
The Time is Near – Part 2

Matthew 25:14 – 46

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I like dystopian novels. A dystopian novel is about what the world would be like if our current culture and technology collapsed. They are often billed as what the world will be after the apocalypse. My very first one was a series that started with a novel called “The Breaking of Northwall”. The series was amazing. Some of the more recent ones that I have read are a bit more... unsettling.

In the 1970’s, an Italian author and futurist, Roberto Vacca, wrote a book called, *The Coming Dark Age*. I have never forgotten his challenging chapters. While many of his challenges and calls for change have been implemented, his central premise is even more viable today. The more a complex system of any kind is deeply and fundamentally interrelated, the more vulnerable and fragile that system is.

Brothers and sisters, this world will fall. All that upholds our civilization is fragile and exposed. We think of it as stable, secure, and safe. It is not. EMP airburst over any modern country will pretty much sent it back to 1800’s. That is simply a fact. Imagine if there was not electricity of any kind anywhere in the USA for 3 days, for a week, for a month. What would our world be like?

What would you do...

How would you survive? Are you ready? Are you prepared?

Does this feel like the cartoons with an old man and long beard carrying a sign that says, “The End is Near”?

But we are only talking about a human apocalypse. Yes, terrible, destructive, life-changing. But what about the coming Divine Apocalypse?

That is what this text is about.

Be Faithful until He Comes (v.14-30)

We have been given a responsibility to be faithful in. Through a detailed parable Jesus highlights what is at stake in faithfulness to our Lord, even in the horrific tribulations that will come just before His return.

An Entrustment (v.14-18)

Jesus tells another simple story. Watch the connectives here. In verses 1-13, there is a time connector, “then”. So the story of the 10 bridesmaids is about the kingdom at the close of the age. This story begins with a “for”. It is explaining why we must faithfully watch. The kingdom of heaven is like this story. The story begins with an entrustment.

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

A master is going away and so gives to each of his servants some of his property to care for. They are given talents, which was a very valuable coinage approximately equal to 20 years of day labor. Each was given an amount they are capable of handling. The master goes away for a season. Each one basically does as expected and doubles the investment. Well, except for the last one. He simply prevents loss and buries it.

A Long Wait (v. 19)

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

A long wait transpires. The sense of this is that it was an unexpectedly long time. But he does return and is ready to settle accounts. What have they done with what was entrusted to them?

What does a long wait for an expected return tend to cause? Think about children waiting on their parents...

A Great Reward (v.20-23)

²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Ah what a lovely scene. Here are wise servants who are excited about their master's return and eager for him to look and see what they have accomplished. Both wise servants have doubled the investment. Over the time of his absence, the servants have done very well indeed and are greatly rewarded. Though he viewed the money as a small matter, because of their faithfulness the master's reward is greater responsibility and authority. Faithfulness in small things brings responsibility in greater things. Their excitement is fused with the master's own joy over their good work and faithfulness. So, they are invited to enter into the happy pleasure and joy of the one they have well served.

A Sobering Judgment (v.24-30)

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The last servant comes forward, not with excited anticipation, but rather with self-justifying excuses. We suddenly get insight into the kind of man he is. We also can observe the

inescapable connection between our heart's thinking and self-talk and our actions. This servant's view of his master is wrong. He is in fact not a hard master demanding results where he has put no labor. But this is what the foolish servant thinks. So he has done wickedly. He has not been faithful even though he is able to return to the master what he was given.

The master says something that is startling. If the servant really thought these things, then he should have at least put the money into savings and gotten a return on interest. He is so foolish and wicked he does not even do wisely according to his view of the master. But the master judges him according to his own view. Since he thinks the master is a hard man demanding results where they are not possible, then he will judge the servant according to that standard.

The result is that the servant suffers the wrath and the judgment of the master. Once again, this wicked, foolish servant is cast into hell. This is not just a simple loss of reward. What is at stake in wrong views of God, faithlessness to God's gifts to people and wicked folly is eternal judgment in hell.

Now, what does this mean in our understanding of the kingdom? There are several good and helpful lessons here hovering around Jesus' warning and exhortation.

We are entrusted with responsibilities as servants in the kingdom during our King's long and present absence. False servants are exposed by their faithlessness, particularly in the hard and painful days near the end.

A wrong view of God is deadly. It is both a symptom of spiritual deadness and the cause of much sin and spiritual failure.

Unbeliever's will not only be judged according to the standard of God's righteousness, but also in accordance with what their own wrong views of God should have caused them to do.

Are you listening, my dear ones? All through this discourse there has been a growing warning about the deadly and damning judgment that follows not remaining faithful to God in the hard times. Yes, some are experiencing great difficulties now – trials, financial setbacks, marital troubles, physical afflictions and decline. These seem great to us now and are in comparison to our great ease. But what will we do when our lives, our livelihoods, our families, our children are at stake? Will you remain faithful when the government deems you and unfit parent because you are a believer in Bible myths and removes your children? Will you hold to your public profession of faith and trust in the God and His gospel when this room is ringed with soldiers demanding you recant? All of this is happening in some parts of the world now – and will escalate even more as the final days are coming.

