

# Matthew 25

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon on Matthew 25 emphasizes the importance of individual preparedness and faithfulness in service during Christ's absence, culminating in the final judgment of nations upon His return.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:1

**Topics:** "Readiness for Christ's Return", "Individual Responsibility in Faith"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the individual responsibility of believers during Christ's absence, using the parable of the ten virgins to illustrate the necessity of being prepared with oil for their lamps. He explains that while all the virgins went out to meet the Bridegroom, only those with oil were admitted to the wedding feast, highlighting the importance of genuine faith and readiness. The sermon also discusses the parable of the talents, where the faithful servants are rewarded based on their understanding and trust in their Master. Darby warns against complacency, noting that even the faithful can fall asleep and forget the Lord's return, but they must remain vigilant and faithful in their service. Ultimately, he concludes with the assurance that those who have received the message of Christ will be judged favorably, while those who reject it face eternal punishment.

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## Transcript

Professors, during the Lord's absence, are here presented as virgins, who went out to meet the Bridegroom, and light Him to the house. In this passage He is not the Bridegroom of the church. No others go to meet Him for His marriage with the church in heaven. The bride does not appear in this parable. Had she been introduced, it would have been Jerusalem on earth. The assembly is not seen in these chapters as such.

It is here individual [See Footnote #70] responsibility during the absence of Christ. That which characterised the faithful at this period was that they came out from the world, from Judaism, from everything, even religion connected with the world, to go and meet the coming Lord. The Jewish remnant, on the contrary, wait for Him in the place where they are. If this expectation were real, the characteristic of one governed by it would be the thought of that which was necessary for the coming One-the light, the oil. Otherwise, to be the companions of professors meanwhile, and to carry lamps with them, would satisfy the heart. Nevertheless they all took a position; they go out, they leave the house to go out and meet the Bridegroom. He tarries. This also has taken place. They all fall asleep. The whole professing church has lost the thought of the Lord's return-even the faithful who have the Spirit. They must also have gone in

again somewhere to sleep at ease-a place of rest for the flesh. But at midnight, unexpectedly, the cry is raised, "Behold, the bridegroom; go ye out to meet him." Alas! they needed the same call as at first. They must again go out to meet Him. The virgins rise, and trim their lamps. There is time enough between the midnight cry and the Bridegroom's arrival to prove the condition of each. There were some who had no oil in their vessels. Their lamps were going out. [See Footnote #71] The wise had oil. It was impossible for them to share it with the others. Those only who possessed it went in with the Bridegroom to take part in the marriage. He refused to acknowledge the others. What business had they there? The virgins were to give light with their lamps. They had not done it. Why should they share the feast? They had failed in that which gave this place. What title had they to be at the feast The virgins of the feast were virgins who accompanied the Bridegroom. These had not done so. They were not admitted. But even the faithful ones had forgotten the coming of Christ. They fell asleep. But, at least, they possessed the essential thing that corresponded to it. The grace of the Bridegroom causes the cry to be raised which proclaims His arrival. It awakens them: they have oil in their vessels; and the delay, which occasions the lamps of the unfaithful to go out, gives the faithful time to be ready and at their place; and forgetful as they may have been, they go in with the Bridegroom to the wedding feast [See Footnote #72]

We pass now from state of soul to service.

For in truth (v. 14) it is as a man who had gone away from his home-for the Lord dwelt in Israel-and who commits his goods to his own servants, and then departs. Here, we have the principles that characterise faithful servants, or the contrary. It is not now the personal individual expectation, and the possession of the oil, requisite for a place in the Lord's glorious train; neither is it the public and general position of those who were in the Master's service, characterised as position and as a whole, and therefore represented by a single servant; it is individual faithfulness in the service, as before in the expectation of the Bridegroom. The Master on His return will reckon with each one. Now what was their position? What was the principle that would produce faithfulness? Observe, first of all, that it is not providential gifts, earthly possessions, that are meant. These are not the "goods that Jesus committed to His servants when He went away. They were gifts which fitted them to labour in His service while He was absent. The Master was sovereign and wise. He gave differently to each, and to each according to his capacity. Each was fitted for the service in which he was employed, and the gifts needed for its fulfilment were bestowed on him. Faithfulness to perform it was the only thing in question. That which distinguished the faithful from the unfaithful was confidence in their Master. They had sufficient confidence in His well-known character, in His goodness, His love, to labour without being authorised in any other manner than by their knowledge of His personal character, and by the intelligence which that confidence and that knowledge produced. Of what use to give them sums of money, except to trade with them? Had He failed in wisdom when He bestowed these gifts? The devotedness that flowed from knowledge of their Master counted upon the love of Him whom they knew. They laboured, and they were rewarded. This is the true character, and the spring, of service in the church. It is this that the third servant lacked. He did not know his Master-he did not trust in Him. He could not even do that which was consistent with his own thoughts. He waited for some authorisation which would be a security against the character his heart falsely gave his Master. Those who knew their Master's character entered into His joy.

There is this difference between the parable here and that in Luke 19, that in the latter each man receives one pound; his responsibility is the only question. And consequently he who gained ten pounds is set over ten cities. Here the sovereignty and the wisdom of God are concerned, and he who labours is guided by the knowledge he has of his Master; and the counsels of God in grace are accomplished. He who has the

most receives yet more. At the same time the reward is more general. He who has gained two talents, and he who has gained five, enter alike into the joy of the Lord whom they have served. They have known Him in His true character, they enter into His full joy. The Lord grant it unto us!

