



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 25

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Introduction

Chapter Main Points:

- The importance of being prepared and productive
- The basis upon which nations will be judged



An Overview

- Jesus continued His discourse on the Mount of Olives with two parables illustrating the need to be prepared and productive:
 - (1) the wise and foolish virgins (1-13)
 - (2) the talents (14-30)
- He concluded by predicting His judgment of the nations on how they treated His brethren (31-46)

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- An additional exhortation to watchfulness in consequence of the day and hour of the end being unknown, but it is also another "kingdom of heaven" parable
- The third question asked by the disciples, (Mt 24:3), was about the end of the world
- This whole chapter is an answer
- The future tense is used
- In most of the parables of the kingdom the present is used, because they describe its earthly features
- This, however, portrays the closing events, the judgment, the closing of the heavenly gates

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The whole imagery of the parable is drawn from Eastern marriage custom
- The betrothal, which took place some time before the marriage, was a kind of solemn marriage contract
- When the time for the celebration of the marriage came, the bridegroom came to the house of the bride and brought her by night to his own house
- The virgin bridesmaids awaited his coming and attended the bride to the marriage feast

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- *Ten virgins*, signifying all mankind
- Virgins - Denoting the purity of the Christian doctrine and character
- In the Christian tradition Christ is the Bridegroom
- His Church is His faithful and virginal Bride (Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; and Rev 21:2,9; 22:17)
- The condition of the Church at the End of the World shall be like the condition of the ten virgins described in the parable
- In the parable, all the virgins have oil lamps which they must keep burning as they await the coming of the Bridegroom

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The wise, or prudent, are those who truly enjoy the purity and holiness of their religion
- Foolish virgins are those who only profess the purity and holiness of their religion
- The foolish had oil in their lamps when they started, but had no oil to refill them
- They started out, apparently, all right, but did not hold out

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The wise not only let their light shine (Mt 5:16), but at the same time kept the grace renewed that was essential to the continuance of their light
- The oil is the grace and salvation of God, or that faith which works by love
- The vessel is the heart in which this oil is contained
- The lamp is the profession of enjoying the burning and shining light of the Gospel of Christ

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The flames of the oil lamps probably represent the spiritual light of the Holy Spirit giving life to the Church
- Jesus said "I came to cast fire upon the earth and would that it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49)
- On Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit possessed the New Covenant community praying in the Upper Room in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4)
- St. Paul warns Christians "do not quench the Spirit" 1 Thessalonians 5:19

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- St. Gregory teaches, that by the *lamps*, faith is meant; and by the *light*, good works
- He concludes that the bad, although they have lamps, i.e. faith, that is no less than the good, will be excluded
- Because their lamps are out, i.e. their faith is dead, without charity and good works to enlighten them
- St. Augustine also declares, that these lighted lamps are good works, works of mercy which shine forth before men

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- He also teaches that this oil is a right inward intention, directing all our works to the greater glory of God, and not to the praise of ourselves in the sight of men
- The foolish virgins had a little oil in their lamps at first, sufficient to shine before men, by some little external manifestation of piety, or certain works done through fear, profit, or human respects
- But had made no provision of oil in their vessels, i.e. in their hearts and conscience, no provision of solid piety and charity, by means of which they might, like the prudent virgins, produce good works to salvation

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The quality that made the difference between the virgins in this parable was the anticipated wisdom on the part of the wise virgins, Matthew 7:21-27
- Sleep is frequently used in the sacred writings for death
- In the parable the bridegroom is delayed in his coming
- This delay is similar to the delay of the return of the Master in the parable of the two servants and is a reminder that we do not know when Christ, our Bridegroom, will return

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- It is said He will come at midnight; when least expected
- We will all have to rise again at the sound of the last trumpet, to meet our judge
- They trimmed the lamps by removing the burnt parts of the linen or the torch, so that they would burn clear
- It was needful, also, to dip them again in oil, or to pour oil upon them
- This represents the conduct of most people at the approach of death

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- They then begin to get ready
- They are alarmed, anxious, and trembling, and then they ask the aid of others, but often when it is forever too late
- The wise virgins will have their oil ready and their lamps trimmed and burning and soon prepare themselves to give in their accounts to their Lord
- The foolish, having made no provision of the oil of good works, are compelled to seek it at the time they are to be judged

