



RETURN OF THE KING – PART 2 **Matthew 24:36-25:46**

If you have Bible and I hope you do, turn with me to Matthew 24. Last week, we saw that Jesus is coming back. There is coming a day—Matthew 24:30—when *“the Son of Man—Christ—will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*

It could be today. It could be tomorrow. It could be next week, next month, next year, ten years from now, or a thousand years from now. So what does that mean for our lives now, at this moment? How does the reality of Christ’s return affect the way you think and feel right now? That’s where I want us to pick up.

The Sobering Setup That We Need To Feel...

Starting in Matthew 24:36 and going all the way to Matthew 25:46, we see Jesus telling us story after story to help us understand how we should live in the light of His coming. I want to read the first few verses after what we read last week, because they frame a setup, a sobering setup that we need to feel in this room this morning, I pray all of us.

Some of you may not have been here last week. Some of you may be visiting here for the first time, and so you’re coming in, in a sense, on the middle of a conversation that Jesus is having with His disciples just days before He died on the cross for the sins of men and women throughout history.

Before He died and rose from the grave, He prepared His disciples for His departure, and He promised them that He would return. This is a bedrock truth in biblical Christianity: one day, Jesus is coming back. And I want you to hear what Jesus says about His return. Let’s start in Matthew 24:36.

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming,” (Matthew 24:36-42).

His delay will be long.

So let's pause there and feel this setup. What is Jesus saying about His second coming? One, He's saying that His delay will be long. Now He remarkably comments that He doesn't know the day and hour when this will happen—and no one knows but the Father in heaven. This is an example of how Christ, in His humanity, restrained His deity, humbly accepting limitations upon His omniscience as a man on this earth. And this is a reminder that no man anywhere on earth, no matter what he claims, knows when Jesus is going to return.

So when somebody comes out with a book and DVD series this year—"12 Reason Why Jesus Is Coming Back in 2012"—don't buy it. At the most, see if the guy who says that is willing to give you everything in his savings and investment accounts since he won't be needing it beyond this year.

So no man knows when Jesus is going to return, but Jesus is saying all over this passage that there will be a delay.

Let me give you a little preview of what we're about to read as Jesus tells different stories. In Matthew 25:5, He describes a bridegroom that was delayed in coming. In 25:19, He describes a long time before a master comes to his servants. In Chapter 24, He's already told us that much tribulation and persecution and opposition will come to disciples of Jesus, and the gospel will be proclaimed to all nations—all of which implies a long delay. And it may seem particularly long to us, but we need to remember the words of 2 Peter 3:8: *"...With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."*

His return will be sudden.

So Jesus says His delay will be long, yet His return will be sudden. He refers to the days of Noah when people were eating and drinking and marrying. Everything was normal and usual until, all of the sudden, a flood came and swept them away. That's how it's going to be. People eating lunch, enjoying company, going through their routine, and all of the sudden, to their surprise, Christ will return.

Beware of thinking that the day-to-day stuff of your life in this world will last. One day, it's all going to be turned upside down—immediately. Don't put your hope in your job. Don't put your hope in your house. Don't put your hope in your things, in your investments, in your plans. Don't put your hope in the things of this world. Jesus' return will be sudden.

His judgment will be irreversible.

On a normal, usual, routine day, Jesus will return as the Judge of your life and this world, and when He returns His judgment will be irreversible. Every single story that Jesus is about to tell after this illustrates this point.

You're going to hear about servants who are not ready when their master returns, and they are cast out into darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. You're going to hear about bridesmaids who are locked out of the marriage feast, and the door is shut, never, ever to open for them. You're going to hear about people cast into everlasting punishment. There is absolutely no hint here (and no teaching throughout the Bible) that there will be a second chance for anyone on that day.

Our hearts will be exposed.

On that day our hearts will be exposed. The true nature of our hearts before God will come to light. Nothing will be hidden; everything will be revealed. All the things that we like, that we presume to cover up will be exposed. Things that we, in our pride, didn't even realize were wrong will be shown wrong. Which leads to the next truth...

Our sentence may be surprising.

Our sentence may be surprising. In every story we're about to read, the people are surprised when the master casts them out or turns aside from them. It goes back to what Jesus said in Matthew 7, at the conclusion of His most famous sermon.

