

Matthew 24:45-51

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2445-51/>

Jesus tells the first of four parables to illustrate the things He told the disciples about His coming and the end of the age. The first parable is called “the parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants.”

The parallel Gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:33-37 and Luke 12:41-48.

After He answered the disciples three questions (What is the sign of the end of the age? What is the sign of your coming? When will these things be? (Matthew 24:3)), and He exhorted them to be alert for His return (Matthew 24:42) Jesus told the disciples four parables to illustrate the things He said.

- The first parable is called “The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants.”

It was given to specifically illustrate Jesus’s admonition to “be alert for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42).

- The second parable is called “The Parable of the Bridesmaids” (Matthew 25:1-13).
- The third parable is called “The Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25:14-30).
- The fourth and final parable is called “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” (Matthew 25:31-46).

The first three parables form a trio and likely describe different aspects of Christ’s judgment of believers’ faithfulness. The final parable seems to describe three separate judgements.

This parable is a somewhat condensed version of the third parable “The Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25:14-30).

The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants begins with a rhetorical question: *Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?*

In this parable, *the master* of the house and servants represents God. He owns the house and everything in it. *The master’s household* includes all of his property, his businesses, and affairs. It is his estate. In the parable, *the master’s household* broadly represents God’s creation, but more specifically it represents God’s kingdom. The *master* has servants who are a part of *his household*. The Greek term translated as *slaves* is “doulos.” It can mean bond-servant, *slaves*, or hired workers.

As God represents *the master*, and *his household* represents His creation and the kingdom in this parable, *the slaves* represent people who are believers and therefore a part of his *household*.

God tasked people to steward His creation in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). But Adam and Eve abdicated their responsibility and fell into sin. Jesus is speaking this parable with His disciples who are believers and members of God's *household* (John 1:12-13). After Jesus rose from the dead and before He ascended into Heaven, He delegated authority in the kingdom to His disciples when He tasked them to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Believers are tasked to manage God's *household* for *the proper time* while the Son is away. But which believers *will be faithful and sensible to his master's will*?

The opening question is what *the master* asks himself—either in his head or aloud—when he considers which servant/slave *to put in charge of his household* when he is away. The version of this parable that Mark recorded clarifies that *the master* "goes away on a journey" and leaves his house in the hands of *his slaves*, assigning a different task to each one (Mark 13:34). The phrase *to give them their food at the proper time* means to manage *the household* activities, including the distribution of the stores of *food* to all who belong to *the master's* household during *the time the master* is away.

The Master (God) is asking: "Who is responsible to manage all of this for me, when I am not present to do so myself? Who will faithfully steward my *household*?"

Jesus said, *Blessed* ("Makarios") *is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes*. A servant who faithfully does the will of *his master*, even when *the master* is away, pleases *the master* and demonstrates that he is capable and worthy of greater responsibilities.

Jesus underscores this point. *Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions*. The point is that Jesus will give to those who are faithful stewards during their lives on earth the great reward of reigning with Him in the world that is to come.

What responsibilities does He mean by *put him in charge of all his possessions*? Everything belongs to God. So this would include all material possessions as well as all responsibilities and relationships. It would include stewarding the raising of children, as well as responsibilities in being an employee or employer. All these are small responsibilities compared to the responsibilities God has in mind in the kingdom of heaven. But it is to those who are faithful in small things that God intends to reward with stewardship over large responsibilities.

This point was similar to a point Jesus made in another parable called "The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward" (Luke 16:1-8). One of the points of that parable was "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10).

One of the primary rewards Jesus seeks to give those who are faithful in this life and with this creation is to reign with Him over the earth in the next life and in the new creation, in love, service, and harmony (Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:11). The servant kings of the new creation will bring their glory into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

Jesus promised, “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” (Revelation 3:21). The word for “overcome” in that verse is the Greek word, “nikao.” It means “to conquer” or “to win the victory.” For more, read our [Tough Topics article “Overcome.”](#)

Jesus won victory over temptation and death through learning obedience, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8-9; Hebrews 5:8). As *the master* of the house asks, *who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household*, so too does Jesus ask Himself who should share His throne, and rule over His kingdom. Answer: The one who is serving Jesus faithfully when He returns.

What is it that those who rule over His household will be doing in His kingdom? To give them their food at the proper time. And what is Jesus looking for to judge whether a servant is faithful and sensible? It is a slave or servant who is already feeding His people. One who is investing in His flock. Those whom *the master* finds so doing when he comes will be the one who is *blessed* by *the master*. It is likely here that Jesus’s reference to feeding His people is a corollary to His instruction in the Great Commission, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20a). As Jesus made clear, spiritual food is of greater value than physical food (John 4:32-34, 6:27, 6:55).

