lived in this way, they did many acts of service for the needy which they did not even remember. But the King remembered them all and recognized his sheep. He answers in verse 40, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." There are so many beautiful examples of those who are reflecting the heart of Christ by serving "the least of these." Our young people who just returned from Ecuador told us of Pastor Louis who serves the Kichiwa in Ecuador. They are very poor people who often need food and other basic necessities. Due to their lapsed Catholic background, they persecuted Pastor Louis when he first arrived among them. But he endured and loved them unconditionally. In time, they recognized the love of Christ in him and began to listen to his message. Now they all learn of Jesus together through his Bible messages and teaching. Pastor Louis visits them from house to house and cares for them like his own children. He shares with them whatever he has. He constantly inspires them with hope in heaven. He does so simply because he wants to follow Jesus.

Look at verse 41. Then the King will turn to those on his left and say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." It was not God's intention to send human beings to this place. It was meant for the devil and his angels. It is a place of unbearable torment. The reason the King gives for sending them there is not that they were murderers, perverts, or robbers. It is because they did not care for his needs while they were on earth. Though they looked like the sheep in some way, they never learned the heart of Christ. They were indifferent to those who needed help and looked down on those who were suffering. But they thought of themselves as those who would inherit the kingdom. They were shocked by the King's verdict and claim that they never saw him needy. Then he will say, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (46).

God's judgment seems too great to be true. God's judgment is both glorious and a bit frightening. So many people treat it as a theological issue to hold in their minds and think of it only when they need to answer Bible study questions. But Jesus teaches us that this judgment is real and it is coming. It is the day of glory and victory for genuine children of God. But it is the day of unbearable sorrow for pretenders. May our Lord help each one of us to be ready for that day.