

We Believe – The Return of Christ

Matt. 25:31-46

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



The epic novel *Don Quixote*, which was written by Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes, centers around the idea that is still compelling today, that is, a noble or virtuous mission is worthwhile. I think that each and every one of us, our neighbors, and people that we bump into in the grocery store would all agree with that. Why? Because our experience demonstrates it. We pursue jobs, education, relationships, and even politics because we, at some fundamental level, believe that there is a bigger and more noble purpose to it all. Don Quixote, as the main character, was convinced that the chivalrous class of knights was ending, and it was his quest or mission to keep that tradition alive. The story itself is a comedy of errors as the “Man from La Mancha” is causing harm to himself and others by trying to do good while being caught in a fantasy. Famously, if there is only one scene you’ve heard of, it is how Don Quixote, with lance in hand, went off to fight giants, as his friend, Sancho Panza, tried to explain that the giants were really windmills. In the end, Don Quixote finds himself bested by his opponent but still resolute on his noble quest.

This story is over 400 years old, yet it is still relevant to us today. Why? Because we yearn for lives that are filled with purpose, meaning, and value. Jesus told a story once that leaned into that reality too. It is a story about a businessman and his employees. What we come to see in Don Quixote and what we will come to see in the parable of the talents and pounds is not that a meaningful life is a worthwhile pursuit; it truly is. But one of the greatest threats to purpose, meaning, and, ultimately, a lasting relationship with God is complacency. In the parable of the talents and pounds, we will meet a character who grew complacent, and that complacency fostered bitterness, and that bitterness robbed him of meaning and contentment. The truth we will see today is that complacency is a thief, but expectation and hope motivates faithfulness.

Article #9 – Christ’s Return

“We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”

1. A blessed hope.

- a. What is hope? → A confidence that it is all going to be ok.
 - i. cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5 – “**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**”
 - ii. A biblical term (Greek *elpis*) referring to the expectation of the believer that God will fulfill promises made in the past. **Biblical hope is more than a simple wish; it entails certainty based on God’s demonstration of faithfulness to people in the history of salvation as recorded in the Scriptures and as experienced by the church.** Ultimately, the Christian’s future hope lies in the promise of Christ’s return and the anticipation of resurrection from the dead.¹
 - 1. Is not – A wish or a positive thought that might or might not come true.
 - 2. Is – A confidence that God will do what he said he would do.
 - iii. Hope in the life of the Christian is directly connected to faith.
 - 1. Faith is trusting in God for unseen things in the future based on God’s past provision.
 - 2. Hope is the confidence that God will do what he said that he is going to do.
 - a. In this way faith and hope are two sides of the same coin. Both are intertwined and are rooted in God’s past action.
- b. **This passage reveals our hope through the character and authority of God.**
 - i. **Justice will reign over evil. (v. 32, 44-46)**
 - 1. God is not blind to injustice, and in the second coming Christ will have a complete and sufficient victory over every evil and injustice that has ever happened. There is nothing that is not seen and held accountable by God.
 - ii. **Eternal life is secure in Christ. (v. 34, 46)**
 - 1. Eternal life is not a mystery or a guessing game for the believer. It is a guarantee not because of our work, but because of the sufficient work and authority of Jesus. This means that we do not have to wonder or be confused or worried about our salvation. It is secure for us in Christ Jesus, and we will experience it.
 - 2. What is inherited is always received as a gift. This statement is an in-text refutation of works-based salvation. I.e., our inclusion and receiving of eternal life is a gift from the Father.
 - 3. Secondly, it is not a kingdom they established by their efforts, but was one prepared for them by God.
 - iii. **Truth is God’s nature. (v. 32, 40, 45)**
 - 1. The believer’s hope is rooted in this passage in God’s ability to see and discern what is true from what is false. All through Jesus’ words, he makes it clear that God is not simply a good guesser, occasionally correct, or merely inclined towards truth with good intentions. Truth is his nature, and he can only operate in truthfulness and justice.
- c. We live in the past, the present, and the future at all times.
 - i. **Past** – What we are **actively** remembering.

¹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 61.