The servants who are faithfully feeding the flock on the earth will be blessed with an incredible reward. Jesus will put him in charge of all his possessions, to reign with Him in His kingdom. This metaphor is parallel with Revelation 3:21, where Jesus promised He would share His throne with those who overcome. It makes sense. Jesus wants rulers of the New Earth who have proven they are willing to serve. There will be no tyrants in the Kingdom that is to come. Only kings who, like Jesus, learned to serve (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus then contrasts the *faithful slave* with an unfaithful or *evil slave*. This *slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time.’* He reasons that he can do what he pleases and does not need to follow *his master’s* instructions. This *slave* abuses the delegated authority given to him by his master *and begins to beat his fellow slaves and he wastes the master’s wealth* when he begins to *eat and drink with drunkards*. Rather than being a servant, he is an exploiter. Jesus will not “promote” or reward exploiters in His kingdom. He will promote those who carry out His mission to serve others.

This calls to mind what Jesus taught His disciples about greatness:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.” (Matthew 20:25-27)

Jesus then explained what will happen to this *evil slave* when *the master* returns.

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, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites.

Jesus added *in that place with the hypocrites, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. *Weeping* signifies deep sadness and grief. *Gnashing of teeth* signifies anger or bitterness. This unfaithful slave is with the other pretenders who are mourning their loss and are likely angry and bitter at themselves for their actions.

The phrase translated *cut him in pieces* could also be translated “scourge him severely.” Since this parable deals with servants of God’s household, it must be taken that this refers to believers, whose membership in the household is secure. A person’s possession of eternal life with God is an irrevocable gift of God’s grace and has nothing to do with our works or faithfulness (Romans 11:6, 11:29; Ephesians 2:8-9). However, if we neglect the gift, we will not experience the abundant life available through kingdom living, and instead can fall into the exploitative ways of the world.

This punishment, harsh as it is, is a loss of rewards. Something like “scourge him severely” also seems to fit better within the parable, since *the master* then assigns the wicked *slave* to be *with the hypocrites*, where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. If *the slave* were literally *cut in pieces*, he wouldn’t really be able to be a part of a group or mourn.

This makes clear that when we come into the presence of Jesus, our Master, we will care deeply what position Jesus assigns us in His kingdom. To be chastised for squandering our opportunity to serve, and instead using it to exploit, will be the spiritual equivalent of a severe beating. A severe beating would have been a common punishment for poor stewardship in Jesus’s era, and would have been a picture readily understood by the disciples sitting and listening to Jesus while He discoursed on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem.

The consequence is quite severe for exploiting rather than serving. But upon reflection it should not be considered any more severe than other passages that discuss Jesus’s judgment of believers who have not been faithful. This is a similar outcome to some of the faithless “sons of the kingdom” who “will be cast out into the outer darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12).

This fate is also similar to the “friend” of the king who showed up to the wedding feast without wedding clothes—he too was in the outer darkness where *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 22:11-13). In these parables the “outer darkness” represents being excluded altogether from the reward banquet. In Matthew 8, Jesus made clear that “sons of the kingdom” would suffer this fate, and be displaced by Gentiles who exhibited great faith.

Consider also what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians,

“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

(1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

Note that in this passage we can watch our deeds go up in flames, because we exploited or squandered. And it is possible to have all our works burned up. And we will suffer loss. Seeing all we have done be exposed as self-dealing will not be fun. It is not reasonable to expect that this will not create mourning, such as *weeping* and angry *gnashing of teeth* (likely at ourselves). This state will not be perpetual, as Revelation 21:4 says every tear will be wiped away before the advent of the New Earth. But that means there are tears. *The evil slave will be assigned a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The heart of what Jesus is trying to convey in this parable is the reality that sacrificial service is more than just something Jesus commands us to do. It is a path that creates an amazing reward, to serve with Jesus in ruling the New Earth. This is a tangible way in which laying down our lives or picking up our crosses daily leads to finding complete fulfillment for our lives (Matthew 10:39; Luke 9:23).

And serving others in love also helps us avoid a quite terrible reward, for bad things done while in our bodies. To be *with* other *hypocrites* mourning. Romans 8:28-29 promises us that we will be conformed to the image of Christ. And this exercise of refining will be accomplishing that. So, it is still in our benefit:

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him;
For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives.”
(Hebrews 12:4-6)

In this first of four parables concluding the Olivet Discourse we see an *evil* member of Jesus' *household* who is *evil* because they are mistreating Jesus's other servants. And this servant is scourged and disciplined.

It seems readily apparent that it is infinitely better to have our issues dealt with while in our earthly bodies, rather than face Jesus at the judgement having lived a life that was fraudulent, a life that served self and exploited others. It is far better for us to confess and deal with our sins now (1 John 1:9). It is far better for us if we live in such a way to be refined by the fiery trials of this life (1 Peter 4:12, 19) than it is to face disappointment and wrath of our Savior and Lord at the judgement for our unfaithfulness.

Jesus does not want His disciples to lose their opportunity to reign with Him because they were chasing earthly treasures (Matthew 6:19-20).

This concludes the first of four parables that Jesus told His disciples to illustrate what He taught them about the end of the age and His coming.

The next parable is “the Parable of the Bridesmaids” (Matthew 25:1-13). It makes a similar point.

Biblical Text

⁴⁵“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; ⁵⁰ 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, ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.