"On that day many will say to me—many!—will say, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness," (Matthew 7:22-23).

Hear this! Many people will be shocked on that day to find that though they thought they were on the narrow road that leads to heaven, they were actually on the broad road that leads to hell. This is one of the most frightening verses in all of Scripture for me as a pastor: to think that there may be many people who think that they are eternally safe when the reality is they do not know Jesus.

I think of one brother in this faith family who came here having spent his entire life in church. He had served on just about every committee that any church had ever created. And he has served well. One of the pastors from his former church called one of our pastors to tell us what a great man Tom was and how helpful Tom would be as a member of our church. The only problem is that he did not know Jesus. He had checked off every box. He had prayed the prayer, been baptized, signed up, served, taught, led, yet he had never come to saving faith in Christ. When he was baptized, he shared, "For all those years, I sat in the seats of a church thinking I knew Christ when I did not."

Or I think of a college student in our faith family who recently shared during her baptism testimony:

"I prayed to ask Jesus into my heart when I was younger, yet as I grew older, I knew that I had done that—and was doing all kinds of other activities in the church—in order to earn the favor of God. Until one day, I was finally confronted with the extreme tension that exists between my sinful self and God's holy nature. I realized that only Christ's work was sufficient for the favor of God, and I fell on my knees in fear and trembling and adoration and confessed my need for Jesus. Now I know that I am crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

I don't think their stories are unique. They represent a pandemic problem across contemporary Christianity—people who have made decisions, prayed prayers, signed cards, been baptized, done the deal, but don't truly know Christ.

Jesus is saying here, "Your sentence may be surprising."

Our lives will stand alone.

And He's saying that our lives will stand alone. Two men in the field: one taken, one left. Two women grinding at the mill: one taken, one left. It doesn't matter who you're around on that day, for on that day, homes and neighborhoods and communities and nations will be divided among two groups: those who truly know Christ and those who do not know Christ.

And it doesn't matter what home you're in, who you're married to, what your parents believed, how you grew up, where you spent your life, where you led your family. On that day, your life will stand alone.

We must be prepared.

So—feel this—in light of the fact that Jesus' delay will be long, His return will be sudden, His judgment will be irreversible, our hearts will be exposed, our sentence may be surprising, and our lives will stand alone. In light of all this, we must be prepared. That's the point of Matthew 24:36-25:46. That's the point of this passage. That's what I want to say to every person in this room right now: Are you prepared?

Jesus is going to tell us five stories, some shorter and some longer, but they all have the same point: we must be prepared. We must be prepared because your life and my life are at stake for eternity on being prepared. I said last week that as bold as it may sound, this text is going to prepare you for your future, and as weird as it may sound, this text is going to prepare you for your life 10 billion years from now. This text is eternally important this morning; I can't think of anything more important.

So here's what I want us to do. We're going to walk through these five stories/illustrations, and I want to give you five questions to ask in your heart today to help you know if you are prepared. Five questions that I want to urge you to honestly, prayerfully, humbly, penetratingly ask of your heart this morning.

And my prayer is that in the process, God might prepare your heart for that day. That for many, you might realize in the next few moments that you are not ready for that day, and that you might see that God in His grace has brought you to this place on this day to change your heart so that you might be ready for that day. And for others, that you might be encouraged as you ask these questions, that you might feel in your heart a sweet, expectant sense of confidence that by the grace of God you are prepared for that day.

So let's start with the first story (it's a short one), and then we'll ask the first question. Let's pick back up in verse 42.

"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:42-44).

The Penetrating Questions That You And I Must Ask...

Are you keeping watch for Christ?

The first penetrating question that you and I must ask: Are you keeping watch for Christ? In a bit of startling illustration, Jesus describes His coming like a thief in the night. And the rest of the New Testament uses the same imagery. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, "...*The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*" Peter in 2 Peter 3:10, "...*The day of the Lord will come like a thief...*" In the book of Revelation, Jesus says to the church in Sardis, "*I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you*" (Revelation 3:3). Revelation 16:15, "*Behold, I come like a thief...*"

So the point is clear. If you know a thief is coming to your house, you stay awake and keep watch. So what does this look like practically?

