

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 85, Chapter 24 and 25

Verse 42 of Matthew chapter 24 sums up perhaps Yeshua's most indispensable teaching about the End Times:

^{CJB} **Matthew 24:42** *So stay alert, because you don't know on what day your Lord will come.*

Awareness, alertness, and preparedness form the recurring theme of what the mindset and behavior of Christ followers is to be in all ages leading up to His return as the mighty Son of Man. Sometimes this admonition can get lost in our endless concerns and debates over such things as the nature of the Rapture, Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation theologies, who the Anti-Christ might be, who the 2 witnesses are that appear and then are killed but come alive again, etc. Yet, most of chapters 24 and 25 deal with the crucial need for individuals remaining prepared and alert because not only do we not know when the Lord will return, but neither does He. All this suggests a delay of uncertain length, so Christ's illustrations and parables in these chapters attempt to instill a healthy fear of being caught off-guard.

Verses 40 and 41 tell us that while fear is never to be a driving force in our lives, there is a fear that should never venture far from us; the fear of being left behind when the Day of the Lord dawns (which it surely will) and Yeshua's Believers are gathered to Him. But what is it that will cause so many to be left behind? It certainly can't be only our startled surprise at the moment of Jesus's return, so something else is at play. Indeed, this is what He is going to flesh out to finish chapter 24 and then continue into chapter 25. Underpinning it all is this truth that is front and center in Scripture: it is that our behavior reveals our belief.

Let's re-read the remainder of chapter 24.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 24:42 – end

Although the matter of the unexpected thief is not a parable, it is an illustration of the need to remain alert. As with so many of Yeshua's illustrations we mustn't pay too much attention to the details but rather we are to notice the point or points being made. For instance, obviously we are not to compare Yeshua's return from Heaven to a thief breaking into a home and committing a criminal act. Rather the point is that if the owner of a house knew in advance when a thief was coming, obviously he'd be alert, prepared and ready to avert harm to himself and his family. So also the matter of the owner staying awake at nighttime says that this suddenness can occur anytime of the day or night. After this quite simple illustration Christ makes the direct connection of it to Himself when He says "Therefore you too must always be ready, for the Son of Man will come when you are not expecting Him". How might we be ready? What does readiness look like in a Believer? He doesn't specifically say; instead, He rolls right into yet another illustration.

In verse 45 Jesus begins to piece together the nature of a Believer's readiness by asking a rhetorical question. When He asks "who is" the faithful and sensible servant, the meaning is what are the character traits and behaviors that are displayed by a servant that Yeshua deems faithful and sensible? This particular servant is put in charge of other servants, so this illustration is speaking of leaders and leadership. This servant's job is to give those he's in charge of their food at the proper time. In the Gospel of John Christ uses a similar illustration when addressing Peter.

^{CJB} **John 21:15-17** ¹⁵ *After breakfast, Yeshua said to Shim'on Kefa, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me more than these?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."* ¹⁶ *A second time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Shepherd my sheep."* ¹⁷ *The third time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, are you my friend?" Shim'on was hurt that he questioned him a third time: "Are you my friend?" So he replied, "Lord, you know everything! You know I'm your friend!" Yeshua said to him, "Feed my sheep!"*

Peter had become the leader of the 12 disciples; this is why Jesus specifically

addressed him with the instruction to feed His sheep. Obviously in the illustration of the faithful servant the job of feeding the subordinate servants at the proper time was about food, but feeding was meant more on the spiritual level as a metaphor for dispensing wisdom and instruction from God's Word. Thus verse 47 says that provided this servant leader does his job (dispensing wisdom and teaching the truth of God's Word to those he's in charge over), then all will go well with him when the master of the house comes home. The reward for doing his job is that the faithful servant leader will be given an even greater scope of authority; he will be put in charge of all matters of the entire household. Then the other side of the coin is presented. Should that servant leader not be faithful by neglecting to feed those he's supervising (this is a metaphor for not teaching God's Word to them in truth), and he does this because he thinks his master isn't coming home anytime soon, and he proceeds to abuse his position of authority by immoral behavior, joining in with drunkards, and generally mistreating those he is supposed to be caring for, the consequences for him will be painful and terminal. Yeshua says the person will be cut in two (meaning a tortuous death), and then in death be placed with the hypocrites (because such a leader is by definition a hypocrite). This place he will be put is where people wail and grind their teeth. What this is illustrating is judgment and the consequence of being sent to the Place of Torments... what Jews is that era often called **Gei Hinnom**...what Christians call Hell.

