

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 86, Chapter 25 Continued

In our previous lesson we ended with delving into the fascinating and illuminating Parable of the Talents. The most common method within Christianity (and often within Messianic Judaism) to study or preach this parable is by using allegories to separate out various elements of the story, turning them into applications for our modern lives (an indeed often these are useful tools) or to say a parable represents an absent and then returning Jesus. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the literary term allegory means: a symbolic fictional narrative that conveys a meaning not explicitly set forth in the narrative. It then goes on to say that this is the way that fables and parables operate. What can get confusing for us is that this definition is only correct to a point. This is so very important for us, His followers, to get right because Christ regularly taught using parables.

I've spoken on this subject before, but it is crucial for Bible students to grasp and hold closely in your studies, so it is worth repeating. Even though the Britannica correctly says that allegory and symbolism are the basic substances of parables, that definition needs to be accompanied with an asterisk. Typical parables and fables among all the common literary works of authors throughout history indeed are well described by Britannica's definition of allegory, but biblical parables are not comprised of this same substance. Please be aware that what I'm going to tell you is not an attempt to spiritualize Christ's parables. Rather this is an issue of a better understanding of the literary rules that Jewish writers used regarding religious matters such as Holy Scripture, which can be different from the literary rules and meanings that non-Jewish writers used. Since the Bible is composed using those Jewish (or better, Hebrew) literary rules, which changed and evolved over the centuries, then we need to understand what those rules were in Christ's era.

While New Testament biblical **illustrations** may indeed be a form of Jewish allegory and symbolism, Yeshua's **parables** follow the typical Jewish parable formula that had come into use for some unknown time (not long, I think) before His day, and that also became heavily reflected in the writings of Rabbis from Yeshua's time onward. Perhaps one of the most helpful tools for Gospel interpretation is to recognize that there is a distinct difference between Jewish illustrations and Jewish parables, and therefore between biblical illustrations and biblical parables; these are **not** two terms meaning the same thing. I realize that this could seem like a trivial nuance only necessary for a Bible academic to know; but in fact, it has everything to do with how best to understand and interpret Jesus's parables versus His illustrations. Therefore, the first thing we have to do is to distinguish which is which. Jewish parables always begin with an easily recognizable word formula that immediately says that a comparison is about to be made. Thus, when Yeshua wants to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven using the literary technique of parable, He'll always begin with something like: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like" or "The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to". So, when we see Christ saying that thus and so can be compared to this and that, this is a Jewish parable literary form. We then instantly know that what follows has but one point that it is going to make. The entire narrative story of a Jewish parable is concocted in order to lead us to this single point; this one "moral of the story". All of a parable's flowery elements that get us to the point are only there for the listeners to be able to draw a memorable mental picture.

On the other hand, a Jewish illustration (as used in the Bible and therefore as used by Jesus), is presented as a series of metaphors and symbolisms and that is how we should understand them. Therefore, we could say that illustration is the Jewish (the biblical) equivalent of allegory. The bottom line is this: we must not approach Christ's parables as though they were allegories (as being fables that make great use of symbolism), because that is not how He (or any Jewish religious teacher or later Rabbi) would have constructed them or meant them. He was merely using this standard literary technique of parable as was used in His day among the Jewish religious teachers. Yet, it is evident that there are hints of deeper meanings, even mysteries, in His parables that we must not ignore because He was more than a run-of-the-mill Jewish religious teacher. And because the passing of time has revealed to us that some of those prophetic meanings hidden deep within His parables are beginning to take form.

Passionate and fiery debate over the meaning of Holy Scripture was, and remains, a favorite pastime of Jewish religious instructors and Torah scholars. It

became clear to them, early on even in ancient times, that there were levels of meaning in Holy Scripture that were undeniably present. In time those levels were given names and descriptions like ***P'shat***, ***Remez***, ***drash*** and ***sod***. Essentially those 4 levels describe a reasonable and useful method for us to study and think about the meaning of Scripture from its simplest, most literal sense, and then drilling all the way down to its most mysterious sense; that is, a revelation of things that can only be speculated about because it is either something about a prophetic far future event or it involves the mystifying characteristics of the divine that are beyond our human ability to fully grasp or even find words to accurately describe. Yeshua regularly used parables to make the mysterious nature of the divine and the spiritual more accessible and understandable to humans. There isn't much more mysterious in this Universe than God's substance, His characteristics, and the nature of His Kingdom of Heaven... something that Jesus is calling us to become part of.

