

## **REJECTION IMAGERY IN THE SYNOPTIC PARABLES\***

Karl E. Pagenkemper

The first article in this two-part series looked at imagery from Jesus' parables in the Synoptic Gospels that point to an eschatological rejection (thus the so-called "rejection" motif). Seven elements of imagery were examined: (1) "the furnace of fire," (2) the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth," (3) the imagery of "outer darkness," (4) the motif of the shut door, (5) the phrase "I do not know you" (and its variations), (6) the verb *διχοτομέω*, and (7) the nature of the rejection for those servants who did not invest their talents or minas. In each case the rejection signified not simply a rejection from some of the privileges of the kingdom, but rather a complete rejection from the coming eschatological kingdom. The ones rejected did not have any connection with the salvation Jesus offered.

This article discusses the criteria on which the eschatological judgments themselves are made. That is, what criteria did the master or king in each of these parables employ to determine ultimate (i.e., eschatological) rejection or acceptance?

### **TWO KEY PARABLES IN MATTHEW 13**

The point of the parables of the Wheat and Tares and of the Dragnet in Matthew 13 is to teach about the nature of the kingdom of heaven and its mysteries). An issue these parables address is

Karl E. Pagenkemper is Associate Professor of New Testament Studies, International School of Theology, Arrowhead Springs, California.

\*This is article two in a two-part series.

<sup>1</sup> As indicated in Matthew 13:11 these parables concern "the kingdom of heaven." This phrase is common in the Book of Matthew, occurring thirty-three times (or thirty-four, depending on how one reads the textual evidence in 7:21), and nowhere else in the New Testament. The phrase "the kingdom of God" occurs only four times in Matthew (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), while occurring forty-six more times in the

that evil people are still mixed in with the true "sons of the kingdom," and evil continues even though Christ, the Son of David has come.<sup>2</sup> At the future cataclysmic entrance of the kingdom, the Messiah will sift human society and deal with evil. This clearly has not happened yet. The New Testament and its contemporary Jewish literature agree that judgment is certain and that the consummation of the kingdom will come in the future when this fallen age finally concludes and the kingdom will be manifest in universal power.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE PARABLES OF THE TARES

The parable of the Tares presents a man sowing wheat seed only to find that what grew was not simply wheat but also tares.<sup>4</sup> A

other Synoptics out of a total of sixty-three times in the New Testament (plus four times without the definite article in Paul's letters). Most scholars agree that Matthew used the term "of heaven", (while other writers used "of God") to follow the Jewish (and probably Jesus') tradition of venerating the name of Yahweh and therefore speaking in circumlocution about Him. The term "heaven" seems to focus not on the sphere of the rule, but the source of the rule (Dan. 4:26; 1 Macc. 3:50, 60; 4:55; Luke 15:18, 21). See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowder (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1971), 31–32, 97; Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 43; and D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 8:99–101. Similar to older dispensationalists, some attempt a chronological distinction between the two "kingdoms" (e.g., Margaret Pamment, "The Kingdom of Heaven according to the First Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 27 [1980–81]: 211–32).

<sup>2</sup> For a good survey of first-century messianic expectations, see Emil Scharer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 35)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973–87), 2:488–554; cf. George E. Ladd, "The Sitz im Leben of Matthew 13: The Soils," in *Studia Evangelica*, ed. Frank L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie, 1964), 2:203–10, esp. 206–7. See examples of kingdom expectations at the time of Christ in *The Assumption of Moses* and the *Psalms of Solomon 10–17*. While kingdom expectations at the time of Christ were varied, one thread throughout is that at the cataclysmic entrance of the kingdom, the Davidic conquering king would deal decisively with evil.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Werner Georg Kammell, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1957), 136.