In the Christian and Messianic community, it is our propensity to think of such potentially faithless leaders as being our hired Pastors or Rabbis. And while indeed these positions are included, by no means is that the extent of it. Are you an Elder? Then you are a leader. Are you the head of a women's Bible study? Then you are a leader. Are you a Sunday School teacher in charge of children? Then you, too, are a leader. Accepting the position of a leader in whatever capacity means that the standard God has set for you is higher and more consequential than for those who aren't leaders. The rewards for being a faithful servant leader are great, but the consequences for being an unfaithful servant leader are severe. And remember who it is that is going to judge all leaders and decide their fate; none other than the One making this illustration: Jesus the Christ.

A couple of lessons ago I made a statement that went something like this: we can't believe in any old Jesus of our imaginings. We must believe in the historical, biblical, actual Jesus if we are to be saved from eternal death by trusting in Him. I also said that the real Jesus is the sum of all of His attributes;

not only the ones that we sort through and find pleasant. Just like His Father, Yeshua can offer mercy beyond our ability to comprehend such personal sacrifice and loving kindness. He can also condemn us to an eternal judgment beyond our ability to comprehend such horror. Both of those possibilities represent just some of His attributes that make up His total person. In this brief illustration of the faithful versus the unfaithful servant leader we see both of these attributes expressed not as hypotheticals, but as actual actions Christ will take.

It is both fascinating and troubling that some Bible versions have watered down the final words of this chapter. The statement of the master “cutting in two” the unfaithful servant (sometimes rendered “cutting into pieces”) is translating the Greek word *dichotomeo*, which literally means to cut into two. A known method of especially grisly execution used at times by the Romans, being cut in half is also the source of our English word dichotomy that means to divide or contrast 2 things. However, the RSV (for instance) translates it to “punish”, and the Young’s Literal Translation says “cut off” (meaning to be separated from your people or from God). Commentators such as Davies and Allison note that clearly this watered down and incorrect translation is because those particular Bible translators (likely on account of their sponsors) could not accept a portrayal of Christ that is so harsh that it offends our traditional Christian sensibilities. This a good example of creating a Jesus of our own imaginings and ignoring who He really was and is, when it is right there before us.

Let’s move on to chapter 25.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 25 all

Let’s begin by remembering that these chapter endings and beginnings are artificial and were added 1000 years after the Bible was completed and closed up. So, as we begin chapter 25, we need to realize that the scene and the conversation that ends chapter 24 is merely continuing. Yeshua is still on the Mount of Olives, and still talking only to His innermost circle of 4 disciples.

Here (for the first time in a while) we encounter a true Jewish Parable (as compared to an illustration that can employ a number of metaphors). We easily recognize it because it begins with the typical parable formula of “The Kingdom of Heaven is like” or “The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to”. As we discuss this Parable remember also that we must avoid getting caught up in any of the details. This is a purely fictional story, with fictional characters, and it aims

to communicate a single point... the moral of the story (so to speak). Thus, the several elements of the story are only there to flesh it out and to make it enjoyable, coherent, and memorable. Like so many Parables, the elements used in the story represent simple and common things that every Jew was familiar with; in this case, a wedding.

This Parable is often given the title of the Ten Virgins. Numbers usually meant something in the stories that Jewish leaders taught because they usually meant something in Holy Scripture. The use of the number 10 indicates fullness, wholeness, or even perfection. So perhaps 10 was considered the ideal number of bridesmaids desired for a wedding. The reality is that we could just as easily (and more in tune with the cultural reality of that day) title the parable the Ten Maidens. Whether maiden or virgin what this is indicating is unmarried girls that still live under their father's roofs. As Westerners we tend to get a little hung-up on the word "virgin", and put too much weight into the sexual purity aspect of these 10 girls. That plays no role in this story. It was a given in that era that young unmarried girls (maidens) had not known a man. In fact, it was so taken for granted that in the rare occasion that an unmarried girl had illicit sexual intimacy with a man that her father had the right to kill her. More often the girl was only tossed out on her ear, shamed for life, and now had to try and fend for herself (no easy feat in those days).

