

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

MATTHEW 24:45 - 25:30

IN this second part of the Olivet prophecy of Jesus there are certain marked differences from the first, and from the third.

In this section, commencing with this question, “**Who then is a faithful and wise servant?**” and ending with the thirtieth verse of the next chapter, our Lord only once refers to Himself as the Son of man, in the thirteenth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter the expression does occur: “**Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.**” The title, “**Son of man,**” was the one by which our Lord most often described Himself in the days of His earthly ministry. Indeed it may be said that He never called Himself the Son of God, save when it was necessary so to do in answer to criticism, or inquiry, or investigation of the deepest truth concerning Himself.

The title, “**Son of man,**” was one which indicated His relation to the purpose of establishing the heavenly Kingdom on earth. It cannot be too often repeated that this was the purpose included in the mission of Christ.

This is not for a moment to deny the fact that He came to seek and to save lost men individually in the deepest and profoundest evangelical sense of that word; so to change men, that when this probationary life is over, they shall enter into the homeland the joy, and the rest of the Divine presence. But if we think of the mission of Jesus as one simply of saving men here, in order that they may be ready for the life beyond, we have most strangely misread all that He ever said, and all He ever did, and taught men to pray for. The prayer taught in the Manifesto clearly sets forth the passion of the heart of Christ for the earth, as therein He taught His disciples to pray that the Kingdom might come, and the will of God be done, on earth as in heaven.

It is very significant that this title, “**the Son of man,**” drops out of use in the writings of the New Testament, only found in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is not therein referred to in this way any longer as a rule.

It is equally suggestive that it comes into sight again when we reach the Book of Revelation, the Book which, whatever present application it may have, surely does set forth in pictorial form the movements by which Babylon is to be destroyed, and the Kingdom of God is to be ultimately and finally established. There the title, “**Son of man,**” reappears.

In this particular prophecy the title appears in the first part; and again immediately at the thirty-first verse of the twenty-fifth chapter, when the third section is reached “**When the Son of man shall come in His glory.**”

Then again in this section there are no references to prophets, no references to the Temple, and no references to the Sabbath day; no references indeed, to any of those sacred signs and symbols of the old economy, which had indicated the truth concerning the government of God in the world.

The time of the employment of these means passed for ever away with the beginning of the age of His redeeming reign.

To turn from this negative survey to a more positive one; this passage consists of three parables, indicating the responsibilities resting upon His own, during a period in which He, as to bodily presence, would be absent from them. In these three parables there are marked similarities, and distinct differences.

Let us first observe the similarities between the three.

In every parable there is an absent lord.

- In the first the lord of the household, who has committed certain duties to his servants, is absent.
- In the second, the bridegroom is waited for, but is absent.
- In the third, the lord is the owner of goods, and he has given talents to his servants, but is himself absent.

In the next place, there is the relation to him of those from whom he is absent.

- In the first they represented his authority;
- In the second their very waiting attested the fact of their belief in his return;
- In the third they prosecuted His commerce, with his goods; the talents which he gave to them are all his goods; not their ability, not their capacity, for a talent does not stand for quality, but for quantity in this parable.

Then again, it is evident in each of these parables that the responsibility of these servants is always to their lord, and to him alone.

- The servant of the household is responsible to none save the absent lord.
- The waiting virgins are only responsible to him.
- So also those to whom he gave the talents are responsible to him only.

Now let us notice the differences between the parables.

These may not be so obvious, but they are very certain.

- The first parable is *communal*. It is the picture of His household in itself, while He is away.

- The second is *personal*. It is a picture of individual souls in relation to Himself the wise and the foolish.
- The last is *imperial*. It is a picture of the responsibility of those whom He has left behind for the carrying out of His enterprises in the world.

The parable of the household, and of the two examples of servants set over it; the faithful and wise, and the wicked is a parable wholly pertaining to the Church of God, as a household over which He is Lord and Master.

The parable of the virgins, if we take the parable of the virgins as a whole, is one that indicates the true attitude of individual souls to Him in the days of His absence.

The last is a parable which teaches the responsibility of His servants in His absence concerning His enterprises, His goods, of which He gives them talents, that is measurements, quantities, that they with these may trade.

There is much of detail in this section, but we will take it as a whole, that the cumulative message of the three parables to Christian people may not be missed. Prophetic literature has lost its power to appeal to us, partly because we have been prone to trifle over details, instead of gathering up the great messages of Christ to His people. Therefore, in the broadest outline let us look at these parables, that we may catch the spirit of the messages, and understand the one great message to the Church of God in this age which lies between His ascension and His coming again.

