

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 25

by John Wesley

John Wesley's sermon explores the themes of spiritual preparedness, the use of God-given talents, and the eternal consequences of our actions in light of the final judgment.

Scripture: Matthew 25:1

Topics: "Active Faith", "Preparedness"

Description

John Wesley expounds on Matthew 25, emphasizing the importance of being prepared for the coming of the Lord, as illustrated by the parable of the ten virgins. He warns that mere harmlessness is not enough for salvation, as seen in the parable of the talents, where the unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness for failing to use his gifts. Wesley highlights that faith must be active and accompanied by love, urging believers to be vigilant and productive in their spiritual lives. He concludes with a powerful reminder of the final judgment, where the righteous will inherit eternal life while the wicked face everlasting punishment. This sermon serves as a call to action for all to actively live out their faith in service to others.

Transcript

XXV. This chapter contains the last public discourse which our Lord uttered before he was offered up. He had before frequently declared what would be the portion of all the workers of iniquity. But what will become of those who do no harm? Honest, inoffensive, good sort of people? We have here a clear and full answer to this important question. 1. Then shall the kingdom of heaven - That is, the candidates for it, be like ten virgins - The bridemaids on the wedding night were wont to go to the house where the bride was, with burning lamps or torches in their hands, to wait for the bride groom's coming. When he drew near, they went to meet him with their lamps, and to conduct him to the bride.

Verse 3. The foolish took no oil with them - No more than kept them burning just for the present. None to supply their future want, to recruit their lamp's decay. The lamp is faith. A lamp and oil with it, is faith working by love.

Verse 4. The wise took oil in their vessels - Love in their hearts. And they daily sought a fresh supply of spiritual strength, till their faith was made perfect.

Verse 5. While the bridegroom delayed - That is, before they were called to attend him, they all slumbered and slept - Were easy and quiet, the wise enjoying a true, the foolish a false peace.

Verse 6. At midnight - In an hour quite unthought of.

Verse 7. They trimmed their lamps - They examined themselves and prepared to meet their God.

Verse 8. Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out - Our faith is dead. What a time to discover this! Whether it mean the time of death, or of judgment. Unto which of the saints wilt thou then turn? Who can help thee at such a season?

Verse 9. But the wise answered, Lest there be not enough for us and you! - Beginning the sentence with a beautiful abruptness; such as showed their surprise at the state of those poor wretches, who had so long received them, as well as their own souls. Lest there be not enough - It is sure there is not; for no man has more than holiness enough for himself. Go ye rather to them that sell - Without money and without price: that is, to God, to Christ. And buy - If ye can. O no! The time is past and returns no more!

Verse 13. Watch therefore - He that watches has not only a burning lamp, but likewise oil in his vessel. And even when he sleepeth, his heart waketh. He is quiet; but not secure.

Verse 14. Our Lord proceeds by a parable still plainer (if that can be) to declare the final reward of a harmless man. May God give all such in this their day, ears to hear and hearts to understand it! The kingdom of heaven - That is, the King of heaven, Christ. Mark 13:34; Luke 19:12.

Verse 15. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one - And who knows whether (all circumstances considered) there be a greater disproportion than this, in the talents of those who have received the most, and those who have received the fewest? According to his own ability - The words may be translated more literally, according to his own mighty power. And immediately took his journey - To heaven.

Verse 18. He that had received one - Made his having fewer talents than others a pretence for not improving any. Went and hid his master's money - Reader, art thou doing the same? Art thou hiding the talent God hath lent thee?

Verse 24. I knew thou art a hard man - No. Thou knowest him not. He never knew God, who thinks him a hard master. Reaping where thou hast not sown - That is, requiring more of us than thou hast given us power to perform. So does every obstinate sinner, in one kind or other, lay the blame of his own sins on God.

Verse 25. And I was afraid - Lest if I had improved my talent, I should have had the more to answer for. So from this fear, one will not learn to read, another will not hear sermons!

Verse 26. Thou knewest - That I require impossibilities! This is not an allowing, but a strong denial of the charge.

Verse 27. Thou oughtest therefore - On that very account, on thy own supposition, to have improved my talent, as far as was possible.

Verse 29. To every one that hath shall he given - So close does God keep to this stated rule, from the beginning to the end of the world. Matthew 13:12.

Verse 30. Cast ye the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness - For what? what had he done? It is true he had not done good. But neither is he charged with doing any harm. Why, for this reason, for barely

doing no harm, he is consigned to outer darkness. He is pronounced a wicked, because he was a slothful, an unprofitable servant. So mere harmlessness, on which many build their hope of salvation, was the cause of his damnation! There shall be the weeping - Of the careless thoughtless sinner; and the gnashing of teeth - Of the proud and stubborn. The same great truth, that there is no such thing as negative goodness, is in this chapter shown three times: 1. In the parable of the virgins; 2. In the still plainer parable of the servants, who had received the talents; and 3. In a direct unparabolical declaration of the manner wherein our Lord will proceed at the last day. The several parts of each of these exactly answers each other, only each rises above the preceding.

Verse 31. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him - With what majesty and grandeur does our Lord here speak of himself Giving us one of the noblest instances of the true sublime. Indeed not many descriptions in the sacred writings themselves seem to equal this. Methinks we can hardly read it without imagining ourselves before the awful tribunal it describes.

Verse 34. Inherit the kingdom - Purchased by my blood, for all who have believed in me with the faith which wrought by love. Prepared for you - On purpose for you. May it not be probably inferred from hence, that man was not created merely to fill up the places of the fallen angels?

Verse 35. I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink - All these works of outward mercy suppose faith and love, and must needs be accompanied with works of spiritual mercy. But works of this kind the Judge could not mention in the same manner. He could not say, I was in error, and ye recalled me to the truth; I was in sin, and ye brought me to repentance. In prison - Prisoners need to be visited above all others, as they are commonly solitary and forsaken by the rest of the world.

Verse 37. Then shall the righteous answer - It cannot be, that either the righteous or the wicked should answer in these very words. What we learn herefrom is, that neither of them have the same estimation of their own works as the Judge hath.

Verse 40. Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it to me - What encouragement is here to assist the household of faith? But let us likewise remember to do good to all men.

Verse 41. Depart into the everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels - Not originally for you: you are intruders into everlasting fire.

Verse 44. Then will they answer - So the endeavour to justify themselves, will remain with the wicked even to that day!

Verse 46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life everlasting - Either therefore the punishment is strictly eternal, or the reward is not: the very same expression being applied to the former as to the latter. The Judge will speak first to the righteous, in the audience of the wicked. The wicked shall then go away into everlasting fire, in the view of the righteous. Thus the damned shall see nothing of the everlasting life; but the just will see the punishment of the ungodly. It is not only particularly observable here, 1. That the punishment lasts as long as the reward; but, 2. That this punishment is so far from ceasing at the end of the world, that it does not begin till then.

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