These 10 bridesmaids (that is, being bridesmaids was their role at the wedding) took their oil lamps to go out and meet the groom (so obviously the setting is nighttime). Five of these fictional bridesmaids were foolish and the other five were sensible. Being sensible means being wise. So, what made a foolish bridesmaid foolish? It was that they took their oil lamps to light the way to find the groom and accompany him back, but didn't take any extra oil "just in case" they needed more; that was an unwise decision. This contrasts with the sensible (the wise) bridesmaids who came prepared with extra oil for their lamps to plan ahead for most any eventuality. This anticipates that they wouldn't know exactly when the groom was going to arrive, which is validated by the beginning words of verse 5: "Now the bridegroom was late". So, in addition to the idea of not knowing when precisely he would arrive, there is also once again introduced the idea of an unexpected delay. That is, there was a range of time (although inexact) of when one could reasonably expect the groom to show up; however, his actual arrival went well beyond even that extended range of time.

Because of the lateness of the hour, and all the time spent waiting in the dark, all

of the bridesmaids did what was natural and drifted off to sleep. Thus, those identified as the foolish did nothing wrong by falling asleep because the sensible girls did likewise. So, here's another point in the story that we must not try to make anything of by attaching some kind of spiritual meaning to it; it's said just to make the story more complete and colorful.

Suddenly in the middle of the night someone (not any of the 10 maidens) cries out that the groom has arrived. Who cried out? Why was that other person out there? Doesn't matter; the point is that after a delay, and at nighttime when most people are asleep, the groom finally shows up. It's not at all clear but maybe the girls' job was to provide illumination for the bridegroom to light the way back to wherever they had come from. As the 10 maidens are awoken by the anonymous crying out, they hurry to light their lamps but because of the extended delay, the lamps belonging to the 5 foolish ones had run out of oil and the girls hadn't brought any spare oil with them. Seeing that the 5 sensible ones did have some extra oil they asked if they would share it. No, they said, because there simply wouldn't be enough for them all if they did that. If they shared, soon all their lamps would grow dim and die out prematurely. One has to wonder... how about the command to love your neighbor as yourself; or even the Golden Rule? This isn't about the girls being selfish, this is about their wisdom to be prepared. The 5 sensible girls tell the others that they need to get their own oil from the oil dealers and not borrow it from them. Of course, it goes without saying that it was late at night so no oil dealers would have been open for business. Bottom line: 5 maidens were prepared and 5 weren't, and when the groom arrived the time for preparation expired. The ones that didn't prepare couldn't fall back on the preparedness of others and (and this is important) they also couldn't fall back upon the possibility that they were partially prepared or at one time in the past had been prepared.

In the end, the 5 bridesmaids that were sensible were able to attend the wedding feast, but the other 5 couldn't. In fact, the place where they went for the feast shut the doors after the groom and the 5 wise maidens and no doubt the other properly prepared guests arrived. The 5 foolish maidens finally made their way through the dark to the place of the wedding banquet and found the door shut and locked. They banged on the door and asked to be let in. But the groom answered back "I don't know you".

The final words of the Parable sum up its point. The one moral of the story is: "So stay alert, because you know neither the day nor the hour". I want to take a

moment to point something out that is often poorly translated and when it is, it disconnects us from a connection that Yeshua surely intended His disciples to make. In verse 11, in the CJB, we find the 5 foolish girls saying “Sir, sir... let us in”. In other versions we find the translation as: “Lord, lord... let us in”. The Greek word being translated is *kurios*, and lord or master is a better translation because there’s little doubt that in Jewish thought the word was *adonai* (meaning lord or master). Notice the progression: the girls shout through the door to the groom “lord, lord!” and the groom responds “I don’t know you” or more grammatically likely, “I haven’t known you”. Where have we heard something like that before?

^{CJB} **Matthew 7:21-23** ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.* ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'* ²³ *Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'*

So, there is a direct connection that is not to be overlooked between the ominous warning of Matthew 7 about being excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven, and the ending of this Parable of the 10 Maidens when the 5 foolish girls found themselves excluded. In fact, they are the same warning. One of the things in common between those two passages is that those who were excluded believed they were part of the included group; on what basis they believed they were included we don’t know. However, what we do know is that those who aren’t prepared in advance will get shut out because the instant the bridegroom arrives, the gate to the Kingdom of Heaven is closed to all but those who were already properly prepared. Those left on the outside can plead their case, but to no avail. In a larger sense we could say that we are given a pattern to follow that demands living wisely at all times because should we think we have time to live foolishly, but then later on at the time of our choosing turn and go in a better direction, we’re spinning the eternal Roulette wheel. Maybe it works out, maybe it doesn’t. It didn’t work out with the 5 foolish maidens. They could easily have bought extra oil earlier, but they didn’t. They wasted their time and their opportunity.

