

The Parable of the Two Servant Leaders

📖 Matthew 24:42-51

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In our verse by verse exposition of Matthew's Gospel we are in Matthew 24, popularly known as the Olivet Discourse for its location but I think better titled the Discourse on Kingdom Coming for its subject matter. In it Jesus is answering the disciples question in 24:3, what is the sign of Your coming and the end of the age. In our exposition of 24:4-28 He answered by outlining events of the Tribulation which are not the sign of His coming but important events leading up to the sign. These events are extraordinary and demand a response. In 24:29 the sign of His coming seems to be the light of the Shechinah Glory appearing in the sky. At that time the Son of Man will appear in the sky, He will gather the nation Israel as predicted in Isa 27:12-13 and other passages and prepare to judge Jews and Gentiles for kingdom entrance. The judgment of Jews is described in 24:45-25:30 by three parables, the faithful slave, the ten virgins and the talents. The judgment of Gentiles is described in 25:31-46 by the sheep/goats. These things are most important and should be treated with great care.

In 24:32-51 Jesus takes an excursus to exhort the generation of Israel living in the time of the Tribulation to be prepared. In 24:32 He tells them to learn the parable of the fig tree. A parable is a teaching device that uses something well-known from life and true to life to teach something unknown. The thing well-known in this parable is the growth cycle of the fig tree. When the branch of the fig tree becomes tender and puts forth its leaves you know that summer is near. In the same way when the nation Israel sees the events of the Tribulation they should know that His coming is near. 24:33 states this explicitly, when you see all these things, that is, the things of the Tribulation, know that He is near, right at the door. In 24:34 the generation that sees all these things will not pass away until they have all taken place because they will occur in the very short time-span of the 70th week of Daniel. In 24:35 heaven and earth will pass away but My words will not pass away confirms the certainty of Jesus' words. His words are more certain than the continuation of the present universe. However, in 24:36 what will not be known for certain by the generation living in the midst of the Tribulation is the exact timing of His coming. In fact, this cannot be known by anyone, not even to angels who stand in the presence of the Father, nor even the Son who stands in closest relation to the Father. Of course, this speaks of Jesus in His incarnational humanity. In His deity, He knows all, but in His incarnational humanity the Father only revealed some things to Him and the exact moment of His coming was not revealed to Him. Therefore, this is an everlasting warning to

any who would date set. We covered some of that foolishness. Even those who see the events of the Tribulation occurring will not be able to tell the exact moment of His coming. That is why it will be so important to pay attention to the general signs of the Tribulation which are a herald of His coming. 24:37 explains that His coming will be identical in some way to the days of Noah. It seems that the connection is that in the days of Noah the people lived in extraordinary times while this man and his family built the ark on dry land and yet the people continued to pursue their daily routines, not paying heed to the signs of the times. They continued in this way even until the very day that Noah entered the ark. Consequently, when the flood came they were all swept away. The application at the end of 24:39 is that when the Son of Man comes it will be exactly the same. People will be living in extraordinary times in the midst of great judgments and yet they will continue to pursue their daily routines, not paying attention to the importance of the times. They will continue in this way even until the very day that the Son of Man returns. As a consequence, 24:40-41 gives examples of the judgment and separation that will take place at His coming. In 24:40, there will be two men in one field; one will be taken and one will be left. The one taken is taken in judgment; the one left is left alive to enter the kingdom. In 24:41, two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Again, the one taken is taken in judgment and the one left is left alive on the earth to enter the kingdom. The entire context is a contrast between those who believed at the Flood and were left to re-populate the earth vs those who did not and were swept away with those who will believe at Christ's coming and enter the kingdom vs those who will not and will be cast into hell.

No one doubts the contrast here is between believers and unbelievers but strangely many shift gears in the following exhortations, parables and judgments and say that 24:42-25:30 is contrasting faithful and unfaithful believers. They introduce the Church and the Rapture because they say that Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour and they think that people living in the future Tribulation will be able to know the day and hour of the Second Coming because they can calculate it from knowing the day and hour the anti-Christ signs the treaty with Israel or from knowing the day and hour of the abomination of desolation. However, verse 42 explicitly says that the generation who sees these things will not know which day the Lord is coming. That means the exact timing of the Second Coming cannot be known even by one living in that time. It is therefore a direct rejection of Scripture to say that the day of the Second Coming can be known by someone living in that time. The problem is flawed reasoning. No one, or very few people, will know the exact time the anti-Christ signs the treaty with Israel because it will occur behind closed doors and no one, or very few people, will know the exact time the anti-Christ will commit the abomination of desolation. And even if one did know the exact time the cosmic disturbances, wars, famines and global chaos during the time will cause those living in that time to lose track of time. But all of this evidence is being rejected by the stroke of a pen and unsound reasoning is introduced to conclude that this must be talking about the Church and the Rapture since it's day is unknown. I agree that it is unknown. It is just not the subject of the passage. And when you introduce it it leads to a great problem of interpreting the parables as referring to the Church at the judgment seat of Christ facing penal judgment. That is a very dangerous distortion of the text that violates entirely the context. Therefore, I am stressing that the

