

# MATTHEW 24:36 – 25:46

## THE PAROUSIA

We have now reached the point where Jesus is addressing the second question of His disciples – “When is the sign of your coming (parousia) and the end of the age?”

We have a tendency to look at this as two separate questions, but in the context of the disciples, it would have been understood as one question. In their minds the coming of the Messiah and the end of the age were one occurrence, or at the very least, the first set the second in motion. Please remember or refer back to the notes on the two previous messages regarding the definition of “end.”

### OVERVIEW

As we roll into verse 36 we will see a change of subject as evidenced by a Greek phrase. Verses 36 – 44 speak of the unexpected and unpredictable arrival of the parousia in a collection of shorter sayings.

We then move into a section of parables (24:45-51; 25: 1-13; 14 – 30), which underline the three short sayings. These three parables have a common theme of awaiting the imminent arrival of an authority figure and the need to have made appropriate provision so as not to be caught unprepared and suffer punishment.

The final section (pericope) of the discourse (25: 31-46) takes up the same theme, though not in parabolic form but in a judgment scene which explains the final verdict, when the division between the saved and the lost will be irrevocable. The element of surprise still dominates here.

Please note that throughout all of this Jesus has refused to give the disciples the “sign” for which they asked. Therefore the timing of the parousia and the final judgment cannot be foreseen. This is important for us to consider because it shows us how we are to live our lives in expectation of Jesus’ return. This section shows us not only in theory, but also in a practical manner what it means to “be ready” for His return.

### ***Matthew 24:36***

***36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.***

So, how do we know we are in fact, “changing gears” or changing subject matter? (I

would love to spare you the details, but this is such a “hot potato” that I feel it is necessary to bring at least some of them to the fore.)

**1) “But of” – Gr. *peri de* – the rhetorical formula for a new beginning.**

This phrase has already been used in **MT. 22:31** when Jesus turned from answering one question to an aside. The Apostle Paul used this same device in **1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12**; to move from one issue to another which was raised by his readers. **Also see: Acts 21:25; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1.** So this phrase marks the transition from the first of the two questions asked in verse 3, to the second.

**2) “That day” is the first mention in this discourse of a single “day” or “hour”, in clear contrast to the plural, “those days” which has been used in vv. 19, 22 and 29 for the period of the Roman War.** The singular “day” or “hour” will recur in 24:42, 44, 50 and 25:13.

**3) Verses 4 – 35 have spoken of an event that can be predicted (v.34) and for whose coming - signs can be given (especially v. 15). From here on Jesus speaks of an event whose time is both unknown and unknowable, which by definition comes without prior warning.**

**4) The event predicted in vv. 4-35 has been described as the “coming of the Son of Man” using the participle *erchomenos*, echoing the vision of Dan. 7:13 – 14.** The only mention of the parousia in that section was to say that it will not be like the events of those days. (v. 27) But now the term parousia, (which does not occur in the Gr. translations of Daniel 7:13 – 14) comes into play in vv. 37 and 39. Since this was the term used in the second part of the disciples’ question, it is clear that that second issue is now being addressed.

**5) It should be noted that whereas vv. 4 – 35 were linked by repeated uses of temporal connections (“then,” “in those days,” “immediately after,” “it is near.”) there is no such temporal introduction to this paragraph. Its contents stand apart from the historical sequence hitherto described.**

So this long section from vv. 36 – the end of chapter 25 are eschatological in nature, whereas vv. 4 – 35 are historical from our perspective.

***36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what***

***hour your Lord is coming. 43 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. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.***

We now have the three short sayings, which have an ominous tone to them. The overall context seems to be one of imminent judgment for which people were unprepared.

The three connected aspects of the parousia:

- **The time of the parousia is unknown. (v.36)**
- **Therefore it will catch people unawares. (vv. 37 – 41)**
- **Therefore Christians must always be ready. (vv. 42 – 44)**
  - **Point B is illustrated by the sudden irruption of the Genesis flood into normal life and by the banal occupations of people who suddenly find themselves divided.**
  - **Point C is illustrated by the householder who is unprepared for the coming burglar.**
  - **All three points rule out the warning “sign” requested by the disciples.**

But what about the people taken in vv. 40 and 41? Is this an illusion to the rapture? I don't believe so, for two basic reasons. First of all, this context is one of judgment. The rapture doctrine teaches of BELIEVERS being removed from earth to be in the presence of God. The idea of judgment would preclude that. Also, in the verses used to support the doctrine of the rapture, Paul speaks of it as a mystery – something that had yet to be revealed until Paul spoke of it. Therefore I don't believe this to be the case.

But this section doesn't spell out in what way a believer is to “be ready.” That is a legitimate question. We will continue on in order to find this application.