With that understanding, then whenever we encounter a parable of Jesus that is about introducing to us a facet of the Kingdom of Heaven, we know that underlying all that is said... the deeper sense of His words... it is revealing some characteristic or another of God and His divine Kingdom. This deeper sense of the Parable of the Talents is a case in point. At the same time, we must never minimize the simpler literal sense of it that applies to our everyday life and behavior.

Let's begin by re-reading the Parable of the Talents.

### **RE-MATTHEW CHAPTER 25:14 – 30**

Notice how the parable begins: "For **it** will be like". Essentially this parable is a continuation of the previous one about the 10 Virgins and their lamps. The "it" this next parable speaks of remains as the Kingdom of Heaven.

Without repeating all that we discussed last time, this parable talks about a wealthy man leaving and entrusting an enormous sum of money (5 talents) to a servant to care for, a lesser but still large sum of money (2 talents) to another servant, and finally 1 talent to the last servant. When the master returned home sometime later... and he arrived unexpectedly... the first servant had wisely invested his master's money and doubled it, as did the second servant. The third servant simply dug a hole and buried the 1 talent, thereby not using it or investing it and instead only preserving what he was given. The first 2 servants were highly

praised by their master for how they handled what he entrusted them with, and as a reward they were given even more of their master's estate to care for. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant was severely criticized for being "wicked and lazy". The master asks why this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant did what he did and the servant responded that he did it out of fear. What was he afraid of? That is explained in the dialogue of verses 24 and 25 when the servant says: ***'I knew you were a hard man. You harvest where you didn't plant and gather where you didn't sow seed. I was afraid, so I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here! Take what belongs to you!'***

On the simplest level... the ***P'shat***, literal level... this servant's charge against his master comes because he completely misunderstood the character and nature of his master, and therefore of his master's expectations of his servants, while the first 2 servants understood his character properly and so acted accordingly. On the deeper ***Remez*** level (the hint), then we can understand that this same thing applies to our understanding of God's character and nature, and therefore what He expects of us. If we don't truly understand who God is, then we won't know how to approach Him or how to obey Him or how to relate to Him... even though just as with this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant we are certain that we do. So, what exactly makes this servant wicked and lazy in the master's eyes (and therefore in God's eyes) rather than merely disobedient or merely ignorant? We can look to the Proverbs to answer this question.

***CJB Proverbs 18:9 Whoever is lazy in doing his work is brother to the destroyer.***

***CJB Proverbs 20:4 A lazy person won't plow in winter; so at harvest-time, when he looks, there is nothing.***

***CJB Proverbs 26:13 The lazy person says, "There's a lion in the streets! A lion is roaming loose out there!"***

In these biblical Proverbs we find out why it is inherent in this parable (at least for a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish listener) that the master (God) would describe this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant as both lazy and wicked. The lazy person is said to be a brother to the destroyer (he is doing Satan's evil bidding). The lazy person won't plow in the winter and then is surprised when later there's nothing to harvest (he's short sighted as he tries to avoid work). The lazy person says that there's a lion in the streets (he operates on fear, harboring an assumption of disaster, and so avoids

risk). God's character, and therefore how He expects us to behave in response to Him, is as a bold doer and as a tireless worker. His character always looks ahead towards the bigger picture and does whatever it takes to bring His Creation to full redemption and perfection. We, as His created creatures, are to follow this example and look to the longer term and wider implications of our decisions and actions... both in our personal decisions about our earthly lives, and in how we prepare for an eternal future hopefully as a servant and partner in that redemption process. And finally, God doesn't fear; He goes forth resolutely and not timidly. Perhaps the command of God that is repeated the most in the Scriptures is for those who trust in Him to "fear not". Fear is a prison of our own making, with Satan as our jailer. Fear is a construction of our minds and often doesn't reflect reality. Fear causes us to retreat in life and in duty, and not venture forward with confidence. Fear enables us to become passive and to hoard whatever we have instead of using our God given gifts and talents to generously benefit the lives of others, and to better our own lives according to His will for us.