Well, think about it this way. Most of you know that Heather is pregnant and doing well. Lord willing, in about two weeks we will find out the baby's gender. Now she's technically due on December 7. But we know right around mid-November, and into the waning days of that month, and into the early days of December, every single day, we will be watching and waiting. I'll ask her every day, "Babe, how do you feel?" Every moment I'm at the office, I'll have my phone with me, looking and waiting for her to call. I'll check it periodically to make sure I haven't missed anything. It will affect when I go where, how I travel, what I do. Not that I will stop and put all of life on hold, but I will live all of life with a constant expectation that today could be the day and this moment could be the moment. And I'll live this way because I can't wait, and because with each passing day I know I'm getting closer to seeing this person that I can't wait to express love to and affection for.

So do you think about the coming of Christ like that? Is His coming on your mind and on your heart? Not in such a way that you stop everything you're doing, but in such a way that it affects everything you're doing?

You think about Him—not because you're forced to or because you have to be reminded to think about Him, but because you love Him. And He's in your mind and He's on your heart, and you can't wait to see Him. Is that true in your life? Are you keeping watch for Christ?

If not, then what might that say about your heart? What might that say about your perspective on the things of this world? What might that mean about where your priorities and passions lie? Are you keeping watch for Christ?

Are you faithfully following Christ?

Second question: Are you faithfully following Christ?

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matthew 24:45-51).

Now there are a lot of elements in these stories that we don't need to press too far. Look at the overall point: Who is the faithful servant? One servant faithfully honors his master until he comes. The other virtually forgets that his master is coming back and so dishonors his master until he is surprised by his return.

This is where I think about Jonathan Edwards and his resolutions. He has various resolutions on time management, and I want to read a few of them to you. Keep in mind that he would basically rehearse these to himself once a week during his life.

Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump.

Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself: also at the end of every week, month and year.

Resolved, to ask myself at the end of every day, week, month and year, wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better.

Resolved, I will act so as I think I shall judge would have been best, and most prudent, when I come into the future world.

Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments.

How would you live differently today if you knew Jesus was coming back tonight? Then live differently today. Will you be found walking in obedience to Him when He returns, or will you be found wandering in disobedience? Will you be found loving your neighbor or ignoring your neighbor? Will you be found passionately devoted to your spouse or practically negligent of your spouse? Will you be found hating sin or holding onto sin? What are you doing during your week that would not make sense if it were the last hour of your life?

And see the horror of Jesus' words at the end here. *"He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,"* (Matthew 24:51). The stakes are high here. Keep that in mind as we progress.

Are you trusting Christ?

Next question: Are you trusting Christ?

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour," (Matthew 25:1-13).

Now again, we need to not get caught up in the miscellaneous details of the story. The point is not to emphasize these women's sexuality; the point is that they are basically bridesmaids in a wedding. And we don't know all the details of the situation behind this wedding ritual, but clearly there was a party awaiting the coming of the groom. The bride isn't even mentioned—only bridesmaids, who were waiting for the groom to come in order to go with him into the wedding feast.

And the only thing that separates one group of bridesmaids from the other is that five of them are prepared with oil in their lamps when the groom comes. And five of them are unprepared to go with the groom when he comes. And those five, because they were not

prepared, are left out of the wedding feast altogether. The groom denies them entrance, saying, "I do not even know you."

Now I struggled a bit with what question to put here because as you're seeing, many of these stories overlap, and the point is essentially the same in all of them: be prepared. But as I studied this story, I couldn't help but to think of what Jesus seems to be addressing, and even Matthew seems to be addressing in recording these words.

This story speaks poignantly to people who are not prepared to persevere until Jesus comes back. They have enough oil to burn lights for a bit, but they do not have enough oil to persevere through the night until the coming of the groom.

You can't help but to think of the parable of the sower that Jesus told just 12 chapters ago about seed that fell on rocky ground where they didn't have much soil. And immediately they sprang up, but since they had no depth of soil, when the sun came they were scorched. They had no root, and they withered away. These bridesmaids were not prepared for the long wait. They were not prepared to persevere until the groom came back. And this is key.

