

RESPONSIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY

THE "GOAL" — STANDING BEFORE THE SON OF MAN

By Arlen L. Chirwood

"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your lord doth come" (Matt. 24:40-42).

The Lord's reference to one taken and another left opens the first of four parallel parables in the Christian section of the Olivet Discourse. And each parable actually has to do with *the same thing*, though each parable presents matters from a different perspective.

Each parable has to do with *the Lord's dealings with His servants (Christians) during present and future times, with the coming kingdom in view*. And, with each parable presenting matters from a different perspective, all four parables viewed together present *a complete, composite picture in a threefold fashion*:

- 1) The Christians' present responsibility.
- 2) The Christians' future accountability.
- 3) The relationship of both to the coming kingdom of Christ.

Christians have *a responsibility* to live their lives in a manner which reflects their high calling. "Salvation" is for *a purpose*, and this purpose has to do with *the coming kingdom*. Christians have been called "unto his kingdom and glory" (I Thess. 2:12; cf. I Peter 5:1, 10; II Peter 1:3). And the Biblical picture of one's salvation is not so much *saved from* ("from hell") as it is *saved unto* ("unto his kingdom and glory").

"Responsibility," in turn, demands *accountability*.

Every Christian will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ *to render an account concerning how he carried out his responsibility*. All things will be revealed in the presence of a righteous, omnipotent, omniscient Judge (Rev. 1:12-20). The previous works of the ones being judged will come under review, and the results will have a direct bearing on the Christian's position in the kingdom which follows.

The purpose for the judgment seat, in this respect, is in keeping with the purpose for the entire present dispensation. God is today *calling out the rulers who are to reign as co-heirs with His Son during the coming age*, and the decisions and determinations rendered at the judgment seat concerning these individuals will have to do with their being placed in or being denied one of the numerous proffered positions which the co-heirs will occupy with Christ.

Accordingly, *the end or goal toward which everything moves in the Christian section of the Olivet Discourse is the coming kingdom*. It is the kingdom with its glory to which Christians have been called, and any Christian failing to realize his calling therein will have failed to realize the very purpose for his salvation.

The coming kingdom is not only the end or goal toward which everything moves in the Christian section of the Olivet Discourse but in the other two sections as well. God's dealings with the Jewish people in the first section (24:4-39) occur during and immediately following the Tribulation and lead into *the kingdom*, and God's dealings with the Gentiles in the third section as well (25:31-46) occur at the end of the Tribulation (following God's dealings with the other two divisions of mankind) and also lead into *the kingdom*.

And, as evident, in a broader respect, *the kingdom* is the end or goal toward which everything in Scripture moves, save events in the few references describing conditions during the eternal ages beyond the Millennium (*e.g.*, I Cor. 15:24-28; parts of Rev. 21, 22). Beginning with the opening chapters of Genesis, the emphasis is upon *man holding the sceptre, ruling over a restored earth; and this emphasis never changes throughout Scripture*.

Christ's discourse on the Mount of Olives moves more to the end of the matter and presents summary information relative to concluding events in God's dealings with the three groups of mankind (Jew, Christian, and Gentile), with *the kingdom, as throughout Scripture, the objective or goal in view*.

Comparing the Parables

It is clearly shown in the parable of the Householder and His servant and in the parable of the talents (Matt. 24:45-51; 25:14-30) that man ultimately placed in the position of "ruler" is the focal point (*cf.* 24:47; 25:21, 23). And it is no different in the other two parallel parables in the Christian section of the Olivet Discourse (24:40-44; 25:1-13).

Note that each parable begins in a similar fashion: "Then..." (24:40-44); "Who then..." (24:45-51); "Then..." (25:1-13); "For it is just as a man...[literal rendering, referring back to the parable of the ten virgins in vv. 1-13, and consequently back to the previous two parables in this section, in 24:40-51]" (25:14-30).

Then note that each parable has been given to provide additional information which will help explain another parable. In this respect, the words "Who then" and "Then," opening the second and third parables, refer back to the previous parable/parables.

The first parable (vv. 40-44), for example, closes with the exhortation to *Watch, Be Ready*, "for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (vv. 42, 44).

The second parable immediately following (vv. 45-51) opens with the words, "*Who then* is a faithful and wise servant..." The allusion is back to the preceding parable (vv. 40-44). The parable of the Householder and His servant [vv. 45-51] has been given to provide additional information, helping to explain the preceding parable dealing with one taken and the other left [vv. 40-44].

Both parables concern *the same thing* — faithfulness or unfaithfulness on the part of the Lord's servants, resulting in their being accorded or being denied positions as *rulers with Christ in the kingdom*. And so it is with the following two parables.

This connection between the four parables can possibly be seen slightly clearer in the opening verse of the fourth parable. Note that the words, "the kingdom of heaven is" (v. 14, KJV), are in italics, indicating that they are not in the Greek text. The word "as" is a translation of the Greek word *hosper*, which is a connecting particle meaning "just as" or "even as."

This is the same word translated "as" earlier in the Olivet Discourse (24:37, 38), comparing the days of Noah with the days of the coming of the Son of Man. And the word is used in the same sense beginning the parable of the talents.