<sup>4</sup> Almost all agree that Jesus was referring to *lolium temulentum*, the technical name for "bearded darnel," from which comes the common name "darnel" (Harold N. Moldenke and Alma Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* [Waltham, MA: Chronica Botanica, 1952], 134–35, 282–83; and Winifred Walker, *All the Plants of the Bible* [New York: Harper & Row, 1957], 208). Darnel is difficult to identify in a field unless one looks closely; it is difficult to deal with when found in quantity; and it acts as a host to a fungus that, if eaten, can be poisonous to both animals and men (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, 2d ed. [New York: Scribner's Sons, 1972], 224; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green [Atlanta: Knox, 1975], 194; and Richard Chenevix Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, 9th ed. [New York: Appleton, 1856], 35). Henry Alford recounts such a reseeded happening to him personally—affording a sizable compensation in the court system (*The Greek Testament*, rev. Everett F. Harrison, 4 vols. [reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1958], 143).

hint to identifying the tares is offered in the parable (when the grain "comes to head," Matt. 13:26), but the identity and outcome is clarified in Jesus' interpretation ("the tares are the sons of the evil one," 13:38). When the wheat bore grain (*καρπὸν ἐποίησεν*· literally, "made fruit," v. 26), the tares became evident.

Obviously the production of grain (*καρπός*) preceded awareness of the tares. This is highlighted by the *ὅτε . . . καί . . . τότε* construction. But it is difficult to know the precise nuance of the term *καρπός*. It is used nineteen times in the Gospel of Matthew (compared to five in Mark and twelve in Luke, out of fifty-five times in the New Testament).<sup>5</sup>

The problem with the term is one of both usage and hermeneutics. Of the nineteen occurrences of *καρπός* in Matthew, thirteen are placed in contexts that suggest a moral emphasis (i.e., good works).<sup>6</sup> Five others refer to literal fruit from a tree; but even among these, four are used of physical fruit in parabolic texts (13:8, 26; 21:34, 41).<sup>7</sup> This suggests that Jesus consciously alluded to good works when He used the term *καρπός*. In addition this "fruit" was observable to the servants who could distinguish the tares from the wheat.

Yet the hermeneutical problem remains. Should an interpreter understand the "fruit" in this parabolic reference as "good works"? The issue may be unresolvable, because the interpretation distinguishes two kinds of seed, but it does not identify how the distinction is made. Thus one might maintain a certain amount of agnosticism about this issue because of the nature of the parables, for the fruit might not have any significance at all.

However, such an allusion may be precisely what Jesus had in mind—and in light of Matthew's use of "fruit," it is difficult to avoid the notion that he knew what his readers would hear. Since

<sup>5</sup> Gundry has identified the term *καρπός* as part of Matthew's special vocabulary (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 645).

<sup>6</sup> In Matthew 3:8, 10, John the Baptist used the word *καρπός* to refer to fruit in keeping with righteousness. Matthew 7:16-20 suggests false prophets can be identified by their fruits just like good and bad trees. Matthew 12:33 indicates that the quality of one's heart is shown by one's "fruit" (cf. 12:35). And after the parable of the Landowner, Matthew referred in 21:41 to the kingdom of God being taken away and given to those who produce the appropriate fruit.

<sup>7</sup> The last two references (21:34, 41) are clearly in the context of moral usage, as indicated by Jesus' comments in 21:43 (an examination of the Jews' fruit lest the kingdom be taken away). Meanwhile 13:8 refers to the fruit of the good soil as it produces various amounts. Gundry argues that in 13:8 *καρπός* "obviously" refers to good works because of Matthew's usage of the term (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 254). A literal reference is found in 21:19, where the fig tree is cursed for lack of literal fruit. But one might argue that this too is a reference to Israel's lack of appropriate works. The parallel in Mark 11:12-14 is immediately before the account of Jesus' cleansing of the temple because it had become a den of thieves.

the interpretation shows a separation of the good from the bad, and the term *καρπός* is used (in the parable itself) to identify the tares for destruction (not to mention the heavy emphasis on works in all Jesus' other eschatological parables on separation, e.g., especially Matt. 25:31-46), it is reasonable to suggest that He wanted His hearers (or at least the disciples<sup>8</sup>) to understand this as a reference to good works.