Ladies and gentlemen, the kingdom of heaven is not for those who simply respond to an invitation. All of these bridesmaids had done that. Similarly, the kingdom of heaven is not for those who simply make a confession. Each of these bridesmaids would have said they were a part of the bridal party. Their cry in verse 11 as they stand outside the wedding feast sounds eerily similar to the cry of the damned in Matthew 7, "Lord, lord..." And the kingdom of heaven is not for those who simply express some affection. It's not that they were indifferent to the bridegroom. This was a happy occasion that they were glad to be a part of. But they weren't prepared to persevere in.

Oh, see this, the kingdom of heaven is only for those who endure in salvation. This is part of the point in Matthew 24 that we didn't get to explore more last week for the sake of time. But do you remember back in Matthew 24:9, when Jesus warned the disciples not to fall away? Look at it with me. He said, *"They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another."* This is talking about people who looked like and claimed that they were followers of Jesus! *"And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved,"* (Matthew 24:9-13).

There will be people, Jesus says, who for a time will look like they are followers of Jesus, people, for a time, who will look like they are Christians, people who have responded to an invitation, made a confession, and expressed some affection toward Christ who will not endure to the end. Oh, don't we see this all over the place even today? People who would say that they are Christians because they prayed a prayer however many years ago or were baptized at some point or went to church or have done this or that but their hearts are far from God. People who would say that they are Christians, but they are not trusting Christ today. That's the point of the question: are you trusting Christ today? Not just a long time ago, but now, in your heart, in your life, even amidst difficulty and challenges and the inevitable trials that will come at you in your faith. Are you trusting Christ today?

One commentator said, "By no means are all who read the Bible, attend and belong to a church, sing the songs of salvation, make a public profession of faith, or even preach in Christ's name, going to share in the blessings of Christ's return." He goes on, describing those who "have a form of piety, but deny its power. And unprepared, they travel on to

meet the judge. None of us may presume to be prepared. All of us must be watchful of our hearts. We must examine ourselves to see if we are trusting in Him, lest we unprepared travel on."

So are you trusting in Christ today? Are you believing Christ today? Not have you responded to an invitation to Christ, made a confession of faith in Christ, expressed some affection for Christ at some point in your life? Are you trusting in Christ at this moment?

This is how we are prepared for Jesus' coming: by persevering in faith, trusting in Christ today.

And as a side note, I've been invited to preach again tomorrow at the Pastor's Conference for the Southern Baptist Convention, preaching to thousands of pastors and their wives. God has put a message on my heart that addresses this very issue, and it's not going to be easy to preach. So I would just ask that you pray for me as I preach in New Orleans around 2:45 tomorrow afternoon.

Are you serving Christ with what He has given you?

Okay, next question, are you serving Christ with what He has given you?

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,'" (Matthew 25:14-30).

Now this story is unique because it goes beyond just watching and waiting for Jesus to come back. It focuses primarily on working until Jesus comes back. The whole story is about servants entrusted with much. Just to feel the force of the illustration here, realize that a

talent was worth (some say) up to around \$300,000. So these are not pennies that we're dealing with. This is a lot of money.

And the overall parallel is clear: Jesus is our Master who has given much to us. We don't need to press the imagery of money too far. The point is that the master has given extravagantly to the servants, has entrusted much to them. So Jesus is our Master, and we are His stewards. He has given us much, and we are responsible for what we do with it.

And two servants here take what has been entrusted to them and work diligently with it. They are faithful to honor their Master with the way they maximize His resources. Now the key point to understand in this story is that this is not just about an employee-employer relationship that is cold, hard, and focused on the bottom line. No. See the joy and the excitement and the heart between these first two servants' relationship with their Master.

The first servant comes and says, "*Master, I have made five talents more!*" (Matthew 25:20). One commentator imagined the scene, saying, "The man's eyes are sparkling. He is bubbling over with enthusiasm, is thoroughly thrilled, and, as it were, invites his master to start counting." And then his master said to him, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your master!*" (Matthew 25:21). In other words, "Excellent! Great! Wonderful! Enjoy!" See the joy and intimacy between servant and master here. This is God's design.