Now I want to show you an important connection and afterwards I'll explain why this is helpful to notice. Back in Matthew chapter 13 we read this:

**CJB Matthew 13:1-13** *That same day, Yeshua went out of the house and sat down by the lake; <sup>2</sup> but such a large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there while the crowd stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> He told them many things in parables: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he sowed, some seed fell alongside the path; and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on rocky patches where there was not much soil. It sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow; <sup>6</sup> but when the sun had risen, the young plants were scorched; and since their roots were not deep, they dried up. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> But others fell into rich soil and produced grain, a hundred or sixty or thirty times as much as had been sown. <sup>9</sup> Those who have ears, let them hear!" <sup>10</sup> Then the talmidim came and asked Yeshua, "Why are you speaking to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Because it has been given to you to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it has not been given to them. <sup>12</sup> For anyone who has something will be given more, so that he will have plenty; but from anyone who has nothing, even what he does have will be taken away. <sup>13</sup> Here is why I speak to them in parables: they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding.*

Here we see the parable of the farmer sowing seeds in 4 kinds of soil and afterwards Yeshua responds to the disciples' questions about why He is speaking in parables. He tells them:<sup>12</sup> ***For anyone who has something will be given more, so that he will have plenty; but from anyone who has nothing, even what he does have will be taken away.*** This is virtually identical to Matthew 24:29. Both the Parable of the 4 soils and the Parable of the Talents make the same the point... the same moral of the story. In other words, these disciples have heard this conclusion and instruction before. Clearly in Matthew 13 this statement had a deeper or spiritual meaning because it doesn't seem to have a direct earthly connection to some kind of behavior of the farmer or of the seeds. But in Matthew 25, the moral of the story is directly related to the inaction and lazy, fearful behavior of the 3rd servant who buried the 1 talent that his master had entrusted to him. Yet, on the **Remez** level, the Parable of the Talents has spiritual undertones as well.

Let's first deal with the practical side of the Parable of the Talents. This clearly has to do with money and investing even though the money didn't belong to the servants. The Lord tells us we should invest our money. It goes without saying that we are always to do so wisely (this parable doesn't get into the exact kind of investment that was made by the first 2 servants, or the level of risk involved). The servants knew that while it was their responsibility to care for and grow their master's money, it certainly was not THEIR money. Thus, we must always remember that because God is the Creator, and we are His creatures, that the world and everything in it is His. Even what we call "ours" is ultimately "His". The wisdom being dispensed here is that when the Lord determines to provide us with money, however much or little, we are to be good stewards over it with the attitude that this money belongs to the master. In addition, we have obligations to Him both to try to make it grow and to do it responsibly because then there is money and resources to help others and to make our own lives, and our family's and community's lives, better. This parable where the first 2 servants doubled the master's money takes into no account the amount of time involved (although the implication is that it was considerable) nor the aggressiveness of their investment; so, we shouldn't look here for investment advice other than we should invest wisely and not just timidly sit on our money.

Anyone who has done well in life (and this goes for ancient or modern times) has invested; and investment by its very nature involves levels of risk. Of course, some people were smart enough to born into wealthy families and they inherited well; so, they have an abundance due to someone else's hard work and wise

investing. But even though a person gains wealth through inheritance, they are not to behave as that 3<sup>rd</sup> servant and just hoard their fortune for fear they might lose it, or out of laxness not do the work of investing. Rather, in imitation of God's characters, they are to attempt to increase their wealth through honest, responsible investing. Just as this is not going to become a lesson in all the ways and means of financial investing, or exactly what to invest in and how, also don't think that this is somehow an instruction that validates the popular Prosperity Doctrine. This is not about how to become rich, so that we can luxuriate in our abundance. Or is about our wealth as visible proof of the level of our faith in God (which it is not). Rather this is as much about God's character and nature as it is about us not being afraid to take reasonable risks or refraining from making decisions based on fear in all matters of life that involves our possessions and gifts.