While the practice of pulling a limited number of weeds may have been fairly normal,<sup>9</sup> Jesus prohibited the practice (perhaps because of the sheer number of tares<sup>10</sup>) until the appropriate time (*ἐν καρπῷ*) of harvest (13:30).<sup>11</sup> As Schweizer suggests, "Co-existence is not the final stage."<sup>12</sup> Instead of leaving the job to the slaves who were asking about the tares, the landowner said he would instruct reapers (*ἐρῶ τοῖ θερισταῖς*) to gather the tares.<sup>13</sup> After the tares are gathered as fuel for burning, the wheat will be gathered into his storage barn (13:30).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jesus had said that the "secrets of the kingdom" were not for the crowds at large (11:25-27; 13:10-16, 34-35). Thus it is possible that Matthew deliberately placed the interpretation of the Soils in between the giving of the parable of the Soils and that of the Tares. This suggests that 13:24-30 followed 13:1-9 in the original event, and that the interpretations of both the Soils and the Tares were given later to the disciples (perhaps in the house mentioned in 13:36) along with some other parables.

<sup>9</sup> David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 232; A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 5 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:200; and Erich H. Kiehl, "Jesus Taught in Parables," *Concordia Journal* 7 (1981): 225.

<sup>10</sup> Since tares mix their roots with those of the wheat, the extraction of so many weeds could threaten the owner with a total loss. T. W. Manson notes, "It is not clear why the servants should be surprised at the appearance of the darnel among the wheat, unless it was present in great quantity which is not stated. The surprising thing would be a field that did not have some weeds" (*The Sayings of Jesus* [1949; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 193). Also see A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," 1:200; William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 564; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 255, n. 76; and William G. Doty, "An Interpretation: Parable of the Weeds and Tares," *Interpretation* 25 (1971): 185—93.

<sup>11</sup> Concerning the eschatological connections of the "harvest," see Friedrich Hauck, "θερίζω, θερισμός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 (1965): 132-33 (cf. Matt. 3:12; Mark 4:29). The eschatological element is confirmed by the interpretive pericope (cf. Matt. 9:37-38). The same imagery appears in the Dragnet parable (13:49). On eschatological judgment, separation, and harvest, see Isaiah 17:11; Joel 3:13; Jeremiah 51:33; and Hosea 6:11 (the last two refer to the temporal judgment of God on Babylon and Judah, but the idea of coming judgment and rejection is still expressed in harvest terminology).

<sup>12</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 304.

<sup>13</sup> The shift to the reapers anticipates the reference to angels in verse 39.

<sup>14</sup> The imagery of gathering into barns may come from John the Baptist (Matt. 3:12), which also suggests an eschatological cast to the parable.

## THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

Many have pointed out that the parables of the Tares and of the Dragnet are structurally similar;<sup>15</sup> thus one can rightly anticipate the many similarities in design and interpretation. Being in Capernaum, Jesus used a ready illustration (fishing) to present the eschatological harvest of the kingdom. Jesus depicted fishermen collecting various kinds of fish that happened into the path of a seine net. Clearly some fish would be worth keeping and some would not.<sup>16</sup> Though ἐκ παντὸς γένους (v. 47) could suggest varying degrees of goodness, it is unlikely, since Jesus did not highlight that fact at all. Neither is it likely to be racial in nature. It simply suggests that many sorts will be brought in, all of which will be categorized as either "good" or "worthless."<sup>17</sup> The reference to the sea (τὴν θάλασσαν), a common figure in the Old Testament, probably suggests the place where God's enemies reside. Thus the image of fishing for men, as used in Matthew 4:19 (a passage also connected with the throwing of nets; cf. 4:18), pictures souls being pulled from "enemy territory."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> David Wenham outlines the eight parables in Matthew 13 in a chiasmic structure. In his arrangement the Tares and the Dragnet parables are paired, and so the similarities should not be surprising ("The Structure of Matthew 13," *New Testament Studies* 25 [1979]: 516-22). Wenham is apparently developing a thesis of C. H. Lohr ("Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* [1961]: 403-35), in which Lohr argues that the whole Book of Matthew has a grand inclusio pattern.

<sup>16</sup> The terms καλὰ and σαορὰ (v. 48) probably refer to ceremonial suitability (cf. Lev. 11:9-23) not moral suitability. Some are fit to eat and some are not. Cf. the use of σαπρός in Ephesians 4:29 and in various parabolic texts, namely, Matthew 7:17-19; 12:33; and Luke 6:43. Also see Otto Bauernfeind, "σαπρός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1.(1964): 94-97; and Carson, "Matthew," 8:330.