context out of which all these exhortations, parables and judgments flow is the analogy between the Flood and the Second Coming and the contrast is very clearly believers and unbelievers. When the Flood came there were believers and unbelievers on the earth. The believers were left alive to repopulate the earth; the unbelievers were taken in judgment. At the second Coming it will be the same way. There will be believers and unbelievers on the earth. The believers will be left alive to repopulate the earth; the unbelievers will be taken in judgment. Therefore, the following contrasts are also between believers and unbelievers. And in particular the context now is dealing with the nation Israel and how when Christ returns there will be the believing remnant of Israel and a non-remnant and how a judgment and separation will be made at that time so that only the remnant enters the kingdom.

In 24:42 the exhortation is to the nation Israel in the Tribulation, the generation that sees these things from verse 34. **Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.** The word **Lord** is *ΚΥΡΙΟΣ*, it is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew YHWH. It therefore refers to Israel's God. Despite the fact that many in the nation Israel are not believers He is still the God of Israel. At this time the nation Israel will be composed of believers and unbelievers and God is their God by covenant (cf Matt 5:48). Therefore, what is being said is that the nation Israel in that time should **be on the alert**. Why? Because they **do not know which day their God is coming**. Again, in general the time period can be known because of the extraordinary events of the Tribulation, but the specific day and hour cannot be known. That is why they must **be on the alert**. The word **alert** is *γρηγορευω* and means "to stay awake, be watchful." It means they need to be watching the events and recognizing their extraordinary character as pointing to the nearness of God coming to them.

In 24:43 Jesus uses an illustration to show that no one can know the exact hour, **But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.** Jesus seems to be saying that if a homeowner knew the exact time during the night that a thief was coming then obviously he would not allow his house to be broken into. But the problem is that it can happen anytime in the night. Therefore, to stop a thief you have to be alert all night long. In the same way, no one will know the exact time of Christ's coming. Therefore, to be prepared they will have to be alert during the whole Tribulation. The command then is for constant watchfulness of the times so that they recognize the events of the Tribulation unfolding around them. At this point all this relates to the nation Israel.

24:44 gives additional advice. **For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.** Note the word **also, you also must be ready**. This is something in addition to verse 42, being **alert**. Being **alert** means being watchful so that they detect the events of the Tribulation as heralding His soon coming, just as the fig tree taught. But here they **must also be ready**. This is a different Greek word. This word is from *ετοιμος* and means "to be prepared." Not only should they be alert to the

significance of the events of the Tribulation but the events should stimulate them to be prepared. Of course, the way to be prepared is to believe in Jesus.

The text is teaching the necessity of the nation Israel being watchful so that when they see the false Christ's, the false prophets, the wars and rumors of wars, kingdom rising against kingdom, the abomination of desolation, their being hated by all nations, etc...that they recognize those as indicating the nearness of Christ's coming and they respond by believing in Him. Otherwise when He comes they will be swept away in judgment, just like those who lived in the days of Noah. The context is a contrast between believers and unbelievers at the time of Christ's second coming, and in particular Jewish believers and unbelievers.

Now, in 24:45-51 we have the first of three parables that deal with Israel's judgment when He comes. It took me all day Monday to figure this out because there is no detailed exegesis of this in the literature, just general statements. And so I had to pump out all the details and that takes a lot of time. It's been very exhausting but very rewarding. What is most concerning about this passage is the view that I mentioned earlier where people say that this is all talking about the Church and the Rapture and the judgment seat of Christ. That view is based on two false ideas. First, that people living in the Tribulation will be able to know the exact time of the Second Coming. Because of that they say this can't be talking about the Second Coming but the Rapture. From there it's all about the Church and they think it's a contrast between a faithful Church believer and an unfaithful Church believer. That has major problems because then you have to explain what is happening in verse 51 as happening to an unfaithful believer and yet what is described in verse 51 is penal punishment. Second, they say that there is one master and both men are slaves and so since they are both slaves they must both be believers. I will show you that this is absolute nonsense. They miss the entire point and it results in some very bad theology. Once again you only need to look at what it really says, not what your theology says it should say.

