



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Lesson 17 – Study Questions

Matthew 24:45-51; 25:1-46

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 24:45-51

NOTE: Today's lesson begins with the parable of The Faithful or Unfaithful Servant. Pope Francis speaks of this parable with this warning: "The parables of the Lord...push us to "be ready" for his coming. Prepare yourself as the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time." (Matt 24:45)

1. This is the first of three "vigilance" parables (the next two in chapter 25). Record the definition of "vigilance" and comment on how this definition applies in Christian life.

2. Identify the symbolic "characters" in this parable by who or what you think they represent:

The Master-

The Faithful Servant-

The Unfaithful Servant-

NOTE: This parable is considered among those which are apocalyptic in nature (the "coming" of the Son of Man is literally his Parousia). Remember that God had made a covenant with Israel. Before establishing them in the Promised Land, he put before them blessings if they would obey, curses if they would not. He has sent his emissaries time and time again to warn them of the consequences of continued disobedience. Now, the time of his Parousia is "coming." *Cavins and Christmyer*

3. How does the master recommend that people occupy themselves while they wait for his return?

4. What words in this parable would indicate to you that Matthew may have meant this to be directed to the religious leadership of his time?

5. CONNECTION: Jesus' parable about two ways of behaving while awaiting the delayed return of the "master" can apply to us as we too await Jesus' coming. To be vigilant does not mean that we should focus on the "when will it happen;" rather, we must be faithful in living Jesus' commands, particularly in service to others. How does the admonition of Jesus to be watchful apply to how you live your life?

Read and record Mark 13:33 and write a prayer asking for the strength and discipline to remain vigilant.

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 25:1-13

NOTE: As chapter 25 begins, Jesus continues to instruct his followers about what they should do while awaiting his coming. Matthew begins with the parable of the ten maidens, which "reflects a Jewish custom in which the bridegroom brings his bride home at the head of a procession that ends with a weeklong celebratory banquet." *Cavins and Christmyer*

6. After reading the parable, describe why some of the virgins are admitted and some are not.

7. From the Commentary, page 124, what would the light in this parable represent?

NOTE: This parable occurs only in Matthew; it is tied to the larger context by the themes of delay, division within a group, prudence, and being prepared for an arrival. In the preceding parable, the evil servant realized his master would be delayed; unfortunately, the realization led to his failure to be responsible and watchful. Here, on the contrary, five of the virgins do not reckon with the possibility of a delay, and their failure to anticipate the delay leads to their lack of preparedness. *Meier*

8. Matthew uses the word that represents "wisdom" rather than "intelligence." What do you see as the difference between intelligence and wisdom?

9. If we consider this parable as an allegory of the Parousia of Christ (see definition of Parousia in Lesson 16), "the bridegroom is Christ, the ten maidens are the Christian community waiting for Christ, the delay of the bridegroom is the postponement of the Parousia, his sudden coming is the unexpected arrival of the Parousia, and the rejection of the foolish maidens is the last judgment." (*Sacra Pagina*) Who or what would the foolish virgins represent?

NOTE: The Hebrew bible witnesses to a tradition of identifying God as the bridegroom of Israel (see Isaiah 54:5 or Jeremiah 31:32); however, in the New Testament Jesus appears as the bridegroom. *Sacra Pagina*

10. CONNECTION: Applying wisdom or acting foolishly are parts of decision making. In our daily life, even in how we plan for the future, we make decisions that directly affect our lives. Describe what you think could be an example of a day-to-day spiritually “wise” decision or a spiritually “foolish” decision. If you described a “foolish” decision, what might be done to change or correct it?

Read Ephesians 5:15-17 and write a prayer today asking the Holy Spirit to guide you in your daily decisions.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 25:14-30

THINK: Today’s lesson begins with the third Parousia-parable dealing with what we should do while awaiting the Son of Man’s second coming. Our Commentary provides a unique perspective. Other scholars interpret this parable in a more traditional way, making us “think about the relationship between how we use the gifts we have received from God and his return, when he will ask us what use we made of them...” (*Pope Francis*) Consider reading this parable with both interpretations and see what message most speaks to you.

11. In the Parable of the Talents we see ordinary servants reacting to the responsibilities given them. Two of them thought about what the master would want and gained interest; one simply hid away the talent given to him. What was the outcome for each?

