

# WEEK 12: THREE PARABLES ON CHRIST'S RETURN

Matthew 25



## The Place of the Passage

The conflict of Matthew 21–23 leads to Jesus' pronouncing "woes" upon the religious leaders. Then in Matthew 24 Jesus announces a coming judgment against the temple and various trials that will characterize the age until his return. This leads to a series of parables that Jesus delivers to encourage his people to be prepared for his return.

## The Big Picture

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25) Jesus announces judgment against Jerusalem, teaches about coming trials, and motivates his followers to prepare for his glorious return.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Read through the complete passage for this study, Matthew 25. Then think through and write your own notes on the following questions. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1876–1877; online at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

Read Matthew 24:1–3. Where is Jesus sitting, and what is he looking at? After he predicts the destruction of the temple (v. 2), what question do his disciples ask him?

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Their question suggests that the disciples are confused. They think that the destruction of the temple must coincide with the end of the age.<sup>1</sup> How does Jesus in Matthew 24:3–51 clear up the confusion? More specifically, note a few key details about what will happen (a) when the temple is being destroyed and (b) when Jesus returns. List the commands he gives. What commands apply only to the Christians of the first century? What commands apply to us today?

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In Matthew 24:36–25:46 (and through five parables!) Jesus instructs the church to prepare for his *parousia*<sup>2</sup> (or return). Each parable uniquely fills out the theme of preparedness for Jesus' return. What is the point of the first parable (24:42–44)? What does "stay awake" (v. 42) mean, and how do 1 Thessalonians

5:1–8; 1 Peter 4:7; and 2 Peter 3:10–13 fill out our understanding of how we are to live in light of Christ's second coming?

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The key characters in the parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13) are the bridegroom, the wise virgins, and the foolish virgins. What lesson do we learn from each about the nature of Jesus' second coming and the right and wrong responses to that reality?

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What is most surprising about the parable of the ten virgins? How do you make sense of that surprise?

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How does the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) answer the question "How does Jesus want us to live in light of his return?"

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How does the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46) answer the question “How does Jesus want us to live in light of his return?”

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The original audience for the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14) certainly included the Jewish religious leaders. It makes sense that Jesus would tell a parable of judgment so they might repent before it is too late (as some will do; see Matt. 27:57; Acts 6:7). But why would Jesus tell parables of judgment, or possible judgment, to “his disciples” (Matt. 24:1; see also 1 Corinthians 10; Gal. 5:19–23)?

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Read Matthew 25:10, 20–23, 34. What are the blessings that good and faithful Christians will receive from Jesus on judgment day? How should such blessings or rewards motivate you to press on in the Christian life?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

## Gospel Glimpses

**COMMENDED FAITHFULNESS.** When the first two servants invest and multiply the money their master has given them, the master responds, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, 23). This is a picture of the gracious and generous commendation Jesus will give all of his servants when he returns. The apostle Paul likewise affirms, “Each one will receive his commendation from God” (1 Cor. 4:5; see Rom. 2:29; Heb. 11:2, 4, 5, 39). This is over-the-top generosity to sinners. All of our works are done in response to and empowered by God and his grace (Rom. 2:26–29; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 2:13). Moreover, they are also imperfect and require the sacrifice of Jesus for them to be acceptable. Yet God will commend his people for the very things he has enabled them to do! This is why his praise of us will ultimately resound not to our glory but to his.

**THE GIFT OF THE KINGDOM.** At the final judgment, Jesus will say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). An inheritance is not worked for or earned; it is received. While Jesus points to the selfless service of those who will ultimately be saved, the ultimate reason for their entrance into his kingdom is grace. It is a gift. The sheep’s surprise at hearing of their own works demonstrates that none of these works was done for the sake of repayment (25:37–39). With Jesus, earning is out of the question. He gives his kingdom on terms of grace.

