

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 24:45-25:46

We've all heard the expression, "truth is stranger than fiction," and indeed it is!

Several years ago a report came out of the European city of Prague. A woman was deeply depressed. She'd just discovered that her husband was involved in an adulterous relationship and was about to file for divorce.

She sat in her 5th floor apartment and contemplated whether to kill her husband when he got home - or herself. She decided on suicide and dove off her balcony...

Amazingly, her husband happened to be walking down the sidewalk in front of the apartment building at that exact moment. The distraught wife landed on top of her unfaithful husband... And as justice would have it - *he died and she survived!*

Here's the point of the story... always watch and be ready for you never know when someone is going to drop in on you. Jesus promised that He will return.

He's planning to drop in on planet earth. No one knows the day, or hour, but Jesus is coming in the clouds to snatch away those who are His - and who are ready. As we learned last time, the Bible teaches two second comings...

Scripture predicts this age will close with a final seven year period of Judgment.

It's called *The Great Tribulation*. It ends when Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives, fights the armies of the Antichrist, and

sets up His Kingdom on earth.

Prior to this return, the earth knows Jesus is coming. A sign appears in the sky. Humanity braces for His return - the world rallies together to fight against its Lord.

Yet a very different event occurs before this last seven year period begins.

Jesus comes – not with a sign in the heavens, but as a thief in the night.

Rather than preparing for war – the world is business as usual. Folks are starting families – acting as if life will go on forever. Jesus catches the world by surprise. He returns unexpectedly, without notice, to rapture His Church.

Yet, folks today – even Christians – will ridicule the rapture. The rapture has gotten a bad rap. Skeptics laugh it off as wishful thinking or science-fiction.

Imagine what people thought of Noah when he warned them of a global flood. *At the time it had never rained.* They laughed him off – labeled him a fanatic.

But then it started to sprinkle... and then puddle... and then downpour...

Hey, "[truth is stranger than fiction.](#)" The Bible promises a day that will take the world by surprise. Without warning, Jesus will return to air-lift His Church. He'll evacuate His Bride before the world is plunged into Great Tribulation.

The Bible teaches Jesus' coming for His Church is **imminent** – it can happen at any moment. No other prophecy needs to be fulfilled before Jesus returns for us.

I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture is the biblical doctrine of *imminence* – Jesus *will rapture us at any time*. If the rapture occurs mid-trib - or pre-wrath - or post-trib; then Jesus cannot return until something else happens... and I can at some point know the day... Just count off the days from one of the tribulation landmarks.

For the day to come unexpectedly it has to be the first day of the end times.

I believe Jesus is at the door waiting on *the Father's "Go!"*
Let's be ready!

The first 44 verses of Matthew 24 are often called "**The Olivet Discourse.**"

Jesus preached a sermon in which He revealed specific signs that would signal the end of the age and His coming judgment... *But before judgment comes down the Church goes up*. That's why at the end of His sermon, verse 42, Jesus invites us to *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."*

In the first half of the Olivet Discourse Jesus gave His disciples **information on the end times**. Now in the last half, He provides **inspiration for all times**.

Jesus tells us to be vigilant. Like a battery, we need to be *ever-ready*.

In four teachings over Matthew 24-25 Jesus tells us how to be ready. He warns us about our **steadfastness**, our **spirituality**, our **stewardship**, and our **service**.

Chapter 24:45 **"Who then is a faithful and wise servant,**

whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?"

An owner leaves town and places his servant in charge while he's away. His pantry is full - there's plenty of food to feed the household if it's managed well.

"Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."

Like the owner in the parable, Jesus has gone on a long journey. Before He left He stockpiled the pantry. He's given us grace, mercy, good news, spiritual food.

Our job is to pass out the love and serve up the joy - grace the needy with His grace - and feed the hungry with His truth – **"to give them food in due season."**

And if the master finds us doing so when He returns we'll be blessed and happy! We'll hear Him say, **"Well done, good and faithful steward."**

And look at the servant's reward, **"Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."** Understand in the Scriptures God motivates His people in one of three ways – **fear, love, reward**. And by far the most common is reward.

Like a father, God provides His kids spiritual incentives to grow and be faithful.

And spiritual rewards are big deals. Never think, **"Well, I'm a Christian, I'll make it to heaven. I'll leave the rewards to someone else. After all, heaven is heaven."**

Trust me such thinking is naive and shortsighted. Rewards are important.

Our faithfulness on earth will shape *the capacity to which we'll enjoy heaven* and *the degree to which we'll participate in heaven*. It's sobering to realize what you do or don't do for God in this life will impact you for the next zillion years.

