

Two Parables

Matthew 24:45 - 25:13

We come this afternoon to two parables, which are a very common and useful teaching tool that Jesus used so well. We've been studying a difficult topic for the past several sermons, difficult in the sense of the reality of several differing interpretation and various ways to understand what Jesus is teaching about his second coming. And difficult because it is not easy to always distinguish between Jesus references to the completion of his first coming and the inauguration of his second coming.

As I have sought to explain in weeks' past, I believe much of these answers Jesus gives to his disciples' questions have reference to that which would come about in that very generation, namely the complete and total destruction of Jerusalem which, according to historical records, took place in 70 AD at the hands of the Roman armies. And yet, that judgment upon the Old Testament nation of Israel is itself a picture of what will come at the very end of this age, when Jesus returns a second time in judgment and glory.

So we read and studied,

v.34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

So remember what those original questions were. Jesus laments the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the nation of Israel, judged for their rejection of him and condemned to destruction. The end of chapter 23.

23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your

house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"

Jesus then followed up with these much more specific words, 24:1 "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

That declaration, of course, immediately raised two obvious question. When? And, what will be the sign? Their question seems to imply that they expected the destruction of Jerusalem itself to be the end of the age, so they asked,

24:3 "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Those are the questions we've been studying these past weeks, and the answer of when is, first of all, soon. Within this generation. And it will be awful.

24:21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

Jesus, however, even when addressing the issue of when, the timing of all this, remains unwilling to give a specific answer.

24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

He explains his reasons for unwillingness to give them a date.
24:44 “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

That’s were we come to today, beginning at verse 45. And today the message is simple. I don’t really have anything new or profound to teach you today, in terms of doctrine or even explanation. Rather, built upon all that we have studied, Jesus gives us that one extended but very profound application for our lives. “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

I doubt that’s new for any of you at this point, I doubt that is new information or a new explanation of something that you have quite understood before. But, I also doubt that any of us, any of us, myself certainly included, is fully prepared in the ways that Jesus tells us to be. In other words, in a sense, this whole sermon is one extended application for our lives. And Jesus gives us that application, that exhortation, in the form of these two parables.

So let me begin with an emphasis of,

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES.

I will often say that the key to understanding and interpreting parables is to realize that they typically focus upon one main idea, one central meaning or teaching. Thus you can’t force every detail of a parable to have some specific significance or meaning. All the details are intended to reinforce that one main idea. And the story that makes up the parable is a story intended to present that main idea in a clear, simple and direct manner. And that is its power! That’s certainly the power of these two parables, the power of a grand exhortation that should govern and control your whole life. And that exhortation is expressed as a story that

everyone can easily understand.

So what is the main point here, in these parables. Remember those questions Jesus has been answering, verse 3, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” These two parables express Jesus’ answer. First,

A. We must recognize that Jesus’ coming is both imminent and uncertain.

That’s what I have been saying. It is imminent. It is coming, soon. With that initial focus upon Jerusalem, it’s coming in that very generation of his disciples living on earth. It is imminent, as a birth is imminent when a woman begins the experience of labor pains. It is coming, next on the agenda, so to speak. It’s the next great event in human history.

And the signs are evident as well, especially the sign of tribulation. And we looked at the parable of the fig tree,

v.32 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!”

But it is also uncertain.

v.36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Everything will go on, just as it always has, until that time.

v.37 “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the

Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.”

That’s Jesus’ answer, as we will see in further detail with the two parables before us this afternoon. With a second point already obvious, that...

B. We must always be prepared for Jesus’ coming.

That’s what these parables will show us.

v.42 “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming...44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

So that’s the purpose of the parables. And although I expect that there is nothing new in any that, although I am not expecting to teach you anything new today, still I want the freshness of these parables to be an adequate challenge and application for you that you might gain the benefit of Jesus’ use of these parables in the message he has for his disciples, including us here today. So, let’s look at the parable of the...

II. TWO SERVANTS.

v.45-47

Again, simple story. A steward was the servant responsible to manage his master’s household. Faithfulness was his duty, faithfulness to pursue to profit and wellbeing of the master. And the most trusted servant, a slave, would be elevated to this most respected and honored position. And we still use the word today, stewardship. It means you are called to manage that which belongs to someone else, and manage it well for his benefit, not your own.

What Jesus emphasizes is plain.

A. The blessing and reward of consistent faithfulness.

v.46 “Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.”