Be Warned of Judgment at His Coming (25:31-46)

At the end of days, there will be a final judgment of the people groups where some will enter into eternal life and the rest will be cast into hell. Jesus is still answering their questions. His answer to their questions now reflects back to Matthew 16:27-28 and fulfills Daniel 7.

The Blessedness of the Righteous (v.31-40)

First, Jesus speaks of the blessedness of the righteous.

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate

people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

In a clear allusion to Daniel chapters 7, 9 and 12, Jesus tells what will happen when He comes in His glory. But this is an unexpected turn. When He comes it is NOT to establish a national kingdom for Israel. It is the end of the world. He comes to sit on His glorious throne. Then He will judge all the people groups. You have to train yourself when you read "nation" in the New Testament not to think primarily of nations with national boundaries, but people groups, the *tou ethne*. The point is that Jesus will be sitting in judgment over all peoples. What happens here is the consummation of the kingdom as Matthew has been explaining it.

As the shepherd King, he will be separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep are the righteous who are placed on His right hand. They receive the inheritance, that is, the full delivery of the kingdom that has been promised, planned and coming since the beginning.

As both evidence that they are righteous and as an exhortation for the horrific days of the final years before the end, Jesus commends their care for each other. Their good works are not the grounds of their righteousness, but its fruit. Not only will the righteous maintain faith under terrible persecution, in love for Christ they will maintain good works in risky acts of love for believers¹. What they have done is to risk life and property to care for those under persecution, even for believers they did not know personally.

Here may well be the oil we need, the talent given to us – it is the care of persecuted and suffering of our brothers and sisters. For in their suffering, win meeting their needs, in loving them we are loving Christ.

The Damnation of the Wicked (v. 41-46)

Jesus warns of the damnation of the wicked.

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The first sentence is both tragic and triumphant. Here are the cursed, unbelievers all. Their evil hearts have closed their affections and actions to help those who are persecuted and afflicted.

Their actions simply exhibit their disdain for Christ and their hatred of God. As one commentator has put it, “[Their] question in both cases is essentially the same. In both cases it is an utterance of astonishment. Nevertheless, the root of the question reveals a sharp contrast. In the case of the righteous we are dealing with astonishment borne of service gratefully rendered, and then completely forgotten. In the case of the wicked the expression of surprise, if not actually feigned, is rooted in self-delusion, the product of unbelief.”²

So, the basis for the judgment is not merely taking care of the poor, some expression of social justice, philanthropy or charity – but rather people’s response to the king of heaven as they have met Him in His brothers, in the persons of His persecuted and suffering people.

The judgment of the wicked is horrific. It will not only be of those who are alive at the end of the age, but of all wicked of all ages. Consider the following cluster of texts:

Daniel 12:1–2 “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:25–29 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Acts 24:14–16 [*Paul speaking before the Roman governor, Felix:*] But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

So the lost, the unbelieving, the wicked will be raised to face judgment. They will suffer eternal punishment away from the presence of God. They will be cast into the eternal fire called in other texts, the lake of fire. In a place prepared for the devil and demons, in eternal conscious punishment, they will suffer the wrath of God. God’s people will be delivered and God’s glory will be vindicated.

Brothers and sisters, these are fearsome words, yet all true. Examine yourselves. By the warning from them may you sustain faith and be faithful today, tomorrow and through whatever dark days may come before the end of our lives or the end of this age. Be ready for His coming. Be faithful till His coming.

2 Thessalonians 1:5–11 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from

heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

Reflect and Respond

Jesus is our Master to whom we will give an account for our faithfulness.

Our willingness to be faithful, to grind day-by-day when no one wants to and everyone mocks us, will only happen if we are hoping in Jesus and His return. Our expectations will enable present faithfulness.

The implications are stark. We tend to shrug off the high calls of the Bible. Matthew has been clear throughout. To fail to hold fast to the gospel during hardship and persecution is spiritually dangerous and deadly. Jesus says these things about the last days. Matthew writes these things to Christians who were beginning to experience of some measure of what Jesus predicted. These warnings are intended to cause the elect, the true believer, to be faithful.

What has been entrusted to us? In Matthew, it is the gospel. It is entrusted to us in our conversion. It is entrusted to us to preserve. It is entrusted to us to spread.

What do you hear Jesus to be saying to you? My hope that it is words of encouragement, hope and confidence.

There is a coming judgment. But the Bible tells you that you can escape that judgment. IT is a judgment against those who do not believe and refuse to bow to Jesus. But, because of Jesus' death and resurrection – that is, through the gospel, you are called to repent, to believe and to bow. May you do so today.

¹ This text is neither a basis for a social gospel nor for social justice. These good deeds are done to Christ. He does not come to us in the world. He comes to us in “the least of these, [His] brothers.” It is our solemn responsibility regardless of the personal risk or cost to love, support and provide for brothers and sisters who are under great and severe persecution. How dare we ignore their plight now and then.

² Hendriksen, p. 891