On the **Remez** level, this is about the tasks that God gives us to do for the Kingdom and our ability to do them. It is great to be saved in Christ; but sharing that salvation with others instantly becomes an obligation, not an option, because just as with everything else our salvation also belongs to the Lord...our salvation is from Him and so it is His. That sharing and investing can come in so many ways: from the generous giving of our increase and wealth, to being a refreshing example in our lives of righteousness living, to working in ministry to the Lord understanding that we could probably make more money elsewhere, to speaking about God's love to others, to simple acts of kindness to those who need it... it's nearly endless. Just be aware: there are no exemptions to God's expectations. If you are saved, you have been entrusted with gifts and talents given to you by the Holy Spirit. And since you do have them, then you are expected to boldly and wisely invest them so they can grow and thrive. If you do not, then there will be a reckoning. As with our parable of the talents, verse 30 says:

***As for this worthless servant, throw him out in the dark, where people will wail and grind their teeth!***

This is certainly nothing any of us want to hear from the Lord on Judgment Day. Let's move on and read the remainder of Matthew 25.

**RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 25:31 – end**

This section of chapter 25 is essentially the end of Christ's final block of teaching. It's not that Yeshua won't tell His disciples other things, but these

things will be said and taught within the actions of the final 48 hours of His earthly life. In fact, the first words of Matthew 26 are that when He finished teaching His disciples on the Mount of Olives, it was 2 days before Passover; a day that would change the world, forever.

The entire nature of the teaching material changes with verse 31, which begins His teaching about Judgment Day. This is not a continuation of the previous parable, nor is it a new parable, nor is it an illustration. This is a prophecy of the Apocalypse and the End Times. No other Gospel records this event or these words; the Jewish Matthew stands alone in it. While what is said is certainly related in one sense to Daniel 7:13 -14, in another way it's different.

**CJB Daniel 7:13-14 <sup>13</sup> "I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

Here in Daniel, we see the Son of Man (Yeshua) arriving in Heaven, standing before His Father, and being given power and authority and the rulership over God's Kingdom on earth (the Kingdom of Heaven). Yet in Matthew 25:31 when it speaks about the Son of Man coming accompanied by angels, it is said that he comes in His glory, meaning He already possesses this glory (as opposed to Daniel 7:14 when only after He arrived in Heaven was He bestowed with such glory). Therefore the "coming" that this verse mentions is about what Christians call the "return" of Jesus.

Next, we're told the Son of Man will sit on His throne. There is disagreement among Bible academics whether this is indicating His Heavenly or His earthly throne. Personally, I don't see how it can mean anything other than His throne on earth, as the King over the Kingdom of Heaven, which upon His return is now being actualized to its fullest extent. This means that Yeshua won't be doing His judging of humanity from far away in Heaven, but rather locally from His throne room on earth. He will be fully present here, in person, although it will be quite a different persona that He will project than the one the Church typically prefers to speak about. The returning Jesus will be a Jesus of condemnation and wrath; not of mercy and salvation. The period for humanity to be blessed with the gift of salvation has ended and the fates of all humanity are set in stone. Now it is



prophesied time for executing the divine justice that has been promised by God for millennia. I suppose as Believers we can say hallelujah to this finally happening. But honestly, for a while this is going to be a time of personal pain beyond which I'm not sure we are prepared or that we've ever considered or experienced. Most of us will have some of the dearest and closest of family members that we love and treasure condemned to the Lake of the Fire. Some of them that receive that eternal death verdict will be a shock to us; we had assumed (maybe only hoped) they were part of the chosen. Spouses, offspring, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers...it is going to be a time when our joy of our King's coming is going to be greatly tempered by the overwhelming sadness that accompanies it. I don't want to rain on your parade, but consider this the next time you raise your hands to Heaven and sing with glee at the thought of Christ's return. In the longer term it is wonderful. In the immediate, it will be... well... I have no words for it.