Notice here the faithful servant is made "*ruler over all the Master's goods.*"

Verse 48 "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' "and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The evil servant will live forever with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Throughout eternity he'll experience a gnawing frustration, a nagging realization of what he didn't do - and the opportunities of which he failed to take advantage.

In verse 48 this servant is called "*that evil servant.*" The word translated "*evil*" is the Greek word "*kakos*" which refers to "*something which was once good but is now bad.*" For example... *an out-of-tune instrument... or a piece of rotten fruit...*

Here's a person who started well, but fail victim to a theological error. The servant grew discouraged. He abandoned the doctrine of imminence.

Rather than live in the mind-set that the Master can return *at any time* he yielded to the idea that there's *plenty of time*. And

this is a common mistake...

We become aware of the signs of the times... We get excited! Jesus is coming!

But the years roll by – decades pass - and we lose that fever-pitch, that sense of urgency and wondrous expectation. Some of you have given up hope...

I'll never forget before Zach was born I was so pumped. A few false alarms made me assume the baby would be early. The false starts only ramped up my enthusiasm. I was sitting on go every night, the whole month before the due date.

Before we went to bed I had Kathy's bag by the door – my pocket was full of quarters (this was before cell phones) – and the car was full of gasoline.

But here's what happened... By the time Zach was born I was exhausted. I'd been sitting on "go" at the end of April. And Zach wasn't born until May 29.

I gave out of steam - and failed to sustain my enthusiasm. When the day finally arrived, I had to stop by the ATM for money and the pumps for gas on the way to the hospital. I wasn't ready... Don't let that happen to you at the rapture.

Stop looking for Jesus' imminent return, and you become subject to two strands of spiritual virus – **brutality** and **carnality**. Notice what the evil servant does... He **"begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards..."**

He becomes brutal. He **"begins to beat his fellow**

servants...”

This world is a cruel place, and if Jesus isn't returning to rescue me then I've got to toughen up - develop thicker skin - hardened my heart. It is dog eat dog.

Just the opposite attitude develops if I live my life in light of the Lord's return. If eternal rewards are right around the corner, I don't need to fret over today. If Jesus is about to return to right all wrongs, then I can wait on justice, and extend mercy.

The doctrine of imminence insures that *we live mercifully not brutally.*

It also insists *we live spiritually not carnally.* Stop looking for the rapture and the second evil virus it breeds is carnality – worldliness. If heaven is distant, then while I'm here why not grab for all the gusto. You only go around once. Satisfy yourself.

Nothing is a stronger motivation for godly living than the realization that at any moment I can be standing face to face with the Lord Jesus who died for me.

1 John 3:3 puts it, "And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure." When Jesus comes I want to be found with a soft and pure heart.

Chapter 25, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

In the NT the Church is called **the bride of Christ**. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ..." Ephesians 5

also speaks of the Church as the spotless Bride of Christ.

Here Jesus speaks of 10 virgins who go out to meet the bridegroom.

It seems to me that these virgins represent His future Church.

Understand the bridal customs in ancient Israel. The betrothal took place at the home of the bride. The groom pledged himself to his bride - then went to build a home. When the home was completed he would return to receive his bride.

When the wedding neared the bride was told the day of the groom's arrival, but not the hour. He could come anytime - morning, noon, even midnight - she was to be ready. When he arrived he took her home, they feasted together, and then consummated the marriage. Our groom Jesus follows the same customs...

The night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus exchanged vows with His Bride - then departed to heaven to prepare us a home. Today Jesus is still at work on the bridal chamber, but soon He'll return for His bride.

In this parable, 10 virgins are waiting for the bridegroom. They've been waiting all day and into the night. Their lamps are lit awaiting their beloved's arrival.

Verse 2 "Now 5 of them were wise, and 5 were foolish."

Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps."

Not only are these 10 virgins a type of the Church, but the fact that they're holding lamps makes them a witness. They're a light - a beacon - for Jesus.

Notice too, their lamp is fueled with the olive oil – a biblical type of the Holy Spirit. You can't be an effective witness for Jesus without the oil of the Spirit.

But these virgins have been waiting a long time – so long they've fallen asleep. At midnight someone shouts, "**The bridegroom is coming.**" She's awakened.

The Church too has had a long wait for her Groom. 2000 years is a long time, and for several centuries the Church also snoozed to the doctrine of the rapture.

But that's changed in recent years – when Israel became a nation again in 1948 it was like a midnight cry, "**Behold, the bridegroom is coming.**" A nation that had not been a nation for 2 millenniums rose from the ashes – Ezekiel 36-37 were fulfilled.