## Whole-Bible Connections

**CHRIST, THE BRIDEGROOM.** Marriage was instituted by God at creation (Gen. 2:24), and it serves as a reflection of the covenant relationship between God and his people (e.g., Isa. 54:5). In the Old Testament, Israel is frequently depicted as God’s “bride” (e.g., Isa. 62:4–5; Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:16–20), and he seeks to delight in his restored people “as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride” (Isa. 62:5; also 65:19). In the New Testament John the Baptist calls Jesus the bridegroom (John 3:29), which identifies Jesus as Israel’s long-awaited king and Messiah. Jesus likewise uses the title “bridegroom” of himself (Mark 2:19). Jesus is the ultimate bridegroom, forever united with his bride—the church (Eph. 5:22–33). He so loves the church that he has died for her and continues to restore and sanctify her (vv. 25–32). One day “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” will be wed to Jesus, the Lamb of God, and there will be great rejoicing, feasting, and celebration (Rev. 21:9; see also v. 2). “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (19:9).

**THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE.** In 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its temple (2 Kings 25; Pss. 74:3, 7; 79:1). According to 2 Kings

23:27 this event represented God's judgment in casting off his people, removing them from his sight; according to 2 Kings 24:20 it is an expression of his anger and his desire to remove them from his presence. In AD 70 God also expressed his anger over Israel's faithlessness and fruitlessness, when Herod's temple was destroyed by the Roman regiments ("Jerusalem surrounded by armies"; Luke 21:20). And, as Jesus predicted, every "stone" was "thrown down" (Mark 13:2). Of course, now in Christ—our Immanuel—and through his Holy Spirit who dwells within God's people (Eph. 2:13–22) Christians have permanent access into God's presence, both in this life (John 15:11–16) and in the life to come (Rev. 22:2–4).

**Theological Soundings**

**ESCHATOLOGY.** Theologians use the word *eschatology* to refer to the study of the "last things" or "end times." According to the New Testament the "end times" began when Jesus arrived on the scene to start his ministry and so to begin the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and promises. Yet Matthew 24–25 points us forward to the time of their complete fulfillment. We still await the glorious second coming of Jesus (24:36), the gathering of all believers to be with him (24:31), the final judgment (25:31–46), and the separation of all people for either eternal punishment or eternal life (25:34, 41, 46).

**MIXED CHURCH.** The church is a mixed body comprising wheat and weeds, sheep and goats, two sets of servants, wise and foolish virgins. At the final judgment the true believers will be separated from the false. This will include those who identify with the church ("servants"; Matt. 25:14) and confess proper Christology (calling Jesus, "Lord, lord"; Matt 25:11) but who do not do the Father's will and who therefore do not truly know Jesus and thus are not known by him (v. 12; compare "those who do not know God and . . . do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus," 2 Thess. 1:8). The "wicked and slothful" (Matt. 25:26) will suffer "eternal punishment" (v. 46) when Christ returns and "cast[s them] into the outer darkness" (v. 30; "into the eternal fire," v. 41), a "place" where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30).

**Personal Implications**

Take time to reflect on the implications of Matthew 25 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the *Personal Implications* for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) the passage as a whole.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

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**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

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**3. Theological Soundings**

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**4. Matthew 25**

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**As You Finish Studying Jesus' Parables . . .**

We rejoice with you as you complete this study of Jesus' parables! May what you have learned go with you day by day throughout your life. Now we would greatly encourage you to study the Word of God on a weekly, and even daily, basis. To continue your study of the Bible we invite you to consider other books in the Knowing the Bible series and to visit [www.knowingthebibleseries.org](http://www.knowingthebibleseries.org).

Lastly, take a moment again to look back through this study. Review again the notes that you have written, and the things that you have highlighted or underlined. Reflect again on the key themes that the Lord has been teaching you about himself and about his Word. May these things become a treasure for you throughout your life—this we pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **The end of the age** – The day of Jesus' second coming and final judgment of the righteous and the wicked. The phrase is used only in the Gospel of Matthew (13:39, 40; 24:3, 28:20).

<sup>2</sup> **Parousia** – The Greek word for "arrival," "coming," or "presence." It is used forty-four times in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 24:37, 39), often in relation to Christ's second coming.