This word, beginning the parable of the talents, is used as a connective to show that the parable about to follow is *exactly like* the parable which has preceded, giving rise to the translation, "For it is just as a man..." The parable of the talents was given to help explain the previous parable, the parable of the ten virgins (or, for that matter, the two parables preceding the parable of the ten virgins as well). This parable concerns *exactly the same thing* — *faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the Lord's servants, resulting in their being accorded or being denied entrance into the marriage festivities and subsequent positions as rulers with Christ in the kingdom.*

Received or Turned Away

The words in the text, "the one shall be taken, and the other left," are often misunderstood by expositors. And through this misunderstanding, some mistakenly teach that these verses refer to *the rapture*, with one removed from the earth and another left behind on the earth. This though is not at all what is in view.

The mistake comes from thinking that *the ones left remain in the field or at the mill*, while the others *are removed from these places*. Reference to the Greek text, the context, and parallel Scripture though will show that *this cannot possibly be the case*. These verses reveal the Lord's dealings with two Christians who will be in the field and two other Christians who will be grinding at the mill (representative individuals, places, and occupations) when He returns to reckon with His servants; and this reckoning will occur, not in the field or at the mill, but *before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven following the rapture*. The time and place of this reckoning are always the same in Scripture.

The word "taken" (vv. 40, 41) is a translation of the Greek word *paralambano*. This is a compound word comprised of *para* ("beside," or "alongside") and *lambano* ("to take," or "to receive"). Thus, the word goes a step beyond just simply *taking* or *receiving*. It is *taking or receiving the person alongside or to oneself* (cf. Matt. 17:1; 20:17 where *paralambano* is used). This would be the word used referring to the reception of an individual as an "associate" or a "companion," which is actually what is involved in this passage.

Then, the word "left" (vv. 40, 41) is a translation of the Greek word *aphiemi*, which is used in an antithetical respect to *paralambano*. In the light of the way *paralambano* is used, *aphiemi* could possibly best be understood by translating the word, "turn away."

That which is involved in this passage has to do with *Christians before the judgment seat either being received in an intimate sense or being turned away in an opposite sense.*

And the parable of the Householder and His servant, which immediately follows, is given to help explain these things. These verses are not referring to the rapture at all, but to *faithful and unfaithful Christians in different walks of life as they appear before the judgment seat in heaven.*

The Parallel Passage in Luke

Reference to the parallel passage in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse shows this same thing:

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (21:36).

Some expositors have also taken this verse as a reference to the rapture (usually those attempting selective rapture); but, again, such is not correct. This verse is actually the parallel in Luke's gospel for not only Matt. 24:40-44 but also for the three parables which follow, covering the remainder of the Christian section of the discourse (the parable of the Householder and His servant [24:45-51], the parable of the ten virgins [25:1-13], and the parable of the talents [25:14-30]).

Again, reference to the Greek text, the context, and related Scripture will show exactly how this verse is to be understood. The main problems in translation and interpretation lie in the words "that ye may be accounted worthy" and "escape all these things."

The words, "that ye may be accounted worthy," could be better translated, "that you may prevail over [in the sense of being strong and winning a victory]"; and the words, "escape [lit., 'escape out of'] all these things," refer back to the immediate context, dealing with "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life" (vv. 34, 35). This verse is, thus, exhorting Christians to watch and pray relative to deliverance from involvement in the ways and practices of the world (Eph. 6:18; cf. vv. 10-17).

(In Luke 21:36, two different words appear in the various Greek texts, which accounts for the two different translations [*kataxioo*, "to be accounted worthy"; *katischuo*, "to prevail over"]. And manuscript evidence favoring either word is somewhat divided. Both appear in a number of different manuscripts.

Thus, context becomes a major factor to ascertain

the correct text, with most Greek texts and translations since the ASV [1901] favoring and using *katischuo* ["to prevail over"]. And that would evidently be for reasons echoed in Lenski's Greek word studies: "No inner reasons militate against this reading; on the contrary, the inner reasons support this reading."

Weymouth, in his translation of the New Testament, captures the correct thought from the Greek text about as well as any English version presently available (also see the NASB):

"Beware of slumbering; at all times pray that you may be fully strengthened to escape from all these coming evils, and to take your stand in the presence of the Son of Man."

Note also Wuest's "Expanded Translation":

"But be circumspect, attentive, ready, in every season being in prayer, in order that you may have sufficient strength to be escaping all these things which are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The words "watch," and "pray" are in a present tense showing linear (continuous) action in the Greek text. The thought is that of Christians *continually watching* (always being alert, on guard) and *continually praying* for the strength necessary to *escape out of the ways and practices of the world*.

"Escape out of" is the translation of an aorist infinitive in the Greek text, showing deliverance viewed as *eventual* (i.e., viewed as the result of Christians continually watching and praying). And, viewed as *a whole* (as in Weymouth's translation), this deliverance would occur on particular occasions at different times.

Contextually, this deliverance is not a one-time event (as the rapture), but repeated occurrences (as in Wuest's translation). And the *goal* of the entire process is Christians ultimately being privileged to "stand before the Son of man."

And *standing before, or in the presence of, the Son of Man* in the passage from Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse (21:34-36) is synonymous with *being received in an intimate manner by the Lord* in the parallel section in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:40-44).

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