

THE DIVIDING PROPHET

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Followers of Jesus are to live expectantly, faithfully, and compassionately as they await His return and His coming kingdom.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 25

+ **SETTING:**

In His last week on earth before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus's disciples, sitting privately with Jesus, asked when He was coming back at the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). The disciples understood and believed that Jesus had to go away, but they also knew that He would one day return to restore all things. Jesus answered them with parables—fictional stories used to convey moral and spiritual truth—to explain that no one knows the time or hour, but it was still necessary for them to prepare for His return and work to build His kingdom while they waited.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 25:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:1-9

NOTES

The phrase “If you stay ready, you ain’t gotta get ready” is the mantra for free agents in the NBA, the WNBA, and the NFL. For a free agent professional athlete, the difference between getting signed by a team and remaining a free agent is their ability to pass a conditioning test. So even when they are not on a team, they train as if they are so that if their number gets called, they are able to jump right into whatever organization wants to sign them.

In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins, or bridesmaids, who awaited the return of the groom to the wedding feast. Their job was to usher the groom using their lamps to show the way if it had become dark. The only problem was five of the bridesmaids weren’t prepared for the potential of a delay. As the bride and groom approached their feast, those bridesmaids realized they didn’t have enough oil and must go and buy more oil, thus missing their opportunity to join the celebration.

Jesus divided the bridesmaids into two categories, the wise and the foolish, based on their preparation. Jesus’s encouragement to us from this parable is that we would be wise to be ready for His return. Like the bridegroom bringing his bride to the feast, the question wasn’t if they were coming but when.

What are signs of someone today acting like the foolish bridesmaids in the parable?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 25:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:10-13

NOTES

Have you ever put yourself in a situation where you were waiting for someone or something and realized that you came completely unprepared? Maybe you were at your child's soccer game and were waiting for him or her to get put into the game, but you left your phone in the car. While you were headed back to get your phone, your child entered the game; so not only did you not get to record it, but you also didn't get to see it yourself. Maybe you were on your way to meet someone important but you forgot to get gas, so you had to stop on the way. In the short time that it took you to get your gas, you missed your window of opportunity to meet the person you had been waiting a long time to see. Being prepared for different possibilities in life is a very important and wise thing that could stop you from missing something you've been waiting for.

Learning from the mistake of the bridesmaids in the parable who were unprepared and missed their opportunity to welcome the bridegroom to the wedding feast, we would be wise to be prepared for the return of Jesus. We don't know when He will return, but we do know that He is returning. Our best act of preparation is to pursue a relationship with God and live under the authority of His Word.

What are some things that we can do to stay prepared for Jesus's return?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 25:14-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:14-23

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #72:

JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Ephesians 2:10). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

In the parable of the talents, Jesus compared His return to a man going on a journey. Before he went on his journey, he gave to each of his servants talents based on their ability. Talents were the highest currency in Rome, and one talent was worth about two decades worth of work. The purpose of his giving his servants the talents was for them to continue building his kingdom (household) while he was gone. Upon his return, the first two servants returned to the master double the amount of money he had given them. Because of their proven stewardship, the master not only praises them but gives them more to steward.

God gives to each of us based on the ability He's given us. What we do with what we are given validates what we believe about God. God's desire is to give us an inheritance in the kingdom He is preparing for us as we are justified through faith in the saving work of Jesus. The guarantee of that inheritance doesn't mean that we sit still as we wait. No, in our waiting, we prepare for the return of Jesus by seeking to grow the kingdom by stewarding the opportunities to advance the gospel where we are.

What are some ways that you can intentionally seek to grow the kingdom today?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 25:14-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:24-30

NOTES

Imagine being a kid and playing outside with your friends. One of your friend's small dog gets loose and begins to run straight for you. You immediately become afraid and respond by running in the other direction. Unbeknownst to you, the little dog just wants to play with you. You aren't in any real danger, but you don't know the dog, so you don't understand the dog's intentions. Your response is not just a response of fear, it is also a response to what you believe to be true about the dog—mainly, that he wants to viciously attack and eat you.

