

The Parable of the Faithful and Evil Slave
Matthew 24:45-51
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After Jesus taught His disciples about the signs that will precede His second coming and the events surrounding His return, He then told them a series of parables about the importance of being alert. His first parable was about the fig tree (24:32-35), which shows that aspects of the seven-year tribulation period will be observable and enable the people of that generation to know that the coming of the Lord is near. Jesus then told the parable of the days of Noah and the parable of the watchful homeowner in order to teach that the time of His coming cannot be known, since *"the day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone"* (24:36). Just as the people of Noah's day did not anticipate the timing of the flood, so too the people of the generation that is alive when Christ returns will not anticipate the timing of it either.

Connected by the word *"then"* in verse 45, the parable of the faithful and evil slave expands on the teaching that the second coming of Jesus will be at a time when no one knows. The point of this parable is that the coming will be sooner than expected. Therefore, we *"must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will"* (24:44).

The faithful slave (24:45-47)

Jesus contrasts two slaves *"whom his master put in charge of his household to give them food at the proper time"* (24:45). The first slave is *"the faithful and sensible slave."* This slave is faithful and sensible because his master finds him *"so doing when he comes."* The household that the master put the faithful slave in charge of to give them their food were being fed at the proper time. The reward the master gave this slave who had proven himself to be faithful was that *"he will put him in charge of all his possessions"* (24:47).

Obviously, the faithful slave corresponds to the faithful disciples of Jesus who would be faithfully serving His interests for the time before He returns. This involves doing the will of God that includes fruitful service to others. The Lord has given each one of His followers abilities, resources and opportunities to serve Him and in particular, with the ministry of the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to the world. We will be faithful and sensible as we utilize these as good stewards of what the Lord has entrusted to us.

The faithful slave is also described as “*sensible,*” meaning wise or prudent. This word is used repeatedly in the next parable, the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:2, 4, 8, 9), and is translated “*prudent*” in the NASB. It describes a person’s thinking as being insightful rather than foolish. This is meaningful because being thoughtful about outcomes motivates our faithfulness. This faithful slave’s wisdom helped him to be cognizant of the return of his master and led him to be careful to do the will of his master.

We likewise will be faithful as we put our present life into the perspective of the Lord’s return. His return for His church is imminent and our life is but a “*vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*” (James 4:14). When we live in light of His potential return, we will wisely pursue what really matters into eternity and be less selfish about what is momentary. “*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

In verse 46, the faithful slave is said to be “blessed” as a result of His faithfulness. Because these true disciples engage themselves faithfully in the task they were left with, the Lord will give them even more responsibility, “*he will be put in charge of all of his possessions.*” This corresponds to those who overcome in Revelation 3:21, “*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*” We will enjoy a blessed place because the Lord has made all His children to be fellow heirs with Him (Romans 8:17).

This reward is also seen in the next chapter of the parable of the talents, where the master says to his slave, “*Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master*” (Matthew 25:21, 23). This points to a greater responsibility and opportunity to serve the Lord in the coming kingdom of God than even what exists for us today.

Today we have opportunities with relatively fewer things, and His true, faithful disciples will have opportunities with many things. It has not been revealed to us what this service may be, but there is every indication that it will be greater in the kingdom than even it is presently. Indeed, there is biblical evidence of our actual role in serving the Lord by overseeing what is His, “*If we endure, we will also reign with Him*” (2 Timothy 2:12).

Jesus had earlier taught them this truth in the parable of the wedding feast, as they traveled to Jerusalem for the final time. He concluded that with, *“Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions”* (Luke 12:42-44). This concept of being faithful with what the Lord has entrusted to us is a theme in the Gospels. As we are faithful, our reward will be great.

This reward in the parable of the wedding feast is further described as a position of blessing to which the master will deliver the slave. *“Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them”* (Luke 12:37). This incredible depiction of the master serving the slaves in reward for their faithfulness is a remarkable glimpse into the blessing that the Lord will deliver us into. While this is only a parable and not necessarily a description of how the Lord will act in the kingdom of God, it nevertheless points to the grace of God in His blessing that will be expressed to His followers as they live for Him.

The evil slave (24:48-51)

The evil slave is set in contrast to the faithful slave. There are only two options given by Jesus, those who live faithfully and those who act treacherously. The evil slave’s problem is first and foremost an internal one, *“if that evil slave says in his heart.”* The one who does not have faith will express such unbelief in his foolish heart.

While the earlier parables taught the fact that no one knows when Jesus would return, this parable teaches the fact that He is coming sooner than some people think He will. The *“evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time’”* and this foolish assumption demonstrates his lack of faith and failure to live prudently. This view ends up producing behaviors that are inconsistent with the will of the master.

