

**THE TRIUMPH OF GOD IS PREPARED
FOR BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD
Matthew 25: 1-30**

Please review this week's catechism.

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when your hope in obtaining some future good determined or influenced how you lived in the present. (*It could be as simple as you planned to go to a movie on Saturday evening and so you made sure the house was clean Saturday afternoon and you hired a babysitter for the evening.*)

In Matthew 24 Jesus has described a future event that every human being is going to experience. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is going to come back to judge the living and the dead. The return of Jesus Christ, personally and visibly to this earth for the purpose of saving his people and punishing his enemies is the future event that every human being ought to be preparing for throughout the course of our lives. In the second half of chapter 24 and now in chapter 25 Jesus is aiming to convince us that we ought to live now as if we were going to heaven so that when he comes, we will go to heaven. In these thirty verses, there are at least four things that characterize all who plan to go to heaven. It is my hope that you will leave here with a dream of one day living with Jesus Christ forever and that you will live now as if that were your goal.

STUDY

1. V. 1 begins with “at that time the kingdom of God will be like...” and v. 14 says, “Again, it will be like...” What time is Jesus referring to? What is it that these two parables are describing? (see 24:30-31, 36-37, 42)

Jesus is using these two parables to describe what the kingdom of God will be like when he comes again to save his people and judge his

enemies. He is describing what will happen to humanity when he comes.

2. What is the setting of vv. 1-12?

A wedding is completely prepared. The wedding hall is decorated, the food is prepared, the wedding guests have assembled, there is just one thing missing: the groom. The bridegroom has not yet arrived and it's getting late in the day.

3. In vv. 1-12, what do all the “virgins” share in common?

10 young women are sent out of the wedding hall to await his arrival. The virgins take oil lamps with them. Their job is to greet the bridegroom and to return to the wedding hall as his escorts. Apparently, this sort of procession is a custom of Jewish weddings in Jesus' day. All intend to meet the bridegroom and to escort him to the place where the festivities are to be held. All have lamps. All are expecting the bridegroom to come before another day has arrived. None of them knows at what hour he will arrive. All are looking forward to the wedding feast. All fall asleep while they wait. All are awakened at midnight by the cry that the bridegroom is coming. All trim their lamps.

4. Jesus says five are wise and five are foolish. What do they do (or not do) that makes the distinction?

Five of these virgins are called wise, because they bring oil for their lamps. The other five women are called foolish because they did not bring any oil for their lamps. When they are startled awake at midnight by the announcement that the bridegroom is approaching, the five wise virgins fill up their lamps from the containers of oil they have with them. The five foolish virgins' lamps begin to sputter and then one by one they go out. They plead with the wise virgins to give them some of their oil but they do not have enough for themselves and for the foolish women as well. So the five foolish virgins run off to try and buy some oil at this late hour while the five wise virgins go out to greet and light the way for the coming bridegroom.

5. V. 13 is Jesus' application of the story, "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." What is it that the exclusion of the foolish virgins tells us? What does it mean to "keep watch" in this context? Or to say it another way, what does the absence of oil represent?

The wise virgins had what was necessary to greet the bridegroom when he came. The foolish virgins presumed they had all that they needed but in fact, they did not have what they needed to greet the bridegroom. When the announcement came that the bridegroom had arrived they suddenly realized they did not have what it took in order to greet him. What does the lack of oil correspond to in our lives? The main point seems to be the presumption of the foolish virgins. They presumed that because they wanted to greet the bridegroom, they were in the company of the wise virgins; they heard the cry of his approach that they would get to greet him. However, they lacked the most essential ingredient. They were unknown by the bridegroom. They did not have a true faith in Christ. They were counting on many external similarities but they were lacking the one essential thing. They were not born again by the Spirit of God and thus trusting in Christ's death and resurrection for them. Keeping watch means that we examine ourselves to be sure that we are in the faith and don't simply presume that because we go to church, agree with Christian doctrine, like hanging out with Christians that we are Christians. Am I known by God? Am I trusting in Christ? These are the main concerns of my life.

6. Are you prepared to "greet the bridegroom" right now? Are you confident that you have "oil" and that you are known by him?

7. According to vv. 14-18 what are some things that are true of every human being? (NOTE: One talent = 20 years wages. Five talents is approximately \$4 million, 2 talents ~ \$1.6 million and 1 talent ~ \$800,000.)

First, the point of using such vast quantities is to show us the privileged position of every human being. God has been enormously generous to each one of us. We're just slaves and yet we've been given so much. Second, the talents of silver do not represent our

abilities and gifts. The talents are given to each one according to their abilities and gifts. The talents of silver represent the length of our lives, our health, the opportunities we are given, where we live, who our parents are, our physical possessions and financial resources, in short all the circumstances of our lives. Third, everything we have comes from God. There is nothing that we possess that we own. God owns everything, even us. We are slaves. We don't deserve what we've been given and we didn't earn it. Everything is a gift. Fourth, we are not all given the same amount of time, health, resources and opportunities. God does not distribute his possessions evenly. They are his possessions, not ours. He has a right to do with them as he pleases and he is not pleased to give all of us the same amount. Finally, as you look at vv. 16-17, God gives us all of these things so that we will put his resources to work in order to earn a profit for him.

8. How do you view your life and possessions? Do you view yourself as simply a steward or do you view yourself as the owner?