So I put the question in your notes. When Jesus comes back, will you be commended for your love? And this ties totally with all the things we've talked about. Are you keeping watch for Christ? This is something you do out of the overflow of love for Christ. When Heather goes out of town, I don't sit here at home and forget that she's coming back. I can't wait for her to come back. I talk to her about when she's coming back. Are you faithfully following Christ because you love Christ? This is John 15:10, "*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*" Fullness of joy comes in loving obedience to Jesus!

Are you trusting Christ because you love Christ? And are you are serving Christ with all that He has given you because you love Him? That's the picture. Will you be commended for your love, or will you be condemned in your laziness?

So notice that the last servant here was not condemned for what he did, but for what he didn't do. He did nothing with what the master had entrusted to him—and don't miss the reason behind it. Verse 24, "*He came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you do not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.'*" Oh, do you see the lack of joy, the lack of intimacy, the lack of love here? Blaming the master for his lack of responsibility. And so he is condemned, and his relationship with the master is severed.

As a steward, to fail to serve and honor the master with the mercy he has entrusted to you indicates a lack of love and desire for the master. Oh, this is the heart of discipleship to Jesus. D.A. Carson said, "It is not enough for Jesus' followers to 'hang in there' and wait for the end. They must see themselves [as] servants...who improve what [their Master] entrusts to them. Failure to do so proves they cannot really be valued [as] disciples at all."

What are you doing with what God has entrusted to you? Not in the sense that you need to earn your keep before Jesus comes back. That's not the point. The point is, "Do you love

Christ in a way that you serve Christ with what He has given you?" Will you be commended for your love, or will you be condemned in your laziness?

Are you serving Christians that God has put around you?

Final question, are you serving Christians that God has put around you?

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life," (Matthew 25:31-46).

Now this passage is open to all kinds of confusion. Many people read this passage and think, "Whenever you do something good for someone, it's the same as doing that for Jesus." But that line of thinking misses part of the point of the passage. The key is when you get to verse 40 and Jesus says, "*Whatever you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did to me.*" And the whole point here is that Jesus is identifying Himself with His followers, with those who have trusted in Him. This is one example of others in the New Testament where we see Jesus identify Himself specifically with Christians. Remember when Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, and Jesus appeared to him and said, "Paul (or Saul at the time), you are going around persecuting Christians and when you do this, you are persecuting me." It's a beautiful picture as Jesus basically says, "You mess with them; you're messing with me."

And it's the same picture here: "You serve them (my brothers, my followers, my Father's children), you're serving Me." Now obviously that doesn't mean we shouldn't help people who aren't Christians. All over Scripture we're encouraged to love and serve non-Christians; that's just not the specific point of this passage. This passage begs us to ask, "Are you serving Christians that God has put around you who are in need?"

Now follow this—and avoid another misunderstanding in this text—you serve Christians that God has put around you not because you want to get to heaven. That's what I love about

this passage. These saints who are welcomed into heaven are surprised at what Jesus says. "When did we do all these things for you?" Clearly, their acts of service—they're giving away their food and clothes, welcoming strangers, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. They were not doing these things in order to get to heaven; they were shocked to hear that this had anything to do with going to heaven.

You serve Christians that God has put around you not because you want to get to heaven, but because Jesus has changed your heart. This goes back to John 15, where Jesus told His disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you," (John 15:12). And 1 John: "... Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love," (1 John 4:7b-8). "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen....Whoever loves God must also love his brother," (1 John 4:19-21). "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth," (1 John 3:17-18).

Oh, this is huge, particularly for us, a people who have so much of the world's goods and are so surrounded in this world by brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need. Let us not close our hearts toward them. Let us give extravagantly to them and in the process show extravagant love to Him! We make sacrifices in ministries here and comforts here and things we've grown to expect in our church culture here—why?—so that our brothers and sisters who are starving can live over there! This is the fruit of a heart that's been changed by Christ, and it's a fundamental way we prepare for the coming of Christ—by serving Christians that God has put around us.

Knowing the whole time that sacrificial service is not a means of earning salvation. We don't serve other people—specifically our brothers and sisters in Christ—in order to gain brownie points before God so that we can enter heaven. No. Sacrificial service is not a means of earning salvation. Instead, sacrificial service is necessary evidence of salvation. A heart that has truly trusted in Christ and a life that is truly longing for Christ will be consumed with serving men and women who are in Christ.