<sup>17</sup> Strangely some writers try to add interpretive color to this "evangelistic" enterprise by looking from the Dragnet to John 21:11 (a reference to 153 fish caught under Jesus' direction). In the history of interpretation this text was often understood to refer to the great variety of people who will come into the kingdom because of the efforts of the disciples (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible, 2 vols. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 2:1074-76). Even as sane a commentator as Brown admits that gamatria may be at work on "153 fish" ("on the principle that where there is smoke there is fire" [ibid., 2:1075]), yet he suggests that the point in John is ultimately to authenticate the eyewitness character of the writer. Also see Robert M. Grant, "One Hundred Fifty-Three Large Fish (John 21:11)," *Harvard Theological Review* 42 (1949): 273-75; Bruce Vawter, "The Gospel according to John," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols. in 1 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:465; and Jindrich Manek, "Fishers of Men," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1958): 140. Amazingly this discussion is still alive (see O. T. Owen, "One Hundred and Fifty Three-Fishes," *Expository Times* 100 [1988]: 52-54; and a response by J. M. Ross, "One Hundred and Fifty-Three Fishes," *Expository Times* 100 [1989]: 375).

<sup>18</sup> Manek draws attention to the Old Testament cosmological associations of the sea motif and the "enemy of God" ("Fishers of Men," 138-41). For example the earth

The picture of a seine net does not suggest that every fish in the ocean is caught. It may accumulate "all sorts," but never all. Since some discrimination is naturally made in the process of fishing, a distinction between the "bad" of the catch and the world at large is reasonable. With such a difference between the world at large and those that are only associated with the kingdom through gathering activities, it may be well to identify the "bad" fish as false professors.

Following the pattern of the Tares (13:42), angels will cast the "bad" fish into the furnace of fire (13:50), a place characterized by weeping and gnashing of teeth. While the "bad" fish are sent to a place of eternal suffering (the suffering involved with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" does not suggest annihilation), the interpretive pericope has little to say about the outcome for the righteous other than placement into containers (ἄγγη, v. 48).<sup>19</sup>

#### SUMMARY

Five things can be noted about these two parables; two pertain to the Son of Man, and three relate to the rejection element. First, one key role of the Son of Man is to direct the "sowing operation" in the current age. While the Dagnet suggests that the "fishermen" (which presumably includes the church's activities) are the instruments whereby the "sons of the kingdom" are gathered, the Son of Man is in charge. A second role for the Son of Man is to direct the eschatological "harvest." Though angels are the agents of harvest in both parables (cf. Matt. 24:31), the Son of Man is clearly portrayed as the One who will send out those angels to their harvest duties.

Third, the timing of the rejection/judgment is clearly eschatological. All the characteristics discussed concerning the fiery furnace and the weeping and gnashing of teeth are related to the end of the age. Fourth, this judgment is eternal.<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence in the descriptions that the judgment is a type of purgatory

is created from the waters, essentially an ordering of chaos (Job 26:5-8; Pss. 24:2; 74:13; 136:6), and the waters are seen as the place of the kingdom of death (Jon. 2:2-4). In the New Testament John saw Satan ("the dragon") standing on the shore of the sea in Revelation 13:1. Thus to fish for men is to rescue them from the kingdom of darkness.

<sup>19</sup> The furnace may seem inappropriate for fish, but this misses the distinction between the reference (fish) and its applicational referent (the wicked). Possibly the reason Jesus repeated an element of the interpretation of the Tares in Matthew 13:50 was to call rhetorical attention to the similarities of these two parables (Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 280).

<sup>20</sup> See Timothy R. Carmody, "The Relationship of Eschatology to the Use of Exclusion in Qumran and New Testament Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1986), 201.

believers go through before entering the kingdom. Nor is there any hint that the distinction between the "sons of the kingdom" and the "sons of the evil one" (13:38) means that the former will gain a special inheritance in the kingdom while the latter are weeping out of grief for their sins, not being able to receive all the kingdom has to offer. Those who are rejected in these parables had been outwardly associated with the true "sons of the kingdom"; but when examined, their claim to the kingdom was found to be false. Their condemnation was as eternal as that of the wicked who made no such claim.