Let's read starting in verse 45, **Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** What is the scene? A master is leaving on a journey. During his absence he appoints some of his slaves to be in charge of the rest of his slaves. Those slaves who are in charge of the other slaves have a responsibility to discharge; feeding the other slaves at the proper time. When the master returns He will judge the slaves who are put in charge.

Let's identify the players. Who is the **master**? Jesus. That's easy. Jesus was going away on a journey because the nation Israel rejected Him but He's coming back to that nation. Who are the **slaves**? The slaves are the nation Israel, His people. Who are the slaves put **in charge** of the rest of the slaves? They are the leadership of Israel.

What is the responsibility they are given to discharge? Recognizing the proper time so that they lead the people of Israel in being spiritually prepared to meet Jesus when He comes. Who is **the faithful and sensible slave**? The leader of Israel who recognizes the events of the Tribulation as heralding the Second Coming and leads the people of Israel in getting spiritually prepared. What does he receive when Jesus returns? He will be greatly rewarded as he enters the kingdom. Who is the **evil slave**? The leader of Israel who does not recognize the events of the Tribulation and therefore mistreats the people of Israel. What does he receive when Jesus returns? He will not be permitted to enter the kingdom but will be cut in pieces and assigned a place with the hypocrites (who are the Pharisees), and in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In general, then, what is the passage about? The judgment of the leadership of the nation Israel. The leadership of the nation Israel will be responsible to recognize when Jesus is near and prepare the people of Israel accordingly. The first time He came they did not fulfill this responsibility. The second time there will be those who will. Those who do will enter the kingdom with great reward. Those who do not will not even enter the kingdom at all. It is actually quite easy. It relates to what has come before in v 42 related to the need to be alert in that day and in v 44 the need to also be ready or prepared with salvation. The leadership will be responsible to lead and as such they will be judged first when Christ returns.

In verse 45 Jesus says, **Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their foot at the proper time?** The **master** we said is Jesus. He is going away on a journey and in His absence puts some of His slaves in charge of the others. Those put in charge are the leadership of Israel. **Who then is the faithful and sensible slave?** The adjective **faithful** is from *πιστος* and means "reliable, dependable." The adjective **sensible** is from *φρονιμος* and means "wise." In Matthew 7:24 the wise man is the one who hears Jesus' words and acts on them. The faithful and sensible slave then is a leader of Israel during the Tribulation who is reliable and wise because he hears the words of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse and acts on them. He recognizes the events of the Tribulation as heralding the nearness of Jesus' coming and fulfills His charge to prepare the nation Israel for His arrival. This did not happen at the first advent but it will happen at the second advent.

As a result, in verse 46 **Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.** That is, **blessed** is the one who is preparing the nation for Jesus' arrival. The word **blessed** is *μακαριος*. It is the same word used repeatedly in the beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." The word means "fortunate." All are fortunate who enter the kingdom but this leader of Israel is especially fortunate because he recognized the events of the Tribulation as heralding Jesus' coming and prepared his fellow Israelites by telling them to put their faith in Him.

Verse 47 describes the fortune he will have for this faithful and wise discharging of his responsibilities. **Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.** When Jesus comes He will reward this faithful

leader with greater responsibility in the kingdom. The principle is that He who is faithful in a little will be given much. The leadership of Israel during the Tribulation time are given the responsibility of recognizing the events of the Tribulation as heralding the Second Coming. The only proper response is to prepare the rest of the nation Israel for His coming by pointing them to faith in Him. If they discharge this responsibility well they will be given greater responsibility in the kingdom.

However, by contrast, 24:48 says, **But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know...** The **evil slave** was also among the leadership of Israel. However, he is the polar opposite of the faithful and wise slave. The reason he is called **evil** is because he did not fulfill his responsibility to recognize the events of the Tribulation as heralding the coming of Christ. He was not a good watchman on the wall. This is seen by the fact he says, **'My master is not coming for a long time.'** He will not pay attention to the extraordinary events described by Jesus in this chapter. As such he is just like someone living in the days of Noah who continued in the daily routine and consequently was swept away in judgment. These future leaders will be responsible to recognize the events of the Tribulation as harbingers of the second advent but this one does not. Instead the text says **he begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards.** No doubt he is turning against his fellow Israelites as 24:10 predicts so that he will even betray them over to the anti-Christ. But also he goes so far as **eating and drinking with drunkards.** That is to say using coping mechanisms of pagan Gentiles to deal with the difficulties of the future Tribulation. Since food and drink are signs of fellowship it is clear that their allegiance is not to the Master but to the anti-Christ and false prophet of the future.