In the parable of the household, the word itself is suggestive. Jesus said: **“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household”** The Greek word here translated *household* is only once again used. In Revelation we read that **“the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”** What relation can there be between healing and household?

This question can only be answered by an understanding of what this word household really signifies. It is the word from which we derive our word *therapeutic*, and the basal idea of it is *healing*. *The word household refers to all such in the house as serve.*

That first word, **“Who then is a faithful and wise servant?”** is the word bond-slave; but the word household comes from another term for servant, which is other than the word bond-slave. It is a word that signifies *a loving service, a purpose of healing in service.*

This is a case of metonymy, where one word is put for another, which the other suggests, as when we say a man keeps a good table, when we refer really to his food. This word in the parable, then, suggests the picture of a great house, and one Lord; and of all those in the house under His control, as thinking of His interests, while serving under His command. He used the word that indicated the love principle in service, the tender healing ministry that only grows out of love. Thus in a word, flaming and flashing with meaning, we discover our Lord’s conception of His Church, during the time of His absence. His household all serve, but all serve by love, and the ministry is a healing ministry.

Now let us very carefully notice His word; “**Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household?**”

This word must be interpreted by the consistent teaching of the Lord, that service is the condition of greatness. The servant is “**made rule over.**” Why “**over**”? Because he is a servant. This is not a picture of the priesthood, or of the ministry according to many modern conceptions of these. There is no sense in which any priesthood or ministry is set over the Church of God, save by their ministry. “**Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.**”

Here is Christ’s picture of one servant set over the rest, because he serves all the rest. It is not a picture of any man in the household, it is not a picture of one in official authority; it is the picture of each one in the exercise of the ministry of healing and of love.

Now, in the parable we see two attitudes.

- *First that of the faithful and wise servant.*

His attitude is simply that of bringing forth meat in due season, and feeding the rest; the attitude of caring for all the other members of the household during the Lord’s absence, for the sake of the absent Lord. But there is another servant here, and Jesus speaks of him as “**that evil servant.**” He says, “**My lord delayeth,**” He is not returning yet; and with that sense of the Master’s absence, he turns to evil courses within the household, beating his fellow servants, instead of feeding and caring for them; turning aside to the companionship of drunken men, instead of standing in the place of loyalty to the absent Lord.

In the parable we have two results.

- When the lord returns, the servant who has been loyal to the service of his fellow servants, for the sake of his absent lord, is promoted and put into the place of a new authority;
- while the evil servant is cut asunder and cast out.

We must not attempt to carry these parables farther than they go. This is a picture first of all of a household, and the relation of all within it to the absent Lord. To gather it up we may state it thus. We shall prove our loyalty in the Church of God to the absent Lord, by the measure in which we serve one another; and we shall prove our disloyalty by the measure in which we beat and slay our brethren.

In the next parable there is a common hope, that of the coming of the bridegroom; but there are two attitudes.

- *First the foolish.*

This is that of expectation they “**went forth to meet the bridegroom;**” but of carelessness they “**took no oil with them.**” The details we pass over, and come to the end in order to see what this really means. To these the bridegroom says, “**I know you not.**” There is nothing more.

We must not confuse this with another parable in which men claimed a right to entrance upon a basis of work done. This is not a story of service, but of personal relationship.

Apparent expectation, for they went to meet him! But no true expectation, for they took no oil with them. When presently they came to the door, according to the figurative and poetic language of the parable, and asked admission, there could be but one answer. It was the answer of a perfect justice, and a perfect knowledge, **“I know you not.”**

- Look upon the wise.

Definite expectation; they **“went forth to meet the bridegroom.”** So far apparently there was no difference. They all set their faces toward His coming; they all spoke as though they were interested in him; they all spoke as though they desired to meet him. But these took oil. They said, The vigil may be long, he may not come so soon as may have been expected, and there must be provision for the waiting.

These went into the marriage feast.

This is a picture not of a particular section of Christendom, but of individual souls in their relation to Him. There is nothing here about a household, or any responsibility; this has to do with an attitude to Christ. The wise virgins are such as have no eyes, no thought, no care for anything except the Bridegroom, and the hour of His approach.

*The last parable is concerned with enterprise; He **“delivered unto them his goods.”***

Mark His method.

As we have already seen, the word talent here indicates quantity rather than quality.