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- *For our lamps are gone out*, Thus too many trusting to their faith alone, and leading a lukewarm and unconcern life, are negligent in preparing themselves by good works for the coming of the bridegroom
- They apply to their prudent companions for aid at this crisis
- They recognize now the superior wisdom of the others, and would seek their assistance to hide their own deficiencies
- We see here a terrible warning against delay in the matter of the soul, or against trusting to a death bed repentance
- The wise cannot impart their oil

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- Nothing can make up for not being ready at the last moment
- *Go rather to those who sell*, The wise virgins do not advise the foolish to go and buy, but rebuke them for the poor store of good works they have laid up
- They had before only sought the praises of men in their good actions, and therefore are answered by the wise: "go now to those to whom you have given all your actions; go and see what their praises will avail, what peace of conscience they can give you: and, if they have praised you, and made you esteemed in the eyes of men, see if they can do the same before God." (St. Augustine)

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- It is evident that they were once lighted
- They had once hearts illuminated and warmed by faith and love
- However, they had backslidden from the salvation of God
- Now they are excluded from heaven because, through their carelessness, they have let the light that was in them become darkness, and have not applied in time for a fresh supply of the salvation of God
- There was a time when they might have been helpful to each other
- But that time is now past for ever - none has a particle of grace to spare, not even to help the soul of the dearest relative!

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- After the final day of judgment, there will be no room for prayers and good works (St. Jerome)
- What a miserable thing it is, not to discover the emptiness of one's heart of all that is good, till it is too late to make any successful application for relief!
- Those who are prepared are those who have the faith that works by love in their hearts, and their lives are adorned with all the fruits of the Spirit
- The door was shut - dreadful and fatal words! No hope remains

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- Nothing but death can shut this door; but death may surprise us in our sins, and then despair is our only portion
- The great matter is to be in time
- Like the door of the Ark that closed at the coming of the flood, the door to the Kingdom of Heaven will be closed to those who do not prepare for the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride the Church
- The wedding guest of the parable of Wedding Feast was not also prepared Matthew 22:11-14

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- Jesus gave a warning in Matthew 7:21-23 that is repeated in this parable which is not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" will enter the gates of heaven but only those who do the will of God the Father
- In this present state of grace we have the comforting injunction, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" in the day of retribution the door is shut, and no knocking will uncloset its forbidden entrance
- The word "know" is often used in the sense of approving, loving, acknowledging as real friends and followers, Matthew 7:23; Psalm 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:12

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- It means, “I do not know or acknowledge you as Christians. I do not approve of you, or delight in you, or admit that you are my friends”
- We may always keep watching to our hearts by faith, hope, charity, and all other good works, St. Augustine
- *Watch, therefore*, This is the scope or design of the whole parable
- This is the great truth that Christ wished to repeat, and all parts of the parable are to be interpreted in reference to this reproach
- The warning that has been given throughout His discourse is repeated once again "be prepared and be vigilant because you do not know the day or hour when Christ will come for the Church as a whole and for you as an individual

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



The parable in general:

- The Bridegroom is the Son of man
- The time of the marriage is the coming to judgment
- The wait is the long and unknown period between His ascension and His return
- The virgins represent the waiting church
- The wise virgins represent those church members who are always ready and whose lights are shining

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)



- The oil in their vessels is the means by which their light is supplied
- The foolish virgins are church members who have become cold and lifeless
- The midnight cry is the trump of judgment
- The cry for oil is an attempt to be prepared in the face of judgment
- The shut door is a declaration that such repentance is too late to be of benefit
- The great lesson is to be always in a state of readiness

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- Jesus subjoins another instructive parable of the ten talents so His apostles and all men might learn how they ought to watch, and to prepare for the last day
- The "man" in the parable is referred to as *kyrios*, "Lord" ten times in verses 18, 19, 20, 21 (twice), 22, 23 (twice), 24 and 26
- *man travelling into a far country*, is Christ ascending up to heaven, who, when He ascended up on high gave gifts unto men, Ephesians 4:8
- The talent amounts in the parable represent an enormous amount of money in the ancient world