Because of that 24:50 says he is not alert to Jesus' coming. **The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know.** The evil slave does not **expect him** because he is not alert to the harbingers of that day, he is not paying attention to the signs of the time described by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, just like the people in the days of Noah did not pay attention to his preaching and the building of the ark. Consequently, this leader will be caught off guard, unprepared with salvation himself and not having discharged his duties toward the nation Israel to help them get prepared by pointing to faith in Christ.

As a consequence, 24:51 says the Lord Jesus **will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** The phrase **assign him a place with the hypocrites** clearly refers to being assigned to hell because throughout Matthew **hypocrites** always refers to the unbelieving Pharisees and scribes. Clearly these leaders of Israel in that time are unbelievers. They will not be in the kingdom but will be excluded along with the Pharisees. The word **cut him in pieces** refers to the dismemberment of a condemned person. Clearly they are condemned because they have not believed in Jesus.

The expression **in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** refers to being assigned to a location where there is extreme suffering due to torment. This can be no other than hell.

However, a view in the free grace camp that seems to be picking up steam is that this is not describing judgment of unbelievers in hell but judgment unfaithful Christians may expect at the judgment seat of Christ. I find this to be a horrible and atrocious handling of the text that creates anxiety in naïve Christians and turns the joy of meeting their Savior into a living hell. How could a Christian retain the joy of meeting his Savior if he thinks he might be cut into pieces and cast into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth? The word **cut him in pieces** refers to the dismemberment of a condemned person but they change it into a metaphor for being punished by Christ with the utmost severity. It is concerning that they think a believer could stand condemned before Christ and punished with the utmost severity. That would be penal judgment and Christ already bore that on the cross on our behalf. This is a severe and distressing error and yet they treat it rather cavalierly. The expression **in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** means to be assigned to a location where there is extreme suffering due to torment but they change this to mean an experience of profound regret a believer will experience because he didn't capitalize on his opportunities in this life and will consequently be cast into outer darkness outside the light of the feast in the kingdom. This is terrible exegesis. IN the first place, to distinguish the wedding feast from the kingdom as if it is only an event within the kingdom is a mistake. A wedding feast is a time of joy, eating and celebration. The entire kingdom is a time of joy, eating and celebration. Therefore, the wedding feast is imagery representing the entire kingdom, not merely the first part of it. Again, I am very distressed by the fact that there is a group called free grace that is coming up with interpretations that do not fit with the concept of grace at all. Clearly everyone who knows how to read should be able to see that Jesus Christ is not going to cut believers in pieces and assign them a place with the hypocritical Pharisees where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In the context the contrast is between believers and unbelievers. The believers in the days of Noah were left on earth to re-populate the earth and the unbelievers were swept away in judgment. So it will be in the coming of the Son of Man. There will be believers and unbelievers and the believers will be left on earth to enter the kingdom and the unbelievers will be swept away in judgment excluded from the kingdom.

In summary, in 24:42 the application of the comparison between the Flood and the Second Coming is that in the future Tribulation the nation Israel should be on the alert. This means watchful during that time so that they recognize the events as harbingers of His coming. 24:43 shows that being alert is critical to not being caught unaware and robbed. In 24:44 since no one can know the exact moment of His coming, in addition to being alert they must also be ready. This means to be prepared with salvation, since only those who are saved will enjoy kingdom entrance. In 24:45-51 the first of the nation Israel who will be judged will be the leadership. The faithful and sensible slave represents Jewish leaders who recognizes the signs of His coming and act on them by preparing the nation Israel by pointing them to the necessity of faith in Christ. In 24:46 when Jesus returns that leader of Israel will be fortunate (cf Dan 12:3). In 24:47 he will be rewarded in the kingdom with greater

responsibility of Christ's possessions. However, in 24:48 the evil slave represents Jewish leaders who do not recognize the signs of His coming and don't prepare the nation of Israel by pointing them to faith in Christ. As such they will side with the unbelievers in that time and in 24:50 when the Son of Man comes in His kingdom they will be caught off guard, condemned and assigned a place in hell with the hypocritical Pharisees where they will suffer eternal torment.