

### Be Ready and Watchful for the Lord's Return!

#### Matthew 24:40-51

Matthew 24:40-51 - *"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

<sup>45</sup> *"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. <sup>47</sup> Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. <sup>48</sup> But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, <sup>50</sup> 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, <sup>51</sup> and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

#### Background Notes

In order to properly understand the Olivet discourse, it's important to understand the difference between the "Rapture" and the "Return." The Rapture is the coming of the Lord for His bride, the Church. A key passages of Scripture dealing with the Rapture is 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Another key passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

Notice that at the time of the Rapture, the Lord will not return to the earth to set up His kingdom, but rather all believers will be caught up from the earth and will meet the Lord in the air. The term "rapture" refers to being caught up from the earth (just as birds we call "raptors" catch up their prey from the earth). The Rapture is quick: *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..." (1 Corinthians 15:52)*. The Rapture is the **imminent** hope of the Church. **Imminent** means that it could happen at any time. There are no prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Rapture takes place.

The Return of the Lord to this earth to set up His kingdom is not the same as the Rapture. The Return is subsequent to the Rapture - in fact, there will be at least seven years between the two events. During the time between the Rapture and the Return there will be a seven-year period of great turmoil and tribulation on this earth.

In addition, prophetic signs are associated with the Lord's Return to this earth. The return of Israel as a nation is the big prophetic sign. The fact that we already see this sign means that the Rapture is that much closer!

Thus far in Matthew 24 it's the Return of the Lord to this earth that's in view (not the Rapture). *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* (v29-30). Those verses don't describe the Rapture. They describe the situation when the Lord returns to this earth in judgment, before He sets up His earthly kingdom.

At the time of the Return of the Lord, the judgment on the earth will be like the days of Noah (v36-39). The unrighteous will be taken away in judgment, and the righteous, like Noah and His family, will be left on this earth for blessing. *"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left"* (v40-41). So you see, in the context it's clear that verses 40-41 don't refer to the Rapture, but to the Return of the Lord to this earth in judgment.

I know that verses 40-41 sounds like a good Rapture passage – but in the context it's clearly a Return passage! The ones who are "taken away" here are the unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation Period. Those who are "left" are the believers who will survive the Tribulation Period, and will inherit the blessings of the millennial kingdom of Christ on this earth.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Lord will return like a thief in the night.

*"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (v42-44).

The Lord will return "like a thief in the night." Of course the idea is not that the Lord is like a thief, taking what doesn't belong to Him. The idea is that the Lord will return when He's least expected - unless people are alert and watching.

Who is the "you" in verses 42-44? Remember - the context of this portion of the Olivet discourse is the Return of the Lord to set up His kingdom (not the Rapture). So specifically, in the context, the "you" refers to believers during the Tribulation Period. They are to be alert and ready, and watching for the return of the Lord. The people living on the earth at that time, like people today, will not be expecting the Return of Christ. However, the godly believers are to be alert and watching. They are not to be caught off guard. *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a*

*thief in the night*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). In that verse, the phrase "*the day of the Lord*" speaks of events associated with the return of the Lord to the earth in judgment. It doesn't refer to the Rapture.

We can certainly make an application of this doctrinal point to ourselves today. Just as the Tribulation saints are to be ready and alert for the return of Christ to this earth, so we should be watching and waiting for the Rapture - the imminent coming of our Lord to catch away His Church. The Rapture could be at any time!

However, having said that, we must be careful to notice that waiting expectantly for the Rapture is a practical application only for us, who live before the Rapture. We must be careful to differentiate between the separate events of the Rapture and the Return. When the Lord returns to earth in judgment, He will come like a thief in the night.

## **2. The Lord will reward His true servants who are faithful.**

*"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 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" (v45-51).*

The Olivet Discourse as presented in the Gospel of Matthew appears to be divided into three sections.

- Section #1 the "Jewish aspect" of the Olivet Discourse, and it is found in Matthew 24:1-44.
- Section #2 could be called the "Christian aspect" of the Olivet discourse, and it is found in Matthew 24:45-25:1-30.
- Section #3 could be called the "Gentile aspect" of the Olivet Discourse, and it is found in Matthew 25:31-46. This section includes the judgment of the nations and the separation of the sheep and the goats. This passage is not referring to the Jews or to the Church - it's speaking of the Gentile nations. So the Olivet discourse has a three-fold structure to it as presented in Matthew.

Section #2 of the Olivet Discourse, the so-called "Christian section," begins here in Matthew 24:40 and continues through Matthew 25:30. (Remember, there were no chapter or verse divisions when Matthew wrote his Gospel!)

There are three parables in this section: the parable of the wise and evil servants (24:40-51), the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13), and the parable of the talents (25:14-30). These three parables obviously go together as a unit.

In all three parables, the Master (or Bridegroom, or Lord) has gone on a distant journey, and the servants (or virgins, as the case may be), are expected to be faithful.

In all three parables there are faithful servants and there are unfaithful servants, who only call themselves servants. This reminds us of the parable of the wheat and the “tares” (weeds that resemble wheat) in Matthew 13, doesn’t it? In fact, notice from in Matthew 25:1, the second parable is specifically labeled as a “parable of the kingdom of heaven.”

Remember our studies of the “parables of the kingdom of heaven” back in Matthew 13? In the Gospel of Matthew, the “kingdom of heaven” is the kingdom **in its present form**, which is “**Christendom**” in the present time. Under the umbrella of “Christendom” are found the true and the false believers, the wheat and the weeds, the faithful and the unfaithful servants. So these three parables in Matthew 24-25, which obviously go together, are three more parables of the kingdom of heaven, and in the so-called the “Christian section” of the Olivet discourse.

In the parable of Matthew 24, the wise and the faithful servants are rewarded, but the unfaithful servants are cut down and sent to a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These “unfaithful servants” are not unfaithful believers. No. These people were **never true** believers! They only claimed to be servants. Notice that they are called **evil** (v48), and ultimately they will be consigned to hell. This would never be said of a true believer, even of an unfaithful believer.

True and faithful believers will be rewarded. The Lord will reward His true servants who are faithful.

## Practical Application

### Let your lifestyle be a litmus test!

Are you a true believer, or do you only say you’re a believer? Are you looking for a litmus test? Here’s how: **Check out your lifestyle!**

Look at the lifestyle of the unbeliever: *“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...”* (v48-49). Notice the lifestyle of this false, “professing” servant. This false, evil “servant” lies, and says the Lord is delaying His coming. This false, evil “servant” doesn’t get along with the rest of the master’s servants. The false, evil “servant” has a loose, ungodly lifestyle.

So examine your lifestyle. Do you truly believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior - or do you only say you’re a believer, and you’re just “going through the motions” of being a Christian? Let your lifestyle be a litmus test!