Personally, I find trying to understand exactly what those 10 maidens were supposed to do with those lamps (in which 5 of them failed), a little vague. Yes, they were to light their lamps when the bridegroom appears, but to what end? What, exactly, was this meant to accomplish? What about lighting these lamps

was so necessary and important that not doing so resulted in a severe eternal punishment? It may be this: in the previous illustration about the faithful servant leader (that ends chapter 24), he was assigned one task by the master: see to the feeding of those he was put in charge over. The faithful servant leader did just that; the wicked servant leader did the opposite and was sent to eternal death for his disobedience and outrageous behavior. Behavior reveals our belief. Here in the story of the 10 Maidens, they were also assigned just one task: provide lamps for if and when the bridegroom comes at night. The sensible maidens did just that; the foolish maidens did the opposite and were left outside of the door where there was eternal death. Behavior reveals our belief. The first illustration was about leaders; the second illustration was about followers. So, the exact nature of the task isn't so much the issue as it is that the servant leaders and the maidens were assigned a task by their master and some did it, and others didn't. In the first case the unfaithful servant didn't do the assigned task because he thought his master's delay allowed him time to do as he pleased and behave wickedly; but was caught surprised when the master unexpectedly showed up. In the 2nd case, the 10 maidens were at the wedding venue, so they knew the groom must necessarily be on the way. The sensible girls made sure they were prepared for his arrival that could occur at any time of the day or night, while the foolish girls went unprepared. If I'm correct in my assessment, then the bottom line is more towards Believers... whether leaders or followers... doing the task faithfully that God gives us to do (whatever that task might be), until either our grave or Messiah Yeshua arrives. To do otherwise is seen by God as gross disobedience that will result in exclusion from the Kingdom.

But also notice something about the Kingdom of Heaven so far in our Parables: when you're legitimately in, you're in, and when you're out, you're out. There's no changing of status at a later time. And no one on the inside can lend outsiders some of their imputed righteousness so that they can get in, too. These principles of entry into the Kingdom of Heaven have already been explained in earlier Parables or by direct instruction from Yeshua.

Clearly this is a teaching and story that looks ahead to the End Times and Judgment Day, and this alone ought to pique our interest. Let's not confuse the reality that a minimal but growing form of the Kingdom of Heaven is currently present, with the fact that upon Our Savior's return the Kingdom of Heaven will immediately be brought into its fullest reality and form. Right now, this is a spiritual kingdom that lives within Believers. In the future it will be physical and tangible to go along with the spiritual element. So, there's big changes coming

upon Christ's return and preparation for those changes must be underway now, within each us, before He comes and not after.

One other thing that might be a hard to grasp and it's a bit touchy, but it's worth mentioning because there's a very good lesson about studying the Bible to be learned here. Because the literary rule of Jewish Parable interpretation and meaning is that a Parable is not to be taken apart and the various elements of the story used as a series of allegories, and that all Parables by definition make one point, and one point only, then in this case we have to be rather careful of saying that this Parable has Yeshua casting Himself into the role as the bridegroom at a wedding. The reason it seems so natural or automatic for a Christian to read this image into the Parable as an assumption is because Christianity has for centuries characterized the End Times Jesus as the divine bridegroom. The problem is that trying to apply such a meaning within this Parable defies how Parables work. The usual interpretation in Christianity is that this Parable is mostly about the Messiah Yeshua being likened to the delayed bridegroom. Yet the Parable plainly says that the comparison being made is about the Kingdom of Heaven, and not about a Messiah. Remember: the Parable begins "The Kingdom of Heaven at that time will be like...". It doesn't say "the Messiah at that time will be like". Because the 4 disciples hearing this Parable knew as a given how Parables work, they would not have been looking to associate Jesus to the delayed bridegroom. Rather, the bridegroom represented bridegrooms in general, and not anyone in specific. Other bridegroom related verses that appear in other places in the New Testament may offer some better evidence for claiming that Yeshua is the End Times Bridegroom that the Church claims He is; but to my way of thinking, this Parable of the 10 Maidens certainly is not one of them.