- ii. **Present** – What we are **actively** experiencing.
- iii. **Future** – What we are **actively** anticipating.
- d. Jesus addresses this sense of time in the larger passage.
 - i. The two parables he tells communicates this truth.
 - 1. 25:1-13 – The Parable of the Ten Virgins
 - a. **Past** – A time when they were part of a specific family unit.
 - b. **Present** – Waiting for the bridegroom.
 - c. **Future** – A new family unit.
 - 2. 25:14-30 – The Parable of the Talents
 - a. **Past** – A working relationship with the master.
 - b. **Present** – Given a portion to invest.
 - c. **Future** – A time when they will be held accountable.
- e. **We are given a bold picture in this section and the larger passage that, in many ways, acts as spiritual medicine to shake us up and out of our complacency.**
 - i. **Remember, one of the main purposes of a parable is to be corrective.**
 - ii. **Parables move us away from complacency.**
 - 1. Biblical parables reveal the kind of God that God is and how God acts, and they show what humanity is and what humanity should and may become. **Parables are not merely informative. Like prophets before him, Jesus told parables to prompt thinking *and stimulate response* in relation to God.**
 - a. Parables usually engage listeners, create reflection, and promote action. They are pointed and clinching arguments for a too often slow-minded or recalcitrant audience.³⁹ They seek to goad people into the action the gospel deserves and the kingdom demands.
 - b. The parables compel us—for Christ’s sake literally—to do something! Parables do not seek the “**mild morality**” about which Kierkegaard lamented but radical cross-bearing, God-imitating response worthy of the name “conversion.”²
 - iii. This parable confronts the notion of passive participation.
 - 1. Just as in the parable of the Wise and Foolish builders, we will again see that obedience is an active and important thing to Jesus.
 - 2. **This is a known reality. → You cannot claim to be on mission and never move.**
 - a. **Team sports** – We quickly learn that every player has an active role in helping the team compete and win.
 - i. You can’t claim to have helped the team without doing something.
 - b. **Business** – We quickly learn that your business will not be profitable if you are not actively seeking out new clients and engaging those you already have.
 - c. **Church** – Many churches have mission statements, but the primary question is, how are you accomplishing your mission?
 - i. This question implies forward movement and not stagnation.
 - 1. Another question to ask for self reflection is, how am I utilizing my giftings to help the body grow in maturity and faithfulness?
 - 2. What motivates us to be about this work? → Christ’s Return.

² Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition. (2018), 9.

2. Living in constant expectancy.

- a. Hope helps us to live expectantly.
 - i. **Resiliency - hold fast / endure**
 - 1. When we live with hope and expect the coming of Christ, we are able to be resilient disciples. This means that we do not have to be tossed to and fro with every new idea of offering of “secret knowledge.”
 - ii. **Faithfulness - forward-looking trust**
 - 1. Faithfulness allows us to live a more non-anxious presence in a troubled and anxious age.
 - iii. **Declaration - proclaim the gospel**
 - 1. We have clarity on what really matters and what really lasts.
- b. **Jesus is confronting the ease in which we become complacent.**
 - i. **The previous parable is a call to faithfulness and a warning against unfaithfulness.**³
 - 1. “We do not have to shrink at his coming...” – I Jn. 2:28
 - 2. “Lord when did we do these things?” – Matt. 25:37ff
 - ii. We have four figures in the parable.
 - 1. The master / business owner.
 - 2. Three servants / employees.
 - a. Two that were faithful.
 - b. One that was fearful and unfaithful. → **He was complacent.**
 - iii. **The power of this parable is in the contrast between the faithful servants and the unfaithful one.**
 - 1. Faithful servants – They know their master’s desires and the mission he gave them with the talents.
 - a. This man was obviously a man of means, and he wanted to have his money used profitably while he was away. **He summoned *his own servants* and passed over to them the money he wanted them to invest while he was away.**⁴
 - 2. What is a talent?
 - a. A unit of measurement specifically relating to weight.
 - b. **Depending on the metal in question, the value of a talent was equivalent to 6000 days’ wages for a day laborer (roughly twenty years’ work),** so the man given five talents was given an enormous sum. Obviously the “one talent” man still had an enormous amount.⁵
 - 3. Unfaithful servant – His priority was not the mission of his master but his own safety.
 - a. **The important thing for this man was that the money was secure and that he could produce it when the time came. Keeping it in this way meant that there**

³ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 533.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 626–627.

⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 528.

was no possibility of loss, but it also meant that there was no possibility of gain.⁶

- b. He refers to his master as a “hard or harsh” man.
 - i. This doesn’t mean that the master was evil or greedy.
 - ii. It does mean that he was a wise and shrewd businessman.⁷
 - 1. Have you ever met someone who was just good at making money? → That was this guy.
 - 2. The servant was resentful and even condescending to his master.