Fifth, the parable of the Tares suggests that the basis of the judgment is the works (καρπός, "fruit," v. 26) of the believer. (This element is not so clearly indicated in the Dragnet.) It was seen that the term "fruit" in 13:26 (cf. 3:10; 7:17-19; 12:33) suggests that the works of the "sons of the kingdom" are what distinguish them from the "sons of the evil one." They are the criteria for detecting those who will enter the eschatological kingdom. While this is not probative (since the specific meaning in context relates to the referent of wheat as it produces its heads of grain), it will be seen in the parables yet to be discussed that this basis for judgment is consistent with Matthew's use of καρπός elsewhere as well as the usage of the term "righteous."<sup>21</sup>

## THE BANQUET MOTIF IN OTHER ESCHATOLOGICAL PARABLES

### THE BANQUET MOTIF

The banquet is a biblical motif referring to the consummation of the age when all God's people will be brought together in the kingdom to enjoy God's blessings.<sup>22</sup> This event is symbolized by a lavish banquet in which all the past and present giants of the faith (particularly the patriarchs) will partake together. Two important parables fit this category: the Wedding Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14)<sup>23</sup> and the Narrow Door (Luke 13:23-30).

<sup>21</sup> The weeds are not called "bad" or "evil," but their contrast with "the righteous" makes such an association reasonable.

<sup>22</sup> For the expectation of a banquet in the kingdom, see Isaiah 25:6-8; 55:1-2; 65:13-14; Ezekiel 32:4; 39:17-20; 1 *Enoch* 62:14; 2 *Enoch* 42:5; 2 *Apocalypse of Baruch* 29:1-8 (in which Leviathan is said to be eaten at the messianic banquet); 4 Ezra 2:38-41; 6:49; and *Pirqe Aboth* 3:20. On the connection of banquets with the banquet of the Messiah and His bride, see D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 B.C.-A.D. 100*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 294; and George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 3 vols. (reprint [3 vols. in 2], New York: Schocken, 1971), 2:363-66.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 14:15-24, an apparent parallel to Matthew 22:1-14, is not discussed here because the rejection is not eschatological, but was temporally applied to national

## THE WEDDING BANQUET (MATT. 22:1–14)

After the introduction to the parable (22:1-2), there are three sections: (a) the doubled invitation, rejection, and subsequent consequences (22:3-7); (b) the new invitation to outsiders (given only once, 22:8-10); and (c) a picture of the rejection of one who is improperly prepared (i.e., without a wedding garment, 22:11-14). This last element is important to the topic at hand. The gathering<sup>24</sup> of the good and evil (πονηρούς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς, v. 10) is the verbal transition within the parable into the "garment inspection" imagery of verses 11-14. As such it suggests that the mixed company in verses 11-14 is to be understood in the same vein as the mixed company in the Tares and the Dragnet before their respective separations.

Entering the banquet hall to observe his guests, the king spotted a man not properly dressed<sup>25</sup> in wedding clothes. Wedding attire would normally be newly washed white clothing,<sup>26</sup> and it was often bought specially for the occasion.<sup>27</sup> The king speaks to

Israel. For a balanced discussion of principles for identifying parallel texts, with helpful use of statistical data, see Craig L. Blomberg, "When Is a Parallel Really a Parallel? A Test Case: The Lucan Parables," *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 78–103, especially 81, 85–90. Also see Carson, "Matthew," 8:455; and Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 37-38, n. 34. On the well-known principle of dissimilarity, see Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 1–7; but cf. Eugene Lemcio, "The Parable of the Great Supper and the Wedding Feast: History, Redaction and Canon," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 8 (1986): 1–7.

<sup>24</sup> Συναγωγή, which occurs in four passages in Matthew (3:12; 13:30, 47; 25:32), consistently refers to an eschatological gathering.