In our language we use the word as though it signified some special capacity or ability. But that is not the meaning of the parable, for mark this well, **“unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability.”**

Ability is thus evidently something entirely separate from the talents. The talents were given according to the ability.

In ability the question of measurement does not come in. That is a question of fitness. Out of His goods, His property, He gave to this man the amount of goods which he was able to make use of.

And if we take up all the Pauline writings about gifts in the Church, we find this philosophy He gives according to each man's ability; the gifts are all given according to ability. The principle revealed here is that the Lord and Master, Christ, never sets a man to preach who has not natural ability for preaching. We may do that sort of thing, but He never does. He never puts a man down to the oversight of the business enterprises of His Church, who lacks business enterprise.

If we turn to the Ephesian letter, we find all these parables there.

- We find there first of all the household, “**endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**”
- We find loyalty, personal loyalty to the absent Lord, “**Put away . . . the old man . . . put on the new man.**” Walk as before Him.
- We find the business of the King prosecuted, “**Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.**”

Now observe the different use of the talents.

- Fidelity; five produced five; two produced two.
- Infidelity; the one hidden by the man who attempted to silence his own conscience by traducing his absent Lord.

Mark the issues.

The reward in the case of the man with five talents committed to him, and in the case of the man with two, are exactly the same. To each of these men Jesus said; “**Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.**” The reward of service is apportioned according to fidelity to opportunity.

In the case of the unfaithful servant:

- First his life was exposed;
- Secondly, his talent was recalled;
- Thirdly and finally, he himself was cast out.

With those broad, rough outlines of the three parables upon our mind, let us notice what they teach concerning the threefold responsibility of the Church.

Within her own borders the Church is to be a great household of mutual ministry.

Is it possible to say a thing like that without having the heart saddened?

- The faithful servant is the one who cares for and feeds the other servants.
- The evil servant is the one who ill treats and beats his fellow servants.

In her own personal life the Church is to maintain an attitude of loyalty, of love to the Lord.

- Her loyalty is to be tested by that very love;
- Her love is to be tested by her loyalty in the small things.

How many of us have set our faces toward the East, and sing the song of His coming?

But what is our attitude toward it?

If we merely sing of it, and in our heart there are other loves, other desires, other aspirations, so that we neglect whatever may be typified by the oil; if we neglect attention to the details, the waiting of loyalty, then we are failing. But if indeed the lamps be trimmed and burning, and the oil be carried, then there is meaning in the song, and love for our Lord is demonstrated and proven.

The Church is responsible for the Master's work - He has committed to us His goods.

There are many figures of the Christian life, but this is one which combines the commercial and imperial ideas.

“**His goods;**” the things which He would have us represent to the age, He has committed to us, the things of His Kingdom.

All the light of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew flashes here; all the truth which culminated in that eighth and final parable in which our Lord said a scribe instructed to the Kingdom of heaven brings forth things new and old out of his treasures.

What are the things? The goods of the absent Lord.

- His revelation of God and of man;
- His provision for man's great need;
- His perpetual call;
- His mediation;
- His dynamic for paralyzed souls.

We all have some of them committed to us; talents, five, two, one, according to our ability, and His choice; and these talents become our deposit. The mind reverts to the Pauline word, “**I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep.**” What? “**That which I have committed unto Him.**”

That is by no means necessarily the apostolic meaning. What, then? Hear Paul's own word, “**That which I have committed unto Him**” which may mean that which He had committed to Paul, and I think that the context proves that is what he did mean.

That charge which He has given to us; that charge which made Paul say, I am debtor, I have something committed to me from the absent Master, with which I am to trade for Him; He is able to guard.

The Church has committed to her the goods of the absent Lord. What is she doing with them?

Notice, finally, in each case that the Church's responsibility is defined by her relation to her Lord.

True to the absent Lord, the household is at peace. Waiting for the absent Lord, the lamps are burning, and individual character is what it should be.

Working for the absent Lord, His goods are increased, and the five gain five, and the two, two.

So that whether it be the Church as a household, whether it be the Church in her individual membership, whether it be the Church as the great army carrying out His enterprise, everything depends upon her relationship to Him.

Thus we may turn the lessons of these parables back upon our own hearts, as each inquires, Oh soul of mine, what is thy relationship to thy Lord? If I am true to Him, I shall spend no time beating my fellow servants! If I am true to Him I shall be more careful that I have oil for the long vigil, than about anything else. If I am true to Him I dare not hide His talent, but must trade with it, that I may have wherewith to greet Him when He comes.

~ end of chapter 65 ~

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