The servant who was given 5 talents

The servant who was given 2 talents

The servant who was give 1 talent

NOTE: “Talents” in the parable refers to a large sum of money. Because of the metaphorical use of the word in this parable, “talent” gained in modern languages the further meaning of “native ability” an idea which is expressed in verse 15 ...the point of the parable is the need for total commitment, fidelity, and sacrifice in the face of delay and then stringent judgment. *Meier*

12. Considering the kind of “talents” Israel and the Jewish leadership had been given, how had they effectively buried them?

13. If we read this parable in light of how “Christians, especially Christian leaders, are to spend the time of watchfulness before the end,” (*Meier*) share an example of good works from a Christian leader who makes the best use of his or her “talents.”

14. All our talents, all our gifts, flow from God. This is emphasized at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer in Mass. Record what the priest says when he holds up the Body and Blood of Christ at the end of the Eucharistic prayer.

15. CONNECTION: “Come, share your master’s joy,” is the response to the servants who put his possessions to good use. Take a moment to consider the “talents” you have been given. Choose one and speak about how you have “invested” it.

Read and record Hebrews 13:16 and pray today to be a good and faithful servant, so that you too may be judged righteous to enter the kingdom of God.

DAY FOUR **Rad Matthew 25:31-40**

16. Rather than with a parable, today’s lesson begins with an amazing declaration that uses some parabolic images and addresses how Christ will exercise his just rule when he comes. Complete verses 31-32.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory,

he will sit upon his glorious throne,

And he will separate them one from another,

He will place the sheep on his right

17. The words “judgment” and “justice” are used frequently. Look up one of the definitions and then comment on what you think it means as it applies in your Christian journey.

18. Even though Matthew uses the parabolic elements of a shepherd and his flock, there is no doubt that the divine status of the Son of Man is emphasized. What specific words from the verses you completed in Question 16 above make this divine status very clear?

19. Why were those on his right blessed and those on his left cursed?

NOTE: Sorting out the sheep from the goats may simply be that it will be as easy for Jesus to sort out individuals at the judgment as it is for a shepherd to sort out sheep from goats in his flock. Goats were not bad and sheep good; both were useful and valued...but if a shepherd needed to separate his sheep from his goats, it was easy to do so. *Martin*

20. CONNECTION: In verses 35-40 Matthew lists some of the things we should be doing, and to whom we should be doing them, in order to be considered blessed in the final judgment. And the “righteous will be astonished that in caring for the needs of the sufferers they were ministering to the Lord himself.” (*NABRE*) Has there been a time when you were astonished or surprised that in caring for one of the “least of my brothers” you felt truly close to the Lord?

Saints, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, have been able to see Jesus in the poor and dying. Read and record Hebrews 13:2 and begin your prayer today asking the Lord to help you, like Saint Mother Teresa, to see Jesus in those we serve.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 25:41-46

NOTE: Michelangelo painted “The Final Judgment” for the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. After 4 years of work, it was completed in 1521. It is a depiction of the final and eternal judgment by God of all humanity. The dead rise and descend to their fates, as judged by Christ... In the lower part of the fresco, Michelangelo followed tradition in showing the saved ascending at Christ’s right hand and the damned descending to his left. Above, the inhabitants of Heaven are joined by the newly saved.

21. As the basis for Michelangelo’s fresco, in verse 41 “the king” sends those on his left to the eternal fire. What do you find unusual about this verse?

NOTE: The Old Testament does not speak of an eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels but belief in such punishment developed shortly before the time of Jesus.

22. Jesus explained to the banished why he is sending them away, presenting their actions as the reverse of those of the blessed. What words indicate that the banished were surprised?

23. Verse 44 is the fourth mention of those who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill, or in prison (see verses 35-36, 37-39, 42-43). What does this repetition indicate to you?

24. Jesus ends this teaching regarding the final judgment with a dire statement regarding those who fail to care for others in need, saying that “these will go off to eternal punishment.” Most of us have had, or may have, a time when we felt the need to impart a “dire warning” to someone close to us. How would you prepare for this spiritually and emotionally?

25. CONNECTION: One of the Spiritual Works of Mercy is to “admonish the sinner.” To admonish the sinner seems to run contrary to Jesus’ own guidance to not be judgmental (Matthew 7:1-2). We know that we should be accepting of others. Jesus loved people, but he did not accept their sins. How can you show that you love the sinner and still help them to recognize and begin to address their sin?

Read and record 2 Timothy 4:2 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

FINAL THOUGHT for the WEEK

Per the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1830), “the moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” One of those seven gifts is “wisdom.” Share some thoughts on how and where you can apply more “wisdom” in your daily interactions with others.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

Read pages 122-127 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