There is more than this in the second parable-that of the virgins. It refers more directly and more exclusively to the heavenly character of Christians. It is not the assembly, properly so called, as a body; but the faithful have gone out to meet the Bridegroom, who was returning to the marriage. At the time of His return to execute judgment, the kingdom of heaven will assume the character of persons come out from the world, and still more from Judaism-from all that, in point of religion, belongs to the flesh-from all established worldly form-to have to do with the coming Lord alone, and to go out to meet Him. This was the character of the faithful from the beginning, as having part in the kingdom of heaven, if they had understood the position in which they were placed by the Lord's rejection. The virgins, it is true, had gone in again; and this falsified their character; but the midnight cry brought them back into their true place. Therefore they go in with the Bridegroom, and there is no question of judging and rewarding, but of being with Him. In the first parable, and in that of Luke, the subject is His return to earth, and individual recompense-the results, in the kingdom, of their conduct during the King's absence. [See Footnote #73] Service and its results are not the subject in the parable of the virgins. Those who have no oil do not go in at all. This is enough. The others have blessing in common; they go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage. There is no question of particular reward, nor of difference in conduct between them. It was the heart's expectation, though grace had to bring them back into it. Whatever the place of service might have been, the reward was sure. This parable applies and is limited to the heavenly portion of the kingdom as such. It is a similitude of the kingdom of heaven.

We may also remark here, that the delay of the Master is noticed in the third parable likewise-"after a long time" (v. 19). Their faithfulness and their constancy were thus put to the test. May the Lord give unto us to be found faithful and devoted, now in the end of the ages, that He may say unto us, "Good and faithful servants!" It is worthy of remark that in these parables those who are in service, or go out at first, are the same as those found at the end. The Lord would not hold out the supposition of delay beyond "we who are alive and remain." [See Footnote #74]

Weeping and gnashing of teeth are his portion who has not known his Master, who has outraged Him by the thoughts he entertained of His character.

In verse 31 the prophetic history is resumed from verse 31 of chapter 24. There we saw the Son of man appear like a flash of lightning, and afterwards gather together the remnant of Israel from the four corners of the earth. But this is not all. If He thus appears in a manner as sudden as unexpected, He also establishes His throne of judgment and glory on the earth. If He destroys His enemies whom He finds in rebellion against Himself, He also sits upon His throne to judge all nations. This is the judgment on earth of the living. Four different parties are here found together; the Lord, the Son of man Himself-the brethren-the sheep-and the goats. I believe the brethren here to be Jews, His disciples as Jews, whom He had employed as His messengers, to preach the kingdom during His absence. The gospel of the kingdom was to be preached as a testimony to all nations; and then the end of the age should come. At the time here spoken of, this has been done. The result should be manifested before the throne of the Son of man on earth.

He calls these messengers therefore His brethren. He had told them they should be ill-treated: they had been so. Still there were some who had received their testimony.

Now such was His affection for His faithful servants, so highly did He value them, that He judged those to whom the testimony was sent according to the manner in which they had received these messengers, whether well or ill, as though it had been done to Himself. What an encouragement for His witnesses during that time of trouble, tried as their faith should be in service! At the same time it was justice morally to those who were judged; for they had rejected the testimony by whomsoever it was rendered. We have also the result of their conduct, both the one and the other. It is the King-for this is the character Christ has now taken on earth-who pronounces judgment; and He calls the sheep (those who had received the messengers, and had sympathised with them in their afflictions and persecutions) to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; for such had been the purpose of God with respect to this earth. He had always the kingdom in view. They were the blessed of His (the King's) Father. It was not children who understood their own relation with their Father; but they were the receivers of blessing from the Father of the King of this world. Moreover they were to enter into everlasting life; for such was the power, through grace, of the word which they had received into their heart. Possessed of everlasting life, they should be blessed in a world that was blessed also.

They who had despised the testimony and those that bore it, had despised the King who sent them; they should go away into everlasting punishment.

Thus the whole effect of Christ's coming, with regard to the kingdom and to His messengers during His absence, is unfolded: with respect to the Jews, as far as verse 31 of chapter 24; with respect to His servants during His absence, to the end of verse 30 of chapter 25, including the kingdom of heaven in its present condition, and the heavenly rewards that shall be given; and then, from verse 31 to the end of chapter 25, with respect to the nations who shall be blessed on the earth at His return.

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#### Footnotes for Matthew 25

70: The servant in chapter 24 is collective responsibility.

71: The word rather signifies torches. With them they had, or should have had, oil in vessels to feed the flame.

72: And note here, the waking up is by the cry; it wakes up all. There IS enough to rouse all professors to needed activity; but the effect of this is to put them to the test, and separate them. It was not the time of getting oil or supplies of grace to those already professors; conversion is not the subject of the parable. The question of getting oil is only I doubt now, to shew it was not the time of doing so.

73: In that of the talents in Matthew, we get indeed the ruling over many things, the kingdom, but it is more full through the expression, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord; and the blessing is conferred on all alike who were faithful in service, great or small.

74: So in the churches in Revelation, He takes existing churches, though I doubt not it is a complete history of the church.

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