Another Parable immediately follows in verse 14. It is another true Parable because it begins with the standard formula opening of: "For it will be like..." That is, a comparison is about to be made. Who or what is the "For it"? What is the "it"? In the previous Parable "it" was the Kingdom of Heaven so the comparison in this new Parable is between how the Kingdom of Heaven operates and whatever Yeshua offers as the similar thing or action. We must always take a biblical Parable in light of how the Jewish Jesus meant it, because it was formulated for Jewish listeners living within a Jewish culture. One of the underlying principles of Jewish thought is something that was taught to their children from their earliest age: God is the Creator of the world. Therefore, the world and everything in it belongs to Him. We, as created humans who love God,

are therefore caretakers of what our master owns. This caretaker persona applies right down to the individual level. Every individual is a caretaker in his or her own right, and each is given a caretaking task by the Creator. It is within this mindset and belief that Yeshua constructed the Parable of the Talents, and it is how His disciples heard it. It is, therefore, how we must understand it as well.

So here we learn of an expectation that the Kingdom of Heaven places upon those that would hope to be its members. The expectation is that even though God may not be tangibly present, our behavior should be as though He was there. Our behavior reveals our belief. The Parable of the Talents is quite long, but despite its length still there is but one point Yeshua is working towards. The point revolves around stewardship, and what it is that each of us will do with what God has entrusted us... however much or little. And I must once again emphasize; from the biblical view... from Christ's view... and from the common Jewish person's view... none of us owns anything. We are God's created creatures living in God's created world, so everything belongs to Him. Steward is a typical English word to describe a caretaker, not an owner. So, stewardship is all about what we are going to do with our Master's possessions.

Verse 14 sets the stage. An anonymous man is about to leave home for an unspecified period of time, and he entrusts everything he possesses to his servants. To the first fictional servant he entrusted 5 talents. To another servant he entrusted 2 talents, and to a third servant he entrusted but 1 talent. Before we go further, I want to read for you a similar Parable from the Book of Luke. Many Bible commentators say that this Parable in Luke is the parallel of the one we are looking at here in Matthew. I don't think that's the case. Rather it is similar, but it is said at another time, another place, to a different audience, and even the characters are different.

CJB Luke 19:11-28 ¹¹ While they were listening to this, Yeshua went on to tell a parable, because he was near Yerushalayim, and the people supposed that the Kingdom of God was about to appear at any moment. ¹² Therefore he said, "A nobleman went to a country far away to have himself crowned king and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten manim [a maneh is about three months' wages] and said to them, 'Do business with this while I'm away.' ¹⁴ But his countrymen hated him, and they sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to rule over us.' ¹⁵ "However, he returned, having been made king, and sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what each one had

earned in his business dealings. ¹⁶ The first one came in and said, 'Sir, your maneh has earned ten more manim.' ¹⁷ 'Excellent!' he said to him. 'You are a good servant. Because you have been trustworthy in a small matter, I am putting you in charge of ten towns.' ¹⁸ The second one came and said, 'Sir, your maneh has earned five more manim; ¹⁹ and to this one he said, 'You be in charge of five towns.' ²⁰ "Then another one came and said, 'Sir, here is your maneh. I kept it hidden in a piece of cloth, ²¹ because I was afraid of you- you take out what you didn't put in, and you harvest what you didn't plant.' ²² To him the master said, 'You wicked servant! I will judge you by your own words! So you knew, did you, that I was a severe man, taking out what I didn't put in and harvesting what I didn't plant? ²³ Then why didn't you put my money in the bank? Then, when I returned, I would have gotten it back with interest!' ²⁴ To those standing by, he said, 'Take the maneh from him and give it to the one with ten manim.' ²⁵ They said to him, 'Sir, he already has ten manim!' ²⁶ But the master answered, 'I tell you, everyone who has something will be given more; but from anyone who has nothing, even what he does have will be taken away. ²⁷ However, as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence!'" ²⁸ After saying this, Yeshua went on and began the ascent to Yerushalayim.

Despite the difference between Luke's Parable and the one in Matthew, still the issue is stewardship, especially in light of how the stewards behave, and the decisions they make regarding their master's possessions. One of the major differences between the 2 Parables is that in Luke's the master (the King) gives explicit instructions that the money he assigns to each servant is to be invested. In Matthew's version, there are no instructions and instead what each servant is to do with the money is left up to them.