That is a frequent and consistent blessing proclaimed plainly. Blessed are you when you are found to be a faithful steward! That blessing ought to be always in your mind, along with the reward, expressed in the language of the parable,

v.47

We will see this again in chapter 25,

Mat. 25:23 “His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

The language of the book of Revelation brings this same thought to the forefront,

Rev. 2:10 “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

We even see this language of reward in,
James 1:2 “

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

The point of that emphasis is to keep this goal before you, always, throughout your life here on earth. That is the perspective to which we are called, the purpose of life, namely faithfulness as a steward in the household of God. Faithfulness and diligence in attending to the duties and responsibilities of serving the master

of the household, namely God. Let that be your encouragement, and your challenge, in everything that you do.

And hear the warning,

B. A warning to those who live without reference to Jesus' coming.

v.48-50

Here is how this becomes so penetrating in application for us. This story, this parable, has the ability to make each of us realize that, at the very least, we fell that temptation. And sometimes, though we might not admit it with our words, sometimes, that is the pattern of which we, too, are guilty. The story has a way of penetrating our hearts in ways that a direct exhortation might not.

The story is so easy to identify with. We think in our hearts, "I have time...time to enjoy myself for a little while. Time to eat and get drunk. I've got time to straighten things out, but for now, I'm going to enjoy myself.

Again, few of us might have sufficient humility to admit that simply with the proclamation of words, but the story makes us feel our own temptations more easily. If you know your own heart, you likely understand this temptation even more than you might easily admit. But reality comes quickly to mind.

v.50 "...the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of."

That brings about this point, that,

C. Judgment will come to those who are unprepared for Jesus' coming.

It is a severe warning.

v.51

Cutting in two was the curse of the covenant in the Old Covenant, the cutting of the animals representing the curse of death upon the covenant breaker. Cutting in two refers to the sentence of death. And if you think you can live your life without preparation for Jesus to return, then you will not be prepared for that judgment either. No words could more grievously describe that eternal punishment than these, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Again, later in chapter 25,

v.30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That is a familiar curse, for example,

Mat. 13:40 "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. 41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Mat. 13:49 "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, 50 and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

You know those things, but let this parable bring those thoughts home to you in a helpful way today. As you look at those two services, the wise and the foolish, let the example and the challenge of the wise servant stand out in your heart.

v.46 "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

Then the second parable, the ten virgins. I'm calling it simply

the parable of the...

III. WEDDING ATTENDANTS.

25:1-10

Think wedding party. Wedding reception is what we usually call it today. The customs would be a little bit different here. The ten virgins were those who might correspond to the wedding party of day, referring to those unmarried ones. And the point before is that those attendants should be ready when the bridegroom arrives. Exactly who these girls are is not laid out for us in the parable. Bridesmaids, perhaps, waiting for the wedding ceremony itself. Or perhaps simply daughters of the friends and neighbors of the bride. Whoever, exactly, they would be, their purpose is to meet the bridegroom as he comes to the ceremony to be married to his bride. Whoever they are, their purpose is clear in the text. They were to be ready and prepared when the bridegroom comes to being the wedding.

And so we see,

A. The wisdom of preparation for Jesus' coming.

v.4 "...the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

They were ready.

v.6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps."

They had oil to light the lamps, and thus they were prepared to do the very thing that was required of them. Obviously, the beginning of the wedding wasn't as precisely timed as it might ordinarily be done today, so they just had to wait until he came. They had to wait until the time was right. And they had to be ready and prepared, whenever that time might come.

Again, nothing really new there for us, I think. But what a simple, straightforward challenge as a picture of the whole of your life. The wedding is going to start anytime, the bridegroom is arriving at any time, and you are the bridesmaid needing to be ready whenever the wedding will begin. That's the perspective with which you are called to live out your days upon this earth!

Again, with a pointed reminder regarding,

B. The consequences of careless foolishness.

We read this about the foolish wedding attendants,
v.3

Foolish, because the lamp was useless without any oil to burn! Then it gets even worse, their carelessness is even more fully demonstrated.

v.5

So when the time came, when the bridegroom was about to arrive, the result was very predictable.

v.8-10

As with the first parable, we see so very clearly,

C. The condemnation of the foolish.

v.10 "The door was shut..."

They were locked out of the wedding altogether. And that condemnation is emphasized in,

v.11-12

What a terrible expression of God's judgment upon unbelievers. "I do not know you!"

Do you remember Jesus' words in,

Mat. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Similarly,

Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from,’ 26 then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ 27 But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.”

Such a horrible condemnation to those who are unprepared. It’s too late. Once the door is shut, the time has ended. There is no second chance. “When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from.”

Thus all of this, both of these parables and the bulk of these chapters near the end of Matthew’s gospel all have one great theme and purpose.

D. A call to be alert and on guard.

v.13

Let me end all of this with the words of the apostle Paul, teaching the church at Thessalonica the very same lesson. And notice how Paul takes this warning of impending judgment upon the wicked and uses it as gentle but direct pastoral application for the people of God.

1 Thes. 5:1 “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”