An event in our lifetime has awakened the church. The Bridegroom is coming. We need to wake up, trim our lamps, and be a bright light to this dark world.

Back to the parable in verse 8 "**And the foolish said to the**

wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

Notice to be an effective witness for Jesus we need the oil of the Holy Spirit. We need to *live in the Spirit - walk in the Spirit - be led by the Spirit - be filled with the Spirit*. We need to be fueled by the Spirit.

You can trim or try all you want, but we need the Spirit's supernatural help.

The foolish virgins ask the wise for their oil, "But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'" Notice the power of the Spirit is nontransferable.

You can be around believers who are moving in the Spirit and still be unmoved.

To fill your lamp you've got to go to the source. John said that he baptized with water, but one would come after Him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the baptizer of the Holy Spirit.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'

"But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

And Jesus draws His sobering conclusion. "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." Be ready!

When Paul writes of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 he concludes, "Comfort one another with these words." And the rapture is a very encouraging doctrine.

Unless you're running low on oil... and then you should be troubled...

Notice several points from this passage. First, all 10 women are virgins. They're all waiting for the same bridegroom. They all have lamps and are lights for Jesus.

There's only one difference - some are filled with oil and some are not.

The 5 wise virgins relying on the Holy Spirit - the 5 foolish virgins are walking in the flesh. They're trying to trim their lamp and be a light on their own - without oil.

They've made no effort to fuel their lamp with the oil of the Holy Spirit.

What's provocative about this passage is that the virgins who are trusting in the Spirit are taken, while those who are walking in the flesh are left behind.

Some folks conclude that Jesus is teaching *a conditional or partial rapture*. Not all believers will be raptured - only those who are depending on the Holy Spirit.

In Revelation 2:22 Jesus addresses the church of Thyatira, "I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds." This compromising church is cast into Great Tribulation.

Contrast that message with Revelation 3:10. Jesus says to the faithful church of Philadelphia, "Because you have kept

my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world..." Implied is that if they had not persevered they would've been plunged into judgment.

Whether you accept a conditional rapture or not, the point of the Jesus' parable is clear – *when He returns we need to be ready!* That means trusting in the Spirit not in the flesh – walking in the Spirit, rather than leaning on our own energies.

Today, while we have the time, let's ask for a fresh empowerment of the Spirit.

The parable at the end of chapter 24 dealt with our **steadfastness** - the last parable our **spirituality** - the next parable involves our **stewardship**.

Nothing we are or own belongs to us. Our time, ability, money, and energy belong to Jesus. All we've received is on loan – to be used for God's glory.

We're stewards of His resources. This parable examines our stewardship.

Verse 14 **"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey."** A "talent" was a measure of money - it was quite a large sum - the equivalent of a year's wage.

I like to think of these **"talents"** as **"opportunities."**

God gives each of us opportunities relative to our time, our abilities, and our resources. The point for us is not the

opportunities we possess. He gives to some people greater opportunity than He does others. My responsibility is simply to take advantage of the opportunity I've been given. That's the lesson in this parable...

“Then he who had received the 5 talents went and traded with them, and made another 5 talents. And likewise he who had received 2 gained 2 more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them...” Notice the phrase “a long time.” We're in this “long time” right now.

The Master is away, but soon He'll return and settle up with His servants. He'll ask each of us, “What have you done with the opportunities you've been given?”

Verse 20 “So he who had received 5 talents came and brought 5 other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me 5 talents; look, I have gained 5 more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant...”

Don't you long to hear those same words one day? This is the goal of my life.

Jesus continues, “You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ Notice the nature of eternal rewards.

Jesus mentions **authority** and **capacity**. Faithfulness on earth determines our reach and our depth in heaven. *Our rule* with Jesus in His kingdom and *our enjoyment* of heaven are enlarged by *our service* here on earth.

Everybody in the Kingdom Age will enjoy being there, but not everyone has the same status or capacity. We'll all be full, but we'll be different size bottles.

We'll all rule, but someone rules Snellville, while someone rules Honolulu.

This is why just getting to heaven is not enough. You can radically shape your eternity by laying up treasure in heaven. Eternal rewards are really big deals.

Verse 22 "He also who had received 2 talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me 2 talents; look, I have gained 2 more talents besides them.'

"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.

Enter into the joy of your lord.' This is encouraging - the guy who multiplied 2 talents into four – and the man who turned 5 talents into ten receive the same commendation. Notice, **the yield was less, but the reward was the same.**

It's not always *the amount* that determines the award. Mere numbers – nickels and noses – stuff we can count are not always a measure of a person or pastor's faithfulness. *Here's the problem...* you never know the initial investment.