The prophecy of a Day of Judgment that is coming not just for Israel but for all who inhabit this planet is sprinkled throughout the ancient Prophets. I'll choose just this one passage among many because it offers so much food for thought.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Isaiah 66:13-20** <sup>13</sup> *Like someone comforted by his mother, I will comfort you; in Yerushalayim you will be comforted.* <sup>14</sup> *Your heart will rejoice at the sight, your bodies will flourish like newly sprouted grass. It will be known that the hand of ADONAI is with his servants; but with his enemies, his fury.* <sup>15</sup> *For- look!- ADONAI will come in fire, and his chariots will be like the whirlwind, to render his anger furiously, his rebuke with blazing fire.* <sup>16</sup> *For ADONAI will judge all humanity with fire and with the sword, and those slain by ADONAI will be many.* <sup>17</sup> *"Those who consecrate and purify themselves in order to enter the gardens, then follow the one who was already there, eating pig meat, reptiles and mice, will all be destroyed together," says ADONAI.* <sup>18</sup> *"For I [know] their deeds and their thoughts. "[The time] is coming when I will gather together all nations and languages. They will come and see my glory,* <sup>19</sup> *and I will give them a sign. I will send some of their survivors to the nations of Tarshish, Pul, Lud (these are archers), Tuval, Greece and more distant coasts, where they have neither heard of my fame nor seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory in these nations;* <sup>20</sup> *and they will bring all your kinsmen out of all the nations as an offering to ADONAI- on horses, in chariots, in wagons, on mules, on camels- to my holy mountain Yerushalayim," says ADONAI, "just as the people of Isra'el themselves bring their offerings in clean vessels to the*

***house of ADONAI.***

I used this particular passage in order to point out a few things about the Judgment Day scene. Judgment Day will not be quiet, like a well-ordered trial in a sound proofed court room. The Lord is coming in fury, wrath and fire, and He will slay the countless unrighteous. But also notice a second thing: at the same time His wrath is being poured out, He is comforting the residents of Jerusalem. Another point: in verse 17, through Isaiah, God speaks of people who “consecrate and purify themselves in order to enter the gardens”. But then these same people who have consecrated and purified themselves to the Lord turn right around and follow someone else, doing as they do, which includes eating the meat of pigs, reptiles and mice. In doing this they seem to be renouncing their consecration or perhaps revealing their insincerity. Is this actually talking about kosher eating? About not consuming things God has prohibited in the Law of Moses? Of course, it is. As with all disobedience, such behavior can be remedied and is forgivable. However, the implication is that you can't claim consecration and devotion to because of your outward appearances, and then go off and intentionally join those who live a life of the un-consecrated, un-set apart on the other, and then expect mercy on Judgment Day. Notice also that the place where the peoples of the nations will be gathered and separated is happening on earth, and specifically in the city of Jerusalem. So, there need be no doubt as to the what, who, and where of this Judgment Day event of Matthew 25:31.

Verse 32 tells of the well-known End Times event of the separation of the sheep from the goats. The scene is of all people on earth being summoned and gathered by the Lord in order to be judged. The idea is of a separation of people into two groups: the righteous and the wicked (Believers would say the saved from the unsaved). Notice that there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> option or middle ground. The first words speak of the nations being gathered. Since the time of Abraham, the term “nations” became a word for gentile nations and gentile people groups. However, I think at this point of Redemption History (in the End Times) there begins a definite swing back towards the term nations being inclusive of all humans, including Israel (although the context of its use still matters). The Greek word that is most often translated in this verse as nations is ***ethnos***. While that translation is accurate, the word ***ethnos*** leans more towards the sense of groups of human beings than it does of human governments and national entities as we think of nations today. So, the idea is probably not about countries that have clear boundary lines on world maps, but rather as assemblies of peoples of all kinds from everywhere. That is, no one is excluded. I think this interpretation is