**Verse 44 is the segue which shows us what we are to look for in the following parables.** Please note: there is a temptation to read too much into parables. They are stories that are told in order to get across a basic truth. To parse down every detail can render them moot. Think of Aesop's fables. They were stories told to get across a moral point. Parables are a similar device, so trying to interpret the “oil” as the spirit and all the details that go into a Jewish wedding feast are simply reading too much theology into what is being said. The immediate and local context and usage simply doesn't allow for that. It may sound good, but it isn't the way parables were used in that day.

***45 “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? 46 Blessed is that servant whom***

***his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 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, 51 and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

- Theme: The servant was to be a good steward of his master's property until the master returned, but grew tired of waiting. So he began to abuse his authority and failed to be a good steward. Upon the master's return, he was punished because of his failure and lack of preparation. This is the common theme that is brought to the fore in verse 44.

***Mt. 25: 1 – 13***

***1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.***

***6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.***

***11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'***

***13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.***

**Once again we have the theme of being prepared for an imminent coming.**

- All 10 virgins had oil, but only five of them prepared by carrying extra with them. All 10 fell asleep, but the five who had prepared by bringing extra provisions were allowed into the wedding feast. The other five were left outside the feast, meaning they were left to the judgment.
- This says something of what it means to be ready. More on that later.
- Note the recurring words and phrases of readiness.
- Verse 13 – Watch! For you don't know the day or the hour of His coming.
- Watch and be ready – the recurring theme.

***14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave***

*five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' 26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

Once again we have a parable, which speaks of a time when a person in authority leaves people for a time with duties relating to stewardship. When the authority figure returns, those who were given the talents were rewarded according to what they had done with the resources they had been given. There is no notice given as to when the master was to return. The stewards were to take every opportunity to build on what they had been given – two of them did, one didn't and was punished.

- Within the sequence of parables are a number of references to the long time that may elapse before the parousia takes place. But alongside the recognition of delay is the warning of imminence.

**31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him,**

*then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of 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 took Me in; 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 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting 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 take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' 44 "Then they also will answer Him, 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, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch 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 everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The theme of imminence is still here! Jesus has still refused to give a "sign" of His parousia.

We have a judgment scene with Jesus, not the Father, sitting on the throne, as is common in most OT allusions. This is the throne to which Jesus was seen "coming" in Daniel chapter 7. Here Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. They were often pastured and transported together back then. It also hearkens back to the wheat and the chaff being allowed to grow together, as Jesus spoke of earlier in Matthew.

But the criteria we see being used for judgment in this scene ties us back to what it means and what has been said concerning "being ready" and "watching" for the Lord's return.

**The practical question is: "How can we live on red alert status all the time? How is that possible?"** The answer is that it isn't possible. We have to go to work. We have to go to school. We all have doctor's appointments, recitals and little league games to attend. Earlier today we saw that people were marrying and working in the fields when the judgment came. And that is fine. Life goes on with day-to-day events. We aren't to just stop everything and wait in the trees until Jesus comes. In

the parables we saw that Jesus gave the stewards things they should do. And we are to do those things. As parents and spouses we are to love and work in order to support our families. That is what good Christians do. So how do we actually do this?

The two ideas of delay and imminence are in play here. An unknown time may be near or it may be distant. To dwell on an assumption of delay and then postpone readiness courts disaster.

As we just saw in the judgment scene, Jesus rewarded those that made the most of the time between His leaving and His parousia. Delay and imminence are not in conflict – they are two sides to the same coin.

It is how God's people are living now that will be the key to their reward and their fate. As we have seen throughout the 3 stories and the parables, readiness for those climactic events can be achieved by living all the time in such a way that their unannounced arrival (climactic events/ parousia) need not be a disaster but rather a time of praise and reward for a life well lived and opportunities well taken. So each parable adds further understanding to what it means to be ready.

What we see is that there is no sign for the *telos* of this age. That would be the easy way out. But what God requires of His people is not a last – minute turning over of a new leaf prompted by a warning sign, but a life of constant readiness – a life, a believer living every moment not with his eye on the clouds or his head in the clouds, but a believer going through everyday activities with the belief and motivation that the master could return any moment. And return He will. **The question is: “Will He find stewards busy about their father’s business? Or will we have fallen into lethargy and a lack of stewardship due to the perceived delay?”**

So, let us be like those good stewards and young ladies spoken of in the parables. We don't have to be on “red alert” status all the time. We only have to know that Jesus could come back at any time and although it will take us by surprise in one sense, we know it is coming. Therefore, let us be about our Father's business, lovingly taking care of business, ministering to others and being good witnesses. He is coming back for us!