<sup>25</sup> The figurative use of clothing is common in Scripture (Job 29:14; Ps. 132:9; Isa. 11:5; 61:10 [the "garments of salvation" are parallel to the "robe of righteousness"]; Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:22, 24; Col. 3:8–14; Rev. 19:8). In Ezekiel 16:6–14 Israel had been found in blood and received new garments from God. The motif is similar to Pauline thinking (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:12).

<sup>26</sup> These clean, white garments are to be contrasted with dirty clothes, which signify mourning. In other words they are to be festive, not dreary (J. Duncan Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* [London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1979], 142. Cf. Zechariah 3:3–5; Revelation 3:4–5, 18; 19:8; 22:14; 1 *Enoch* 62:15–16; *m. Ta'an.* 4.8; Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 2.8.5; *Midr. Prov.* 16.11; *Midr. Qoh.* 9.8. A parallel rabbinic parable can be found in *b. Shabb.* 153a (attributed to Johanan b. Zakkai, ca. A.D. 100).

<sup>27</sup> Was the king responsible to provide the garments? Hendriksen (*Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 797–98) and Simon Kistemaker (*The Parables of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 104–5) suggest the answer is yes. Two reasons support an affirmative answer: (1) the elapsed time from the invitation until the expected arrival at the banquet is too short for a king to assume they all bought their own; and (2) the makeup of those invited (presumably the poor; cf. Luke 14:21–23) suggests many would be unable to provide such affluent "extras." However, "the complaint against the offender in v. 12 is not that he refused a wedding-garment but that he came in without one" (Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 226).

him (calling him "friend"<sup>28</sup>): "How is it that you entered without the proper wedding clothes?" The answer, obvious to the hearers of the parable, was that he was invited. Yet he was still out of place. His lack of excuse for his condition is made clear by his lack of response: he is put to silence (literally, "muzzled"; cf. 1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). When no answer is given, the king tells his servants to bind the man hand and foot and cast him out of the hall (Matt. 22:13).<sup>29</sup> Whatever the binding implies, it is clear that the subsequent punishment is absolute. He is to be cast εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον, "into the darkness which is farthest out."<sup>30</sup>

### THE NARROW DOOR (LUKE 13:23-30)<sup>31</sup>

Set in the middle of Luke's travel narrative,<sup>32</sup> Jesus included

Evidence for the provision of garments by a host is hardly overwhelming. Schweizer argues there is no evidence for such a custom at the time of Jesus, and that if such a practice was to be understood in this parable, its exceptional nature would require the writer to include such a detail (*The Good News according to Matthew*, 417). Some writers insist that the garment refers to some sort of imputed righteousness (e.g., Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 439; J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], 350; Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries [New York: Harper, 1968], 233; A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," 1:272; Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 94; and Madeleine I. Boucher, *The Parables* [Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1981], 104). But this may be going beyond the confines of the parable by mixing a possible application with its interpretation. The implication of these verses is that the man feels he should be in the kingdom and allowed to enjoy the banquet meal prepared for all who were invited and responded. Yet his lack of preparation suggests that his "reality" is out of accord with his profession to the right of entrance.

<sup>28</sup> The term ἑταῖρος occurs three times in the New Testament, all in Matthew (20:13; 22:12; 26:50; all in the vocative). In 20:13 and in 26:50 Jesus used the term in polite irony. Commonly used of people not known by the speaker, it is probably used in 22:12 as a mild rebuke (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 314).

<sup>29</sup> The binding of the man hand and foot may have prevented him from getting back into the hall. Hands and feet are often referred to together (Matt. 18:8; Mark 9:43-45; Luke 15:22; 24:39-40; John 11:44; Acts 21:11), but the best verbal parallel may be in 1 *Enoch* 10:4: "Bind Azaz'el foot and hand and throw him into the darkness" (δῆσον τὸν Ἀζαζὴλ πόσιν καὶ χέρσιν, καὶ βάλε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ σκότος).

<sup>30</sup> Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 279. While the phrase could simply carry the idea of something outside in comparison with something inside, the usage here favors the accepted nuance above.

<sup>31</sup> Many question whether this is a parable or only a similitude, since it is so short (13:24-27). The symbolic elements are clear: the banquet motif is seen in 13:29 while the rejection element is already evident in verse 28.