Only God sees clearly the opportunities the person was given.

Verse 24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where

you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

Notice this servant was "afraid." His fault was his *fear of failure*. Here was a man who afraid of losing the talent so he wasted his opportunity. He buried it.

I wonder how many of us have buried talents – and wasted opportunities - for the exact same reason – we never really tried because we were afraid to fail...

And notice who the servant tries to blame for his fear - he blames his Master. "Lord, I knew you were a hard man" When it comes to Jesus, that's just not true!

Our Lord is *not* stern with His servants. Think of Abraham, and David, and Peter – God blessed men who did all they could to botch things up.

Abraham failed to trust God and sired a child by Hagar. To this day the Jews still deal with her child's animosity. Yet God kept His promises to Abraham.

Hey, our blunders don't thwart God's faithfulness. God is not "a hard man."

One of my favorite quotes is attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory or defeat."

Better to try and fail than to never try at all.

I believe God would rather have a servant who's *motivated* and *activated* - and yet prone to make mistakes - than to have a servant who is *lazy and lethargic*.

Yes, Peter sunk beneath the waves, but at least he got out of the boat.

Better to be a bit *crazy* than *lazy*. The worst move you can make is no move. Be afraid of failure - bury your talent – and you'll lose the opportunities you had.

It's interesting the scenario Jesus doesn't parabilize is of the man who has a couple of talents - invests them - *then loses them*. That's a deliberate omission.

When you invest in the kingdom of God you can't really lose!

It's impossible to use your talent for the Lord, and it be wasted.

For the man who buried his talent we're told, "**But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.'**" The only way to *lose God's blessing* is to *not use God's blessing*.

You can't go wrong when you step out in faith, take a risk, and serve the Lord.

You might make some mistakes - possibly lose a little money – maybe suffer a little embarrassment - but the *lessons learned* will far outweigh the *effort lost*.

One day, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were on patrol. He had no intention of engaging the enemy in combat, yet he saw an opportunity.

He said to his servant, "Let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or few." In other words, "Let's give it a go, and see what God will do."

God blessed Jonathan's daring faith - 2 Israelites killed 20 Philistines.

God rewards aggressive, opportunistic faith. He rewards faith, vision, initiative...

Our tendency is to *sit pat, play it safe, protect the status quo*, but God wants us to move out - not sit still. Be a spiritual entrepreneur – take risks for Jesus' sake.

But of the man who buries his talent the Lord says...
"Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents." And here's the principle...

"For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away." Hey, when it comes to faith the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Faith feeds more faith.

"And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Pharisees were proud of the fact they'd done nothing wrong. Jesus is saying their kind of self-righteousness doesn't get you into the Kingdom of heaven. *It's no big deal to be proud you've done*

nothing wrong.

Sadly, churches everywhere are full of such folks – people paralyzed by fear.

Jesus is saying a true believer will be *empowered by faith* - not *paralyzed by fear*. A Christian's goal is not just to avoid evil, but to do good... Don't be content to just join the Kingdom, but on the lookout for ways to advance God's Kingdom!

In verse 31 Jesus begins the last teaching in His Olivet Discourse, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."

These verses are actually a compilation of numerous OT references...

Zechariah 14:4 tells us that at Jesus' Second Coming He'll set His foot down on the Mount of Olives (*ironically, the same place Jesus gave this teaching*).

Zechariah tells us when Jesus' foot hits the earth, the mountain will split in half and form a valley leading up to the Temple. Joel 3:14 calls this chasm "the valley of decision." Joel says all the nations will be gathered there for judgment!

Jesus describes this judgment. Verse 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him." At that time in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Valley of Decision, Jesus will separate *the righteous* from *the unrighteous* - *the sheep* from *the goats*.

Recall in Matthew 13 Jesus told a parable.

When the tares (or weeds) grew up alongside the wheat the servants wanted to pull the tares - but the owner of the field told them to wait until the harvest.

Jesus was teaching that in the present age the wicked and righteous will exist and grow-up side by side. Only at the end of the age will they be separated. The righteous (the wheat) will enter heaven and the tares (or wicked) will burn in hell.

The separation of the wheat and the tares occurs in two phases.

In one sense, Jesus separates the righteous from the wicked at the rapture of the Church, before the final seven years of Great Tribulation.

