

Parables of Regarding the Return of Jesus
Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21

Introduction

Dog waiting for Amy to come home

A. The Context

1. The immediate context of the parables we will be looking at today is the Olivet Discourse which is recorded most extensively in Matthew 24:1-25:46 (but also recorded in lesser detail in Mark 13 and Luke 21)
2. However, there are some things we need to note that took place before this:
 - a. All of this takes place in the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion so it's the last week of His earthly life
 - b. It occurs after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and after the opposition by the religious leaders had come to a head
 - c. This led Jesus to pronounce judgment upon the scribes and Pharisees in what is called the seven woes which are recorded in Matthew 23
 - d. This pronouncement of judgement ended with Jesus declaring what we read in Matthew 23:32-39 (READ)
 - e. What Jesus did here was three-fold:
 - 1) He prophesied the judgment and desolation that was to come upon Israel and its religious system and leaders
 - 2) He declared a new era of prophets, wise men and scribes that would proclaim the Gospel and shepherd God's people
 - 3) And He foreshadowed His return when Israel would ultimately welcome Him as Lord
3. After this, the discussion turned more specifically to Jesus' return and the end of the age:
 - a. Right after Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple for the last time, the disciples were marveling over the construction of the temple with its beautiful stones and marvelous buildings:
 - b. Jesus replied by prophesying the destruction of the temple (READ 24:2)
 - c. This no doubt caught the disciples by surprise, so a short time later, when they arrived at a limestone summit just east of the city called the Mount of Olives, they asked Jesus about it (READ 24:3):
 - 1) It's often assumed that when they used the phrase "these things" in v. 3, that they were only referring to the temple since Jesus used the phrase in v. 2
 - 2) However, in the conversation that immediately proceeded this one Jesus pronounced judgement against the religious leaders and declared that **"all these things would come upon this generation"**, which was referring to all the judgments against Israel and the religious leaders (READ 23:36)
 - 3) When you compare Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's account it's clear that the disciples made a correlation between the destruction of the temple, Jesus' return, and the end of the age
 - 4) It's also likely they understood the judgment against Israel and the religious leaders would take place at the same time as those events

- d. The disciples wanted to know primarily two things, and they are related:
 - 1) The first question was, When will these things occur?
 - a. Jesus didn't answer this question directly
 - b. The closest He came was what He said in Matthew 24:34, but there truly isn't a consensus on exactly what He meant by this statement:
 - There are those who take this statement in such a woodenly literal way that they claim everything Jesus prophesied in the Olivet Discourse already came true in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem
 - They even believe this included the literal or figurative return of Jesus
 - The proper term for this is preterism
 - c. The problem with this is that Jesus said no one except God the Father knew when these things would or will take place (READ 24:26): so, He couldn't have known they would occur within the current generation
 - d. My approach to interpreting "these things" is that throughout the context of chapters 23-25, what's included in the phrase "these things" changes (sometimes being more limited than others) so "all these things" doesn't necessarily mean the sum of each and every thing Jesus described
 - 2) The second question was, What will be the signs of your coming and the end of the age?
 - a. Jesus spent the bulk of the Olivet Discourse answering this question and lists a series of signs and events that will coincide with His second coming and the end of the age
 - b. These signs and events parallel Old Testament prophecies, including what the prophet Daniel prophesied, and what occurs in the book of Revelation
 - 3) It's not our purpose to flesh all this out here this morning, but it lays the groundwork and sets the context for the parables Jesus spoke to conclude the Olivet Discourse
 - 4) While the disciples wanted to know the when and the how of Jesus' return, Jesus wanted them to focus on being ready for His return

B. The Parables

1. Two of the parables stress EXPECTANCY:
 - a. The first is the Parable of the Fig Tree (READ Matthew 24:32-42):
 - 1) One sure indicator that summer was right around the corner in the ANE was the leaves beginning to appear on the fig trees
 - 2) Just like plants do here, new branches and leaves would begin to appear in early Spring, and by late Spring the trees would be full of mature leaves and tiny figs would begin to appear
 - 3) So, when the farmer saw the tree full of leaves and tiny figs appear, he knew it would only be a short time before Summer would arrive and he could harvest the first figs of the season
 - b. The second parable Jesus told was the Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief (READ Matthew 24:43-44):

- 1) Most homes in the ANE were not fortified with locked doors and windows like ours are today, and they certainly didn't have SimpliSafe or Brinks alarm systems to protect them
 - 2) So, you can imagine trying to protect one's home from a break in was a bit more challenging than it is today
 - 3) Either way, though, whether it was back then or today, it would certainly be a HUGE help to know when a thief was coming because it would allow us to be on the alert and prevent a break in
- c. What these two parables have in common is expectancy, and Jesus used them to encourage His disciples to be ready for His return by expecting it:
- 1) In the first, the farmer was ready to harvest figs because he expected summer to be right around the corner
 - 2) In the second, the homeowner was ready for the thief because he expected him to come at a certain time
2. Two of the parables stress FAITHFULNESS:
- a. The Parable of the Two Kinds of Servants (READ Matthew 24:45-51):
- 1) This parable describes a master who goes on a journey and puts one of his slaves in charge of caring for his household (e.g. family, other servants, etc.) and then describes two different kinds of slaves
 - 2) The first kind of slave is a **"faithful and sensible (or wise) slave"** (25:45-47):
 - a) This slave is faithful and sensible because he takes his newfound responsibilities seriously and does exactly what is expected of him
 - b) As a result, when his master returns, he will reward him by giving him even more responsibility and put him in charge of all his possessions
 - 3) The second kind of slave is an **"evil slave"** (25:48-51):
 - a) This slave is evil because he doesn't believe his master will return for a long time and doesn't take his newfound responsibilities seriously
 - b) Instead of caring for his master's household, he goes on a bender, beating his fellow slaves, eating and drinking with a bunch of drunks
 - c) As a result, when his master returns unexpectedly, he will face what can only be described as the wrath of his master (RE-READ 25:51):
 - Jesus often used hyperbole in His parables, and this is hyperbole on steroids
 - He obviously wasn't endorsing dismembering anyone, but was stressing the serious consequences of having such disdain for his master and the responsibilities given to him as a servant
- b. The Parable of the Talents (Jump down and READ Matthew 25:13-30):
- 1) Like the previous parable, this one also involves a man who went on a journey, but this one divided his wealth up among three slaves:
 - a) He gave one slave 5 talents, another 2 talents, and the last one a single talent
 - b) There's no consensus on exactly how much a talent would be worth today but in Jesus' day it was the equivalent of a day's wage for the average worker (the exact worth isn't important; it was just a LOT of money)