c. Complacency ≠ Contentment

- i. We can easily confuse contentment with complacency.
 - 1. **Complacency** – a feeling of smug or uncritical satisfaction
 - a. I know it could be better, but I just don’t care enough to do anything about it.
 - b. Often is a position of resignation.
 - i. “C’est la vie” – That is life.
 - ii. It is just inevitable. → There is nothing I could have done to change it.
 - 2. **Contentment** – a state of satisfaction
 - a. Example:
 - b. Often involves a conscious choice. → it is an active process to guard your heart and count your blessings.
 - c. Contentment lacks – jealousy / resists comparison
- ii. **Complacency always robs us of blessings.**
 - 1. Why? → Because complacency centers my hardship or lack and tells me I am absolved of any responsibility.
 - 2. What blessings?
 - a. **Caution** – Not necessarily material blessings.
 - b. In this parable, the complacent servant was robbed of the joy of his master.
 - c. It robs us of the blessing of partnership.
 - d. It robs us of the blessing of intimacy.
 - e. It robs us of the blessing of confidence.
 - i. **Cf. v. 23-²³ 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.’**
- iii. Let’s ask: Can I clearly articulate how God wants to use me as part of his greater story?

3. Motivation for Godly Living & Energetic Mission

- a. Common Good → Uncommon News (the gospel)
 - i. **The previous section has ended with those who had used their talents well being praised and given the opportunity for wider work while the one who refused to use his talent was consigned to the outer darkness with its wailing and gnashing of teeth.** Jesus goes on from

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 628.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 630.

there to give a fuller picture of our responsibility, a picture of Judgment Day. He looks to the time *when the Son of man comes in his glory*, a thought that has been with us in one way or another throughout this whole discourse. Jesus' whole earthly life had been one of lowliness and service; now he looks forward to a coming that will be strikingly different. **He does not define *in his glory*, but clearly he means that when he returns at the end of this age he will come in majesty and splendor.**⁸

- ii. **This section reinforces the truth that was just revealed in the parables.**
 - 1. **It is worth reflecting that this is Jesus' last teaching to his disciples in this Gospel; Matthew proceeds from this to the story of the passion.** He leaves with his followers the teaching that in daily life the way they treat the lowly, the needy, and the unimportant is of the greatest significance. Not for them is it to flatter the great and to seek to ingratiate themselves with the wealthy and the powerful in this world. They will serve their Master when they serve "the least of these."⁹
- iii. **Another way of saying this is: The way we live matters in the scope of eternity...** (Past, Present, and Future) "What are we known for?"
 - 1. **This is very much to future forward action of the transformational power of the gospel in our lives.**
- b. God has given every person talents / resources to steward.
 - i. **Once again Jesus is teaching that the reward for good work is the opportunity of doing further work. "Enter the joy of your master" may be understood in the sense of REB, "share your master's joy."** Whether that is the way to take it or not, it clearly means that the servant has received the warm approval of his master and that his future is one in which joy will be prominent.¹⁰
 - 1. **Caution:** The actual size of their gain was not as important as the fact that each had doubled the amount entrusted to him.¹¹
- c. What are we called to be faithful with?
 - i. **The gospel** – The good news of abundant and eternal life through Jesus.
 - 1. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)
 - a. **¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**
 - b. **This is the greatest news that we could ever share.** → God loves you so much that he made a way to reconcile you to himself even though you caused the rift to begin with.
 - ii. **Time** – We all have the same amount of time available to us.
 - 1. 24 hours per day → 8760 hours per year.
 - 2. How are we spending that resource? How are we investing it? Who are we investing it into?

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 635.

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 641.

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 629.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 630.

- iii. **Talents** – In this parable, Jesus refers to a measurement of money called a talent.
 - 1. We can think of talents as physical and spiritual giftings.
 - a. What talents (natural abilities and spiritual giftings) has God given to you?
 - b. Don't know?
 - i. Ask someone else.
 - ii. Take a spiritual gifts inventory.
 - 2. Are you using your gifts to serve yourself or the kingdom?
- iv. **Treasure** – These are our monetary resources.
 - 1. **I have heard it said this way, there is no greater indicator of the health of my spiritual life than my bank account.**
 - 2. The simple reality is that we are willing to spend on what we think is important.
 - a. Caution – Your giving is to be done with a pure heart and out of a deep sense of God's generosity towards you. → God does not need your money.
 - b. Our giving is to always be done out of a posture of worship. That is, a posture of praise for God's faithful provision and love.
- d. **Where are we called to be faithful with these things?**
 - i. Remember – Faithfulness implies there is something to be faithful to. And, if there is something to be faithful to, we must not grow complacent, or we will miss the mission.
 - ii. We need to consider the gospel, our time, talents, and treasure in...
 - 1. **Our families**
 - a. What is the main priority of our family? (Ask your kids.)
 - 2. **Our neighborhoods**
 - a. What talents do I have that can bless my neighbors?
 - 3. **Our workplaces / schools**
 - a. What is my motivation for work?
 - 4. **Our casual interactions**
 - a. What first-impression do I give?
 - iii. **How can I be about my Father's business in each of these areas?**
 - iv. We must resist the simple answer of just being good people.
 - 1. God wants so much more for us than just some cold morality.
 - 2. He wants for us to experience hope, peace, joy, contentment, and his presence everyday. → Yes, our moral obedience is part of that, but there is so much more than just "keeping the rules."
 - v. **Maybe we need to ask, what is at risk of being robbed from us if we grow complacent in each of these areas?**