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- God is generous in giving spiritual gifts to His children, and like the man in the parable, He calibrates those spiritual gifts according to the abilities of the disciple/servant
- We can do no good of ourselves, but only by means of God's grace
- He requires our co-operation
- The servants could only make use of the talents given them to gain others
- The proportion of gifts is different in each; however, the same fidelity is required of all
- Both he who received five and he who received only two talents, received an equal reward of entering into the joy of our Lord

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- He who receives much, must make proportionate improvement; and, from him who has received little, the improvement only of that little will be required
- The servants had nothing - deserved nothing - had no claim on their master, yet he, in his Kindness, delivers unto them his goods, not for his advantage, but for their comfort and salvation
- He gave to each according to the power he had to improve what was given
- It would not be just to make a servant responsible for what he is naturally incapable of managing; and it would not be proper to give more than could be improved

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- *Traded with them*, Literally was busy
- The fact that the capital was doubled implies that the trading was both active and prosperous
- The work was speedily begun
- As soon as the master gave the talents and departed, so soon they began to labor
- There is not a moment to be lost - every moment has its grace
- The second servant made an equally good use of his smaller capital
- It matters not whether our endowments are large or little, we have to use them all in the Lord's service, (Lk 12:48)

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- It was a common thing to hide treasure in the earth
- The servant's only care was to hold on to what he had
- See the ingratitude of this servant
- His master gave him a talent, capable of being improved to his own present and eternal advantage; but he insult the mercy of his lord
- Rather than exert himself to improve what he has received, he goes and hides it
- The man who hid this one talent, represents all those who, having received any good quality, whether mental or corporal, employ it only on earthly things, (St. Gregory)
- *After a long time*, Another hint that the second coming of Christ would be long delayed

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- The one who received five talents and the one who received two talents were ready to give in a joyful account when their master came and called for them
- They come without delay; they expected his coming; and it was with an eye to this that they continued their labor - they endured as seeing him who is invisible
- They come without fear; the master before whom they appear has always loved them, and given them the fullest proofs of his affection for them: his love to them has begotten in them love to him; and their obedience to his orders sprung from the love they bore to him

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- He that loves me, says Jesus, will keep my words
- They render up their accounts without confusion; he who received five brought five others; and he who had received two brought two more: nothing was to be done when their master called; all their business was fully prepared
- They gave up every thing to their master, without attempting to appropriate any thing
- Their ability was his, the talents his, and the continued power to improve them, his
- All is of God, and all must be returned to Him

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- They receive praise
- What a glorious thing to have God's approval
- They were good, pure and upright within - faithful, using to God's glory the blessings He had given them
- They receive gracious promises
- They receive Glory
- As they were partakers of His nature on earth, they will be sharers of His glory in heaven
- The joy shall be their eternal reward
- Suffering, even the most prolonged and cruel martyrdom, will be nothing in comparison of this abundant eternal joy

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- The failed servant admitted that he knew what God required for those in covenant with Him, but he neglected his spiritual gifts, making the excuse that if he buried the gift he believed he couldn't fail
- *there you have what is yours*, he again acknowledges, that the gifts he had were not his own, but his master's
- Who denies the grace of obedience, and thus wishes to reap where he has not sown
- He had kept them as he had received them
- There was the full sum he was entrusted with

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- He hoped no more would be required
- But it is not sufficient to retain what is given
- It must be made use of and improved; for every spiritual gift is given to profit with
- Besides, there seems to be a degree of rudeness in these words
- He does not bring the talent with him, and return it, but only signifies that he had hid it in the earth, in such a place, and "there" it was, where his Lord might take it, and have it again, if he pleased

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- Many sinners accuse God of being the cause of their idleness
- God, in their view, is hard, cruel, and unjust
- Whose service is extremely hard, and who adopts, rejects, and reward whom He pleases
- Who distribute heavier burdens than the weak nature of man can endure
- The design of this part of the parable is to show that no one is excused for neglecting his duty because he has few talents
- God will require of him only according to his ability, 2 Corinthians 8:12

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- The wickedness of the servant is demonstrated, not only his unfaithfulness, but by his false and malicious excuses
- The failed servant knew the scope of God's call to salvation but ignored his obligation to help with the harvest
- If the lord was so exacting as he supposed, he ought at least to have put his money to use with the money brokers that it might have earned something
- It was given to him for a special purpose; he had not carried this out; therefore it could be his no longer