The third servant in the parable of the talents was faithless and fearful of his master. He was given a great deal of responsibility, which was to continue to build his master's kingdom while he was away. He showed what he truly believed about the master by disobeying the command to invest the master's money. The servant ultimately proved himself to be unworthy of both his master's investment and his master's household, and he was cast away.

What we do with what God has given us proves what we believe about God. God calls us to steward all that we have for the sake of His kingdom because, ultimately, all that we have belongs to God. What we choose to do or not do proves whether or not we belong in God's kingdom. Our work cannot earn our way into heaven, but our work validates that we belong.

What can you do to align your actions with your beliefs about who God is and what He calls you to do?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is."¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 25:31-46

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:34-40

NOTES

Jim Elliot once quoted George Whitfield in a letter to his wife, saying, “Remember, ‘you are immortal until your work is done.’ But don’t let the sands of time get into the eyes of your vision to reach those who still sit in darkness.”² As those who will be placed on Jesus’s right when He returns and is sitting on His throne, we believers are set to receive an inheritance from God that cannot be taken away from us. But the reality of the inheritance can’t stop us from pursuing the mission of Jesus in the world around us.

God has placed all of us where we are on purpose for a purpose. Ultimately, that purpose is to advance the kingdom of God using our God-given gifts to serve the church and those around us. A compassionate heart for believers should be something like a reflex. A reflex is an automatic action in response to something. Even though we as individuals can’t help everyone, every time we show compassion and serve those in need, we join in with the church at large in taking the gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation. Our salvation being secure shouldn’t cause us to be complacent, it should spur us to bold acts of compassion as we seek to share and show the gospel to a watching world.

How can you join in with the church at large in showing compassion to those in need today?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Jesus divides the wise and the fools (Matthew 25:1-4,13).

In God's kingdom, Jesus will one day return like a groom on his wedding day, and His people need to be expectant of it, prepared, and ready.



From Day 2: **What are some things that we can do to stay prepared for Jesus's return?**

KEY DOCTRINE #72: JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

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How do good works verify genuine faith and make our justification evident to others?

POINT 2: Jesus divides the diligent and the faithless (Matthew 25:24-30).

Our actions reflect our belief about God, and our belief should include God being all-powerful and sovereign with a desire to build His kingdom. We can either participate in that effort or detract from it.



How are our actions a direct reflection of our understanding of God's character?

We are blessed in order to advance the kingdom, but for those who reject this privilege, judgment will come.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Watchfulness is required, lest Christ come to take the church for his bride at the least expected moment, when some of those waiting are seeking the praise of others."³

—Augustine (354–430)



How can we be diligent in God's work, knowing that our faith should be displayed in our service to the King and His kingdom?

POINT 3: Jesus divides the compassionate and the indifferent (Matthew 25:31-40).

When Jesus returns, He will divide those who inherit the kingdom and those who don't based on their true faith in Christ as seen through their compassionate works on earth.



How does the reality that the kingdom is an inheritance challenge the idea of earning salvation through good works?

When believers show love, service, and compassion for those in need, we show our true faith in Jesus and shall have entrance into the kingdom.



What are examples of serving "the least of these"?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know the exceeding value of God's kingdom, we urgently proclaim the gospel to the world so that others might be brought into the kingdom as well.

- **HEAD:** What would your current works say of your current faith?
- **HEART:** How can we praise God for allowing us to partner with Him in building His kingdom?
- **HANDS:** How can we steward our gifts for the growth of God's kingdom?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"True religion is a habitual recollection of God and intention to serve him; and this turns everything into gold. We are apt to suppose that we need something splendid to evince our devotion, but true devotion equals things: washing plates and cleaning shoes is a high office, if performed in a right spirit."⁴

—John Newton (1725–1807)