Let's begin by understanding what a talent is. A talent is a measure of weight, and biblically it is usually associated with the weight of gold or silver. It is believed that a talent in the 1st century was somewhere between 50 and 75 pounds and this represents a huge sum of money. To give you another way to see it: 1 denarius was the standard wage for 1 day's labor. 1 talent was about the equivalent of 6,000 denarii. 2 talents about 12,000 denarii and 5 talents about 30,000 denarii. Thus, all of the servants were given sizeable sums of money to be responsible for, even the servant that was assigned but 1 talent. Interestingly, the money was not doled out at random, but rather the man made his decision based on what he perceived as each servant's innate or learned ability. Thus, he

didn't expect identical results from each, nor did he decide that "fairness" or "equity" was called for that ignored all other factors. In fact, such a kind of "fairness" is actually quite unfair. It isn't fair to expect someone with little ability to perform at the same level as someone with a much greater ability. And yet, the one with less ability is, in God's economy, in no way inferior to the one with the greater ability.

So, after assigning the money to the 3 servants, he leaves and no one knows when he's going to return. A key factor in this Parable is that while the 3 servants don't know when he's coming back, it is 100% certain that he will return and come with expectations about that money he left with them. The one given the most (5 talents) immediately goes to invest the money and he doubled it. The servant given the next most (2 talents) in some unspecified way also doubled the man's money. But the third servant took the talent of money, dug a hole, and buried it for safe keeping. The question that I'm sure came to the disciples' minds and ought to for our minds as well is: did any of the servants act with bad intentions? Did any of them do something that they thought would displease their master? No; they all acted with a clean conscience and out of good intent. Yet clearly from what comes next, only some of the 3 properly understood their master's character and therefore what he expected of them despite not giving them explicit instructions.

Verse 19 explains that a long (and unspecified) period of time passed. One day, unexpectedly, the man returns and has the 3 servants brought to him to see how they have handled his affairs, and especially what they did with his money. The servant who he entrusted with 5 talents presented his master with 10. The master was overjoyed, complemented the servant, and told him that because he had been such a faithful steward with what he calls "a small amount", he would put him in charge of a large amount. I find it interesting that Yeshua's Parable has the man saying that 5 talents was a small amount! However, the point to be taken is that this has to be a fabulously wealthy man that Yeshua is speaking about, in which a fortune as great as 5 talents was seen as but little in his eyes.

Next the servant that had received 2 talents to watch over was brought before his master. He presented his master with 4 talents and so he was given the same reward as the servant given 5, which consisted of much more to oversee. Then the man given but 1 talent came forward and said some words to his master that no doubt he didn't mean as an insult, but rather he thought was reflective of the man's character and mode of operation. He says that he knows that the man

harvests where he didn't plant and gathers where he didn't sow seeds. Therefore, rather than risk anything, he dug a hole in the ground and hid the money until the master returned. The master's response was: "You wicked, lazy servant!" Certainly, this servant would have noticed what the other servants had done with the money entrusted to them; so why would he do something so different? The first words of verse 25 are the answer: "I was afraid..." he said.

It was fear that engulfed the servant. It was fear that made the decision for the servant to take no risk whatsoever with his master's money. The other 2 servants took what we ought to see as reasonable, calculated risks in investing the money. Had the 3rd servant taken the time to understand his master's true nature and character he would have understood that investing what he had been given was what was expected of him.

Much of Matthew chapters 24 and 25 highlight the coming events and circumstances of the End Times at a future, but unspecified, date. Yet I've mentioned on a few occasions that if we could put ourselves into the sandals of those who heard Yeshua speak, then we would see that He instructs not only with the Apocalypse in mind, but with the everyday practical realities of life as well. In fact, it was no doubt those present realities of living that the Holy Land Jewish disciples and hearers of Yeshua would have identified with and understood from His instruction, far more than some deeper spiritual truths and mysterious end-of-the-world matters of the future. I have no doubt that even their understanding of the future things Jesus spoke of were imagined in terms of months or a few years away at most; not centuries or millennia. On the other hand, in these passages modern Christians tend to minimize the practical matters of daily living, the current humanitarian obligations that Believers have, and instead overemphasize Judgment Day and the End Times catastrophes of the future (whether the near or far future). So in the Parable of the Talents while the overriding theme and background has been awareness, alertness and preparedness of those who eagerly await the return of Messiah so that we will be ready and not stand before Him ashamed, nonetheless such things as using our God-given gifts, talents, and abundance for the good of our communities, being helpful and comforting of the ill and hurting, and using the opportunities presented to us to act out our faith in generosity and without fear is what we are to do at the present time.

We'll finish up with the Parable of the Talents when we meet again.