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- God's Spirit will not always strive with man
- There comes a time when, if willfully resisted and not exercised, it ceases to inspire and to influence
- Well may we pray, "*Take not thy Holy Spirit from us!*"
- The parable of the Ten Virgins said nothing about their working while they waited
- This parable sets forth that side of the duties of the servants in their master's absence, and so completes the former parable

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- Jesus/the Master promises that those who use their spiritual gifts to serve the Church and to advance the Kingdom will receive more gifts to enrich their lives in the service of God
- While those who neglect their spiritual gifts will lose what they were initially given
- God never requires of men more than He has enabled them to perform
- All those who neglect to do good are punished with the greatest severity
- Let no one suffer his talent to lie uncultivated

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- *Weeping and gnashing of teeth* is a term that St. Matthew has used a few times (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13, 24:51 25:30)
- The expression clearly describes the frustration and anguish felt by those souls who have been, through their own sins, excluded from the Master's joy in the Kingdom of Heaven
- Compare and contrast the failed servant's fate to the fate of the faithful servants
- Jesus concludes these parables with a description of that awful day which is to succeed the final judgment, and which will steadfastly fix our dwelling either in eternal happiness, or in eternal misery

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



The spiritual meaning of the parable may be summed up

1. The servants of God are not all gifted with equal talents
2. All, whatever may be their ability, are bound to employ their talents in promoting His honor, and in a proper improvement of them
3. They will be judged according to the improvements which they have made
4. All sinners look on God as a hard master, and as unreasonable and oppressive

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



5. People will be judged not merely for "doing wrong, but for neglecting to do right."
6. If the servant who kept the talent entire without injuring it, and who returned it to his master as he received it, was nevertheless judged, condemned, and cast away, what must they expect who abuse their talents, destroy by drunkenness and lust the noble abilities bestowed on them, and waste the property that might be employed in advancing the interests of morals and religion

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)



- If the careless virgin, and the unprofitable servant, against whom no obvious iniquity is charged, be punished with an outer darkness, with a hell of fire; of what kind of punishment must he be judged worthy, who is a murderer, an adulterer, a fornicator, a blasphemer, a thief, a liar, or in any respect an open violator of the laws of God?

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- Jesus concludes His homily with a vision of the Last Judgment when the Son of Man judges all the people of every nation on the earth
- This is the same vision the prophet Daniel witnessed, Daniel 7:13-14
- At the end of time, Christ will return in glory as He has promised
- His return will signal the resurrection of the dead that will be followed by the Last Judgment
- This is the event St. John described, John 5:28-29
- *The throne of his glory*, For an account of the great white throne upon which sat the divine Judge from whose face heaven and earth fled away, Revelation 20:11

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The two classes have been mingled on the earth; every nation, country, town and city has had its wicked as well as righteous; indeed, even into the church the bad have sneaked in, but now they are separated forever
- Elsewhere the shepherd's work is the symbol of protective, self-sacrificing love, and, as such, our Lord had emphatically claimed for Himself the title of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:14)
- Here we are reminded that even the shepherd has at times to execute the sentence of judgment which involves separation

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The “right” hand and the “left” are used, according to the laws of what we might almost call a natural symbolism, as indicating respectively good and evil, acceptance and rejection
- "*the sheep*" are the righteous
- The name is given to them because the sheep is an emblem of innocence and harmlessness, John 10:7,14-16,27; Ps 100:3; 74:1; 23:1-6
- *On His right*, denotes the situation of those who are honored, or those who are righteous, Ecclesiastics 10:2; Ephesians 1:20; Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:25,33

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- Goats, which are naturally difficult, lustfulness, and excessively ill-scented, were considered as the symbols of rebellious, profane, and impure men
- They here represent all who have lived and died in their sins, Ezekiel 34:17, and Zechariah 10:3
- *The left*, That is, the left hand
- This was the place of dishonor, denoting condemnation Ecclesiastics 10:2
- The King is Christ