validated because next we read of “them” being separated from one another. So, is it entire nations of people as groups that will be judged either to Heaven or Hell, or will it be individuals judged one at a time? While the wording is a bit ambiguous, the way it is phrased and the many principles of the Torah that Yeshua has taught cannot mean that entire nations of people will be lumped together and have their eternity decided upon according to where they live or what their nationality might be. So, while we know that the sheep and goats are metaphors for 2 different groups of people, some Bible scholars see them as metaphors for national entities, and others see it as for individuals. I think it is the latter. One other matter that must be addressed: the sheep and goats are in no way representative of different ethnicities or races. The issue is about the saved versus the unsaved. Every race and ethnicity will contain some of each.

We’re told that the sheep are separated and placed at the Son of Man’s right hand, and the goats at His left. Understand that biblically goats are as clean and desired for Temple sacrifice as are sheep, and are not in ritual Torah law seen as inferior to sheep. Sheep are not good, and goats bad. So, no comparison of either animal as concerns Temple ritual or purity or value is intended here. Further a shepherd didn’t separate sheep from goats on the base of value or worth, but rather they are two different species and each have their own needs and kind; and although they are similar in many ways, they are easily recognizable by their appearance and their traits. Why were the sheep given preferred status in this metaphor? Perhaps since Yeshua is sometimes called the Lamb of God then He selected the metaphor of the sheep to go to His right hand, the hand of goodness and power, where the sheep represent the righteous batch of people. But, that’s my speculation.

One of the questions I’m often asked is when exactly the resurrection of the dead occurs in the timeline of End Times events. While I cannot tell you exactly that happens (because we’re not told, exactly), it is assumed in this passage that it has already occurred by, or at, the time of this Judgment scene of the Son of Man. I get a similar question as regards when God’s Wrath gets poured out, indiscriminately, over the entire earth. In fact, this question is really the crux of the reason for the various doctrines often labeled pre-, post-, and mid-tribulation. While I don’t know exactly in the timeline when this happens, I do know that as a divine principle, God doesn’t pour out His wrath upon the good and the wicked. So, whenever it occurs, you might be relieved to know that the good will not be present. But do not confuse the times of great tribulation and the outpouring of God’s wrath; these are two different things. I fully expect Believers to experience

great tribulation as the End draws near.

Verse 34 is pretty straightforward in that those at Christ's right hand are told to come and be part of the inheritance that God has blessed us with (the Kingdom of Heaven), and that He has prepared for us since the foundation of the world; meaning since Creation. God's purpose has never changed throughout the history of the Universe. We have discussed a few times God's plan of redemption, or as I call it Redemption History, and how it began at Creation. More precisely, the need for redemption arose upon Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. The implication in this verse is that while the **need** for redemption came about at that time, the foreknowledge of it and a plan for it occurred earlier yet at about the same time God spoke the Universe into existence. There is also another interesting mention here that is a good topic of discussion. It says that "The King" will say to those at his right hand... meaning that this King is the same person as the Son of Man and as the great Judge who does the separating of the goats and the sheep. The reason for so many titles is that Yeshua will hold many roles. He is divine, He is the Judge, and He is the ruler over the Kingdom. Yet let's be clear: this is not a matter of the Son replacing the Father. Even as the King He remains subordinate to the Father and is behaving as the Father's agent. In Heaven Yeshua will still sit at the Father's right hand (so to speak). On earth, Christ will sit upon His own throne. Notice how Yeshua says "come those whom My Father has blessed". It is the Father's Kingdom that Jesus rules over. The Father remains as the ultimate authority and power, with the Son of Man, Yeshua, now relocated to earth. But their unity is in no way compromised due to physical separation or distance between them.

Beginning at verse 35 are a list of characteristics that ought to be present and demonstrated in the lives of the righteous. This is where we'll continue our study of Matthew 25, next time.