But the book of Revelation tells us that the Gospel will be preached and people will be saved during the Great Tribulation, so another separation will occur at the end of that period. At His second coming in the valley of Jehoshaphat another separation takes place. This is what Jesus describes here in Matthew 25...

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of 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 took Me in; 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? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' *When did they ever see Jesus in prison stripes?*

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Here's a passage with both a *prophetic application* and a *personal application*.

Prophetically, Jesus is fulfilling the ancient promise God made to Abraham.

Remember Jesus was a Jew. This bulk of the Olivet Discourse, from chapter 24 onward concerned the Jewish nation. When Jesus talks about, "**the least of these My brethren...**" He's speaking of the Jewish people.

In Genesis 12:2 God told Abraham, "**I will make you a great nation and... I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" On the threshold of history God stated He would judge the nations by how they treated Abraham's family, the nation Israel.

Be kind to Israel and God will bless. Be hostile to Israel and God will curse.

During the Great Tribulation the Antichrist will wage war against the Jews. He'll launch another Holocaust that makes the first look tame. Jews will be starved - stripped - jailed -

property will be confiscated - and they'll be left homeless.

This passage is saying that those nations who reach out in compassion to the Jews are reaching out to their brother, Jesus. They're the sheep - the good guys.

The last time I visited Israel I went to Yad Vashem – Jerusalem's Holocaust Memorial. There they have a street lined with long rows of trees. It's called "[the avenue of righteous gentiles](#)." The trees that line the walkway were planted in memory of Gentiles who lost their lives trying to save Jews from the Nazis.

In one sense, the sheep are the people and nations - who during the Diaspora, and later the Tribulation - embrace Jesus, and out of their love for Him reach out in kindness to the Jews. As God promised, those who bless Israel will be blessed.

But in there's another sense in which we can apply this passage. There's a *personal application*. Jesus is also encouraging us to show compassion on the starving - the impoverished - the imprisoned - the homeless.

And He provides us as Christians the most powerful motivation imaginable... "[As you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.](#)"

Jesus loves people. He especially identifies with those hardest hit by sin and suffering. Jesus is the God of the underdog. He so empathizes with the down and out - that He takes it personally when you go out of your way to help.

If you love Jesus and want to show Him your affection – you can sing songs and pray prayers – but perhaps the best way

to kiss our Lord Jesus is to find a needy person and treat that person with an act of kindness.

Befriend an AIDS patient. Get a homeless man a job. Visit a prisoner.

"As you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Verse 41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, (the goats are stage left) 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...'"

Notice, hellfire was never intended for mankind.

God created Hell for the devil and his henchmen.

No one in hell is there tonight because God meant for them to be there. God loves us. He wants us in heaven. People go to hell - not because God desires to send them. They choose Hell when they reject Jesus and go their own way.

Jesus continues, "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 take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

"Then they also will answer Him, 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, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch 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 everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Someone might ask, "Pastor Sandy, here people's eternal

destiny is being decided base on what they do. Is this some kind of works salvation?"

And the answer is “**No,**” Jesus is not teaching a works salvation.

Rather, Jesus is so sure a true believer will share His heart for the needy, and sick, and imprisoned He's not afraid to sort them according to their compassion.

Jesus knows those who say they love God; yet refuse to love their neighbor are deceived. Jesus will sort out the sheep and goats according to their works because He knows that true salvation works into us a kindness towards our fellow man.

Hey, Jesus is coming back - and we need to be ready.

Tonight's passage teaches us how. Be **steadfast** – be on fire **spiritually** – be a good **steward** of your opportunities – **serve** others, especially the down and out.

The devil and his angels had gathered for a staff meeting. The agenda was to come up with some new ways to stop the spread of the Gospel in the earth.

One demon offered, "**Let's tell them there's no God.**" Satan replied, "**Don't be stupid, the evidence is too clear, no one will buy such a ridiculous idea.**"

Another piped in, "**Let's tell them there's no hell.**" Again Satan shot down the idea, "**No, everyone recognizes the need for divine retribution.**"

A third demon suggested, "**I know, let's trick them. Instead of 'No God' or 'No Hell', let's just say, 'There's no Hurry...' Take your time to decide for God.**" Satan replied,

"That's it, we'll just tell everyone there's no hurry."

I hope you sense the urgency of tonight's message. Jesus could return at any moment. The bridegroom will return when most of humanity least expects it.

We need to watch and be ready. If we wait to prepare... that day will overtake us and we'll take some deep regrets with us into eternity.

Martin Luther said, "There are only two days on my calendar that concern me. First is '**Today.**' Second is '**That day.**'"

Let's spend *today* preparing for *that day*.