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- This is the only time that He applies the title to Himself, though He speaks of His kingdom and declares He came into the world to be a king
- The Lord Jesus, the King of Zion and of the universe, now acting as Judge, Luke 19:38; John 18:37; Revelation 17:14;19:16
- At judgment His kingly majesty will be acknowledged by all the universe
- The blessed are now to enter on an inheritance
- On earth they were heirs and joint-heirs with Christ

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The kingdom of glory is designed for those who have received the blessing of the Father, and were holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners
- If we truly love Jesus, we will express the love we have for Him by acts of compassion to those in need of love and compassion
- Jesus identifies with the poor and the oppressed and makes the Christian's outpouring of active love toward those who suffer a condition for entering His Kingdom
- These works of mercy, says St. Augustine, prevail towards life everlasting, and to the blotting out of former sins

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- By setting forth to all the world the good works of His faithful servants, the Sovereign Judge silences the murmurs of the wicked, who might otherwise object that it was not in their power to do good
- The conduct of the wise virgins was the condemnation of the foolish ones
- The diligence of the faithful servant was the condemnation of the laziness and drunkenness of the idle one

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The zeal of the servants who multiplied the talents entrusted to them was a condemnation of him that hid his talent in the ground
- It should be noted that the duties named are such duties as every one can perform
- Chrysostom says: He said not I was sick and ye healed me; or in prison and ye set me free; but ye visited me and came unto me."

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- This answer is indicative of humility and a deep sense of their being unworthy such commendation
- They will feel that their poor acts of kindness have come so far short of what they should have been that they have no claim to praise or reward
- Every thing which is done to a follower of Christ, whether it be good or evil, he considers as done to Himself, Matthew 25:40; Acts 9:4, 5; Hebrews 6:10
- Christ identifies Himself with His Church, as in His words to Saul, “*Why are you persecuting Me?*” (Acts 9:4)

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The saved are the righteous, or those whose sins have been washed away by Christ
- They are those who have lived and acted in the name of Christ, or have been obedient to His will
- They have been full of the love of Christ and have faithfully ministered to the distressed
- The love of Christ implies love of the brethren, and of all mankind

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- When Christ pronounces the sentence of the wicked, He speaks in a widely different manner than the way He invited the just to His heavenly Kingdom
- He calls it an everlasting fire, prepared not for them, but for the devils and wicked spirits, their collaborators
- They have chosen to cast themselves into it; they must therefore look upon themselves as the authors of all their miseries and sufferings, (St. Chrysostom)
- Those who have turned away from Him shall be turned away from Him forever

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The punishment is everlasting exile from His presence (2 Thess 1:9)
- The reasons of this awful fate are given
- They certainly believed, but they attended not to good works
- Their faith was a dead faith
- A faith not working by charity could not bring them to heaven
- The judgment of the wicked is pronounced, not for what they have done, but what they neglected to do

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- Again, Christ assures us that a man who is hungry, thirsty, naked, etc., is His representative, and that whatever we do to such a one He will consider as done to Himself
- He will be just when He judges and righteous when He punishes
- Some are of opinion that this punishment shall have an end
- However, these things are certain
- A separation between the righteous and the wicked takes place at judgment
- The righteous inherit the kingdom; the wicked depart into everlasting fire

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations (25:31-46)



- The state of the righteous is life eternal; the state of the wicked is everlasting punishment
- The duration of these two states is the same, exactly the same Greek word being used in each case (aionios)
- Then if the state of punishment has an end, so has the life
- According to human laws, we see forgery and other crimes punished by death, which is in some measure an eternal exclusion from society
- The will of the sinner is such, that he would sin eternally if he could; it is an eternal God, a God of infinite majesty, who is offended



Conclusion

- If the Bridegroom is Christ, who are the virgins in the parable, what do the oil lamps represent, and where is the wedding feast?
- What is the comparison between the virgins in the parable?
- What warning did Jesus give in Matthew 7:21-23 that is repeated in this parable?
- In the parable of the talents who is the man and what is his journey? Who are his servants, what do the talents represent and when does the "master" return?



Conclusion

- What was the excuse of the failed servant and what was his punishment? Compare and contrast the failed servant's fate to the fate of the faithful servants
- Who are the sheep and who are the goats?
- Why does Jesus say that by serving others as they do, they serve (or fail to serve) Jesus himself?
- How faithful have you been over what God has given you to work with? How might you be hiding your talent?