There are two types of behaviors by the evil slave that are specifically described, where he *“begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards.”* This first behavior is one of mistreatment of his fellow slaves, who were part of the household he was to oversee. Because of his lack of faith in the promise of his master’s return, he acts toward other slaves in a self-serving and cruel manner.

How we treat one another is the direct manifestation of faith, *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen”* (1 John 4:20). We must not hate others but rather we must *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you”* (Ephesians 4:32).

The second behavior that the evil slave is condemned for is that he ate and drank with drunkards. This has nothing to do with being guilty by association, as the religious leaders had condemned Jesus for saying about Himself, *“Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”* (Matthew 11:19). Rather, Jesus’ condemnation was their self-indulgent lack of attentiveness to the interests of their master who put them in charge of his household.

This practice of the evil slave corresponds to the lack of faithful attentiveness that Paul described would exist in these last days, *“for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night”* (1 Thessalonians 5:5-7). To be eating and drinking with drunkards is to be unconcerned with the responsibilities the master put his slave in charge of with his household.

This lack of care and alertness is consistent with someone who not only is self-serving, but wrongly assumes there will be no consequences on the horizon. Peter also wrote of this ungodly attitude of such people in the end times, *“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation”* (2 Peter 3:3-4). The reason that Peter tells us for this delay is for the purpose of bringing faith to all, *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9).

The parable of the faithful and the evil slave teaches that the way we think about the future will have a direct effect upon our present actions. If we think the Lord is not returning any time soon, we will be tempted to live unfaithfully in our daily lives. To have the proper view of the Lord’s coming will ensure that we will live faithfully in opportunities that He has granted to us in light of our hope for the future. *“Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming”* (1 John 2:28).

The emphasis of this parable is not faithful versus unfaithful stewardship but expectancy regarding the master's return. The evil slave was such because he said in his heart *"My master is not coming for a long time"* and he lived without concern. The evil slave was greatly mistaken, for *"the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know."*

This coming would result in reward for the faithful slave, who would be given greater leadership, but it would result in judgment upon the evil slave, who would suffer punishment. The punishment that the master delivered upon the evil, unbelieving slave involved:

1, being *"cut...in pieces"*

This word for pieces is where we get our English word "dichotomy" and refers to two parts. This is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the animal sacrifice in Exodus 29:17. To be cut in pieces indicates certain death, and in the context of the animal sacrifice, the judgment of God.

2. Being assigned *"a place with the hypocrites"*

Earlier that same day, Jesus repeatedly called the scribes and Pharisees *"hypocrites"* and taught that these hypocrites would experience the most severe judgment by God (Matthew 23:13-29). This included eternal destruction in hell, *"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell"* (23:33).

3. Being assigned to a *"place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*

This phrase not only expresses the response to severe torment, but is the description of people who *"will be cast out into the outer darkness"* (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), and people who will be thrown *"into the furnace of fire"* (Matthew 13:42, 50). In each of these passages, this judgment will occur when the Lord returns to earth.

This obviously refers to the unbelievers who are destined for eternal destruction in hell. These are people the Lord living in the tribulation period and experience the Lord's return in judgment. They should have acted in light of this revelation that Jesus had taught regarding His return, but they self-servingly oppressed the slaves who sought to be faithful to the Lord Jesus (cf. Matthew 24:9).

Conclusion

The true followers of Jesus in the tribulation period will be faithful to Him and will be rewarded in the kingdom of God. To do so is the only sensible way to live, since He will return soon and will receive the blessing of God through the increasing opportunities to serve Him. Their faith will be unshaken for the Lord will enable them to endure to the end and be saved (Matthew 24:13).

However, the unbelievers do not heed the gospel of the kingdom that will be proclaimed to them (Matthew 24:14) and do not think that Jesus is returning soon, and thus are destined for judgment. Because they do not expect Jesus to return, they have no sense of their impending torment, along with the religious hypocrites, in outer darkness in the eternal fire.

This contrast between the faithful and sensible slave and the evil slave extends beyond the tribulation era. Today, we have the opportunity to be faithful and sensible in the expected coming of our Lord, along with the opportunity to foolishly reject the truth of His return and assume that all will remain as it has been in the past. The rejection of the revelation of the return of Jesus will lead us to being cut to pieces, surrounded by hypocrites, where we will suffer great turmoil in being sent into eternal destruction. *“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Such foolish rejection of Christ will not occur in a vacuum. Just as the evil slave beat his fellow slaves, those who revel in their ignorant self-indulgence will have no regard for who may stand in their way. Therefore, they will be assigned a place with the religious hypocrites that opposed Jesus.

The people of God will suffer the antagonism of such unbelief, but especially so when it exists within a local fellowship. People who lack true faith are consumed with the affairs of everyday life (cf. 2 Timothy 2:4), and have no interest in living for eternity. Therefore, in their self-service, they foster strife among the believers.

As true, sensible followers of Jesus, *“we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).