- 2) Jesus described the master as giving to each slave **“according to his own ability”** which means his expectations for each slave were reasonable—he didn’t expect any more or less than what each slave was capable of
 - 3) The first two slaves had faithfully invested their portion of their master’s wealth, doubled what he had entrusted to them, and provided him with a healthy profit—Jesus called them **“good and faithful”** slaves
 - 4) However, the third slave did nothing with his talent except bury it in the ground; he didn’t even put it in the bank where it could earn interest—in contrast to the first two **“good and faithful”** slaves, he was unfaithful, **“wicked”** and **“lazy”**
 - 5) As a result, because the first two slaves were faithful with a few things, they were rewarded by being put in charge of many things, but the unfaithful third slave was stripped of his talent, called a **“worthless slave”** and was cast out of his master’s house
- c. What these two parables have in common is FAITHFULNESS:
- 1) The slaves in each parable were given responsibilities by their master
 - 2) The slaves who took those responsibilities seriously and demonstrated their faithfulness, they were rewarded for it
 - 3) The slaves who didn’t, were stripped of whatever responsibilities they had been given and were punished severely
3. The final parable, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, stresses the importance of being ready for Jesus’ return with PREPAREDNESS (READ 25:1-12):
- a. In Jesus’ day, weddings generally began in the evening when the groom and his attendants would go to the home of the bride and accompany her and her bridesmaids back to his parents’ home for the ceremony
 - b. Because this all took place in the evening, the bridesmaids would take along lamps, and in this parable five of the bridesmaids were wise because they prepared by taking extra oil for their lamps; the other five were foolish because they didn’t prepare by taking extra oil
 - c. As a result, when their oil ran out and they went to purchase more, they missed the arrival of the groom and only the five bridesmaids who were ready and prepared were able to accompany him and the bride to the wedding
 - d. The five foolish bridesmaids were locked out because when they arrived the door had already been shut and they were denied entrance by the groom
 - e. There’s obviously a lot we could glean from this parable but the overall theme is that of PREPAREDNESS—some of the bridesmaids were prepared for when the groom arrived, while others were not

C. The Lessons and Takeaways

1. As I’ve laid out, there are three primary themes Jesus was emphasizing with these five parables and they all relate to what it means for us to be ready for Jesus’ return
2. To be ready for Jesus’ return we must be EXPECTANT:
 - a. In John 14:2-3, Jesus promised that He would come again and take us to be with Him: **“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”**
 - b. A few verses later (14:18), He promised His disciples, **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”**

- c. After He ascended into heaven in Acts 1:11, the angel promised the disciples He would return in the same manner in which He ascended
 - d. Hebrews 9:27-28 says, **“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”**
 - e. This is why James reminded his readers, **“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near”** (James 5:7-8)
 - f. As Christians, we need to be ready by waiting EXPECTANTLY for Jesus to return
3. To be ready for Jesus’ return we must be FAITHFUL:
- a. The Bible is filled with general calls to remain faithful, especially in regard to persecution:
 - 1) In Matthew 10:22 Jesus warned His disciples, **“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”**
 - 2) In the book of Revelation, He warned the church in Smyrna in the midst of their persecution and suffering, **“Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10)
 - 3) To the church at Sardis, He first warned them about their sin and the need to repent, and then said, **“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown”** (Revelation 3:11)
 - b. However, there is another kind of faithfulness in the Bible and it has to do with fulfilling the mission for which Christ has left us here:
 - 1) Two of the parables Jesus told involved masters entrusting their work to their servants and expecting them to faithfully execute their new found responsibilities—the first master expected the servant to care for his household and the second expected his servants to manage his wealth
 - 2) In both of these parables, the master represents Jesus, the servants represent us as His disciples, and the work to be done—managing the household and growing the masters wealth—represent the Great Commission
 - 3) Probably the greatest example of faithfulness in this mission is the Apostle Paul who gave up everything in order to be found faithful in the mission Christ gave to Him (READ 2 Timothy 4:6-8)
4. Finally, to be ready for Jesus’ return we must be PREPARED to meet Him:
- a. Multiple times in these five parables Jesus warned His disciples to be on alert because they wouldn’t know the day or hour of His return
 - b. The disciples began their questioning of Jesus mostly concerned with the when, but what’s more important than when He comes is whether or not we will be prepared when He does
 - c. Titus 2:11-15: **“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. 15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”**