9. What behavior distinguishes the first two slaves from the third slave?

The first two slaves went out and immediately got to work. They started businesses and used the resources they were given to increase the wealth of their master. Everything they had came from their master. None of it belonged to them and so they used all they were given in the service of their master. Their time and all the resources they were given were invested in increasing the property of their lord. Their business was their master's business. Then, when their master came back they gave him back 200% of what he had given them. Both of them doubled his investment. The third slave buried the master's money in a hole and used his time to pursue his own agenda. He only gave back to his master the money he had been given.

10. Compare and contrast the motivations of the first two slaves with the third slave. Why did each one do what they did?

How excited they must have been to present the fruit of their work to their master! All of their hard work and self-denial would have been a dim memory in light of their joyful presentation to their master of the

fruit of their labor. It makes me think of children who busily clean the house while their parents are away and eagerly welcome them home in order to show the sparkling results of their labor. It's like children who build and make things for their parents at Christmas and eagerly present their misshapen packages on Christmas morning. More eager for mom to open her gift from them than to open their own gifts. It is the offering of love. The ambition to honor one greater than yourself by presenting him with something you have done for the express purpose of honoring him, of showing him your affection. These slaves do not make their presentations as employees completing a project in order to get a paycheck and a bonus. These are the fruit of labor done in order to honor the master, not to bribe him to be good to them. They were so eager to be able to present to their master the fruit of their labor in order to honor him. They yearned to have him say "well done".

In v. 24 we discover how the third slave thought about his master. His view of his master was that he was an unjust despot, who could not be trusted. He believed that his master was like the worst of human dictators. He believed that his master would require a harvest from those to whom he did not supply seed and that he would expect a return from those to whom he never gave any money. In short, he doesn't trust the master. He doesn't love him. He doesn't view the resources he has been given and the responsibility with which he has been entrusted as a gift. He believes that any effort he made to please his master would not be duly rewarded. Serving the master was a fruitless endeavor and would gain him nothing, but only expose him to undeserved punishment. His problem is much deeper than what he says. He simply doesn't believe his master has any right to rule over him and he has no affection for his master. Notice that these wrong ideas about his master produced emotions. Because he thought wrongly and believed wrongly, he felt wrongly. This slave viewed his master, God, as a tyrant, therefore he was afraid and refused to invest all that he had been given to increase the glory and honor of the master. How could he find joy in increasing the glory of someone he believed to be a despot, whom he feared? No one can naturally work for the good of a person they view as their enemy. Al Gore is not going to campaign for George Bush. It would give no pleasure to Saddam Hussein to increase the honor of Colin Powell, our Secretary

of State. No one is going to deny themselves worldly pleasures in order to work for the kingdom of God if they do not believe having God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" is the best thing that could ever happen to them. The only people who believe that are those who love God and trust him. If you do not love God and trust him, you will not spend the time and money God gave you to build his kingdom.

11. Compare and contrast God's response to the first two slaves with his response to the third slave. What is the destiny of each and why?

He is delighted with what the first two slaves have done and with them. He sees their labor as the expression of affection and the money as the symbol of their love. He is pleased with them, "Well done!" he exclaims. This is the language of mutual love, not the language of economic reciprocity. This isn't a business arrangement but the language of relationship. "Enter into the joy of your master", is not something that the boss says to the faithful employee. But note also the comparison that the master makes between what they have done and what they will receive. They have managed very large sums of money and yet the master says that what they have done is be faithful over a few things. How can he call managing \$4 million a small thing? He does so in light of the comparison with what these two slaves are going to be in charge of in the future.

I want you to understand how these two things fit together: "I will put you in charge of many things" and "Enter into the joy of your master." It is as if the master is saying, "You have enjoyed honoring me in this small way here on earth, now I am going to give you opportunities and resources that will enable you to express your delight in me and love for me that are far beyond anything that you have ever experienced."

This is the connection between earth and heaven. We deny ourselves pleasures on earth and spend our time and money here to advance God's purposes and to display his glory. This is what gives us joy. Then at the final judgment we will present the fruit of our labors in the lives of those we have influenced. This is what Paul means in 1 Thess. 2: 19 when he says, "For what is our hope, our joy or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?"

Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory, our joy.” We will delight in honoring God and expressing our affection for him by presenting to him the lives of those we have influenced. We will do it as an expression of our delight in God and our desire to honor him. Then the reward of heaven is God giving us greater opportunities to express our joy in him forever. We will be given greater resources, more time, and more skill to be able to express more joy in God.

God calls the third slave an evil, lazy and worthless slave. He takes away all that he gave him to begin with and casts him out of his presence, into the outer darkness where there is only weeping and the gnashing of teeth caused by the eternal torment of hell. He is angry with him because he did not believe that his master was worth working for. He viewed his master as a tyrant, an enemy and refused to invest all he had been given for his master’s glory. Therefore, his master justly rejects him.

12. How often do you think about standing before God at the end of time awaiting his evaluation of your life?

13. Does the thought of having him say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master” ever motivate you to act in certain ways?

14. Does the threat of having him call you an evil, lazy, worthless slave ever motivate you to action?

The only people going to heaven are those who are going to heaven therefore...

- **You must be prepared to greet Christ at any time, no matter how long it takes**
- **You must live as a manager of God’s property**
- **You must remember you will have to give an account to your master**
- **You must live by faith**