Two Eternal Destinations That Await Us All...

Either heaven...

Now the imagery here in this last story, which reflects imagery we've seen in the other stories, leads us to two eternal destinations that await us all. What is obvious from every one of these stories is that when we die, or when Jesus comes back, all of us will be divided between two destinations and each of us, again, will stand alone in this. Every person in this room will either go to heaven, a place where people will experience unhindered enjoyment of the Father's love.

Hear the language of Matthew 25:34, "The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!'" You who are blessed by my Father from the foundation of the world! Enter into a kingdom filled with delight. This is your inheritance, child of God, planned for you before the beginning of time. Enter into limitless joy and everlasting satisfaction.

That's the imagery we've seen all over these stories: a blessed servant at the end of chapter 24, then a wedding feast, then servants entering into the joy of their master, and

now the righteous entering into eternal life! Why would we not long for this day? Why would we not look for this day? Keep watch for Christ until this day, faithfully follow Christ until this day, trust Christ, serve Christ, and serve the body of Christ in need around you. It won't be long until we're together in the Father's kingdom enjoying the Son's reward.

Or hell...

So every person in this room will either go to heaven or to hell, which is the polar opposite of the picture we just saw. "*Depart from me,*" Matthew 25:41 says. This is not unhindered enjoyment of the Father's love; this is total separation from the Father's love in a place prepared for demons, "*into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41).

Hell is not a place where the devil torments sinners; hell is a place where the devil is tormented alongside sinners. One writer said, "What a destiny! To spend eternity shoulder to shoulder with an evil being whose one goal has been to defy God and bring others to share in suffering forever."

A place of unquenchable agony. So you've seen the imagery in these stories to this point—"*cut in pieces,*" "*put in a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,*" "*outer darkness,*" and now "*eternal fire.*" And people say, "Well, how can hell be darkness and have fire at the same time?" You miss the point. These are mere words and images to depict the agony and misery that will mark all who are destined to this place. In one writer's words, "The purpose of imagery is to point beyond what literal language can convey. If a literal burning by fire is bad, the reality of hell's suffering must be immeasurably and inexpressibly worse."

And worst of all, hell is a place of never-ending suffering. The same word—"eternal"—that is used to describe life with God in heaven is now used to describe the horror of punishment from God in hell. This is overwhelming, isn't it? Just think about this. This goes totally against the grain of our thinking. We think, "Is this really true? Is what Jesus said really true?" And we've good reason to doubt that if Jesus, less than a week after saying these words, didn't die and then rise from the dead. We've talked about this before: if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we don't have to, need to listen to anything He said. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we need to, we must embrace everything He said.

And so I say to you, to every person in this room, to every person within the sound of my voice: Are you ready for that day? That day, which could be today, when you either breathe your last breath or you see this Savior's face. Are you ready to meet God? Are you ready to stand before God to give an account? You say, "How can I be ready for that day?" And the answer is, "Trust in Christ today. Cling to Christ today. Follow Christ today." For the first time in your life, come to Christ. Leave behind monotonous religious games. This is real. Repent of your sin—turn aside from yourself and your sin—and trust in Jesus. He has died on a cross to pay the price for your sinfulness, He has risen from the grave in victory over death, and all who repent and believe in Him will be reconciled to God. Do this today!

In the words of John Owen, which I put at the bottom of your notes,

"This is somewhat of the word which he now speaks unto you: Why will ye die? Why will ye perish? Why will ye not have compassion on your own souls? Can your hearts endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day of wrath that is approaching?...Look unto me, and be saved; come unto me, and I will ease you of all sins, sorrows, fears, burdens, and give rest to your souls. Come, I entreat you; lay aside all procrastinations, all delays; put me off no more;

eternity lies at the door...do not so hate me as that you will rather perish than accept of deliverance by me.”

Come to Christ, and then once you do keep watch for His coming. Faithfully follow Him. Trust in Him until the end. Serve Him with all that He has given you. And love His people that He has put around you.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: Radical.net