Additional Notes:

On the future - The attempt to penetrate the future has always been a fascination to people. Some resort to spirit mediums, others to astrology, still others to traditional but unsupported religious interpretations—all of which the Scripture roundly condemns. In our generation of readily available knowledge, there is an entire industry built on predicting the future. Experts in this discipline usually proceed by analyzing the trends of the past few years and then projecting them forward. Despite the immense efforts that go into such work,

however, predictions of this sort are always predicated on the assumption that the present trends will continue. If they do not, the predictions prove seriously faulty.¹²

Son of Man - According to the Gospels, “Son of Man” is Jesus’ favorite self-designation. It is used eighty-six times in the NT (Synoptics 69x, John 13x, elsewhere 4x). In the NT it is never presented as a confessional term from someone in the early church. However, Jesus does use it alongside confessional titles, such as “Messiah,” that others raise (e.g., Mk 8:29–31; 14:61–62). The phrase in its various lexical constructions is almost exclusively confined to the Gospels, except at Acts 7:56; Hebrews 2:6 (where Ps 8:4 is cited); Revelation 1:13; 14:14. In the Gospels only Jesus uses the term, except at John 12:34, where what he has said is cited by others. The term is written in Greek as “the son of the man” (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*), except for John 5:27; Hebrews 2:6; Revelation 1:13; 14:14 (*huios anthrōpou*). The phrase in a few Gospel passages (Mt 24:30 // Mk 13:26 // Lk 21:27; Mt 26:64 // Mk 14:62 // Lk 22:69) is related directly to language from Daniel 7:13–14 and, as was noted above, is associated in Hebrews 2:6 with Psalm 8, where it carries its common meaning of “human being,” as a “son of man” is a descendant of a man and thus a human.¹³

The consistency of the term’s use only by Jesus and the lack of its use as a confessional term of the early church elsewhere in the NT makes it extremely unlikely to have been the creation of the church.¹⁴

Judgment & Works - This passage deals with the evidence on which people will be judged, not the cause of salvation or damnation. That grace is not part of the present picture does not mean that it is any the less significant. We must bear in mind that it is common to the whole scriptural picture that we are saved by grace and judged by works (for this latter point cf. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10, etc.). **The works we do are the evidence either of the grace of God at work in us or of our rejection of that grace.**¹⁵

Too often, we take passages like this out of context of the larger clarity of Scripture and that begins to distort or cause confusion on key doctrines like, salvation by grace. If salvation is by works, then why does Jesus speak of an inheritance that was prepared by God? An inheritance is always a gift, it cannot be earned. If it was a wage, that would be earned. In verse 27-39 we see that **their kindness to the needy was not in order to gain a reward and merit salvation, but was part of the way they lived in response to what Christ had done in and for them.**¹⁶

Sheep and Goats:

The point of the *shepherd* simile is to emphasize yet again the ultimate *division* among those who up to that point have been mixed up together (as *sheep and goats* regularly are in Palestinian flocks, the goats being hard to distinguish superficially from the sheep, which are not like the white varieties of Europe!); cf. the parables of ch. 13 for this emphasis on division, which has also been a key theme since 24:38. There is no middle ground between the saved and the lost. *Sheep* (which are more commercially valuable) are a regular

¹² D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 139.

¹³ D. L. Bock, “Son of Man,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 894.

¹⁴ D. L. Bock, “Son of Man,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 897.

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 634.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 639.

Old Testament image for God's people, and so appropriately symbolize the 'blessed' here. *Right* and *left* in Jewish as in many cultures symbolize favor and disfavor, good and bad fortune.¹⁷

He takes an illustration from the pastoral processes and says the separation will be like that when *the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats* (cf. Ezek. 34:17). These were the most common of the smaller domestic animals, and of the two *the sheep* were prized the more highly. **The two groups of animals would graze together, but in due course *the shepherd* would separate them out (most commentators agree that the goats were more sensitive to cold than the sheep, so that at the end of the day the separation had to be made, the goats being put in a warmer place to keep both groups comfortable through the cooler hours of the night).** Thus Jesus is referring to a well-known pastoral practice.¹⁸

¹⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 359–360.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 635–636.