<sup>32</sup> On the travel narrative as a structural unit, see Craig L. Blomberg, "Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke's Central Section," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham

this pericope after two brief comparisons with what the kingdom is like (13:18-21). The expansive growth of the kingdom is suggested by the size of the mustard seed relative to the size of the adult plant and by the role of leaven. With such grand notions in mind the disciples asked, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" (13:23). Jesus' answer was indirect, for He responded with the exhortation, "Strive to enter through the narrow door." In saying this, Jesus excluded the assumption of many that their heritage would be their passport to the kingdom, for one's familial relationship is something that striving cannot change.<sup>33</sup> While many may seek entry, genuinely wanting what is inside, the element of the narrow door suggests criteria other than "wanting" are necessary.

The response by the master (οἰκοδεσπότης, v. 25) to the ones pleading for entrance is straightforward: "I do not know where you are from."<sup>34</sup> The reason for their exclusion is clarified by the Old Testament quotation that follows: they were "workers of iniquity" (v. 27). The context of Psalm 6:8 identifies those who "do iniquity" as the adversaries of righteousness (cf. Ps. 6:7). In other words something in their behavior marked them as enemies of God. Marshall's comments are to the point: "Lack of righteousness excludes men from the heavenly banquet."<sup>35</sup> By identifying those who were rejected (those who claimed a right to entrance but were not allowed in after the door had closed) as "all you evildoers," Jesus taught that there is an inherent connection between rejection and doing evil. The specific nature of the connection between faith and entrance and between works and rejection is not delineated in this pericope, but the connection between "evildoers" and those who do not enter the kingdom is clear.

(Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 240-48. Other suggestions of the structure of the whole section (not found as helpful) are given by E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Century Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 148-50; Walter Grundmann, "Fragen der Komposition des lukanischen 'Reiseberichts,'" *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 50 (1959): 252-70; Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974), 51-56; and James L. Resseguire, "Point of View in the Central Section of Luke (9:51-19:44)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982): 41-47.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Luke 4:25-27; 6:20-38, 46-49; 7:9; 8:9-15; 11:29-52. One can infer that Jesus taught broadly that the answer to the question would be "Yes, few."

<sup>34</sup> This phrase was reviewed in the first article in this two-part series. "I never knew you" means "I will have nothing to do with you." The source of this concept is the Old Testament where those who are God's people are spoken of as being known by Him (Pss. 1:6; 138:6; Isa. 63:16; Hos. 5:3; 13:5; 2 Tim. 2:19). Previous table fellowship would be insufficient,

<sup>35</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament; Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 567.

This parable does not teach that some believers will be denied only the banquet in the kingdom because of their evil deeds; the text does not make this distinction. One's acceptance at the banquet is synonymous with one's acceptance into the kingdom.<sup>36</sup> The parable refers to the final soteriological judgment at the eschaton.

#### SUMMARY

Two points can be made from these parables. First, without preparation for the kingdom even those who are invited cannot enter. The presence of one without a garment (Matt. 22:11-14) parallels the tares that appeared to belong in the kingdom, but when the proof of the quality came out in their lack of "fruit" (or wheat), their true nature was made clear. The man was present at the banquet because he responded to an invitation; he assumed he belonged. Still his lack of preparation showed he did not belong.

While the specifics of the preparation are not clear, the allusion to the garment is likely the good works of one who claimed to respond to the kingdom. This is comparable to the parable of the Two Sons recorded just a few verses earlier (21:28-32). There Jesus correlated true "sonship" with obedience (an important point in relation to Matthew's theme that Jesus is the true Son that Israel never was). This also correlates with the condemnation of the Jewish leaders (Matt. 23) in which Jesus based His acceptance or rejection on the proof of their hearts as seen in their works (cf. Luke 13:6-9). The garments were related to some form of obedience. How much obedience is necessary for acceptance? Such a "quantity" question is not addressed in this parable. But the necessity of this preparation for acceptance is clear. Is this preparation to be separated from one's faith in the work of Jesus on the cross? This is unlikely; although they are not identical, Matthew did not separate the two ideas.<sup>37</sup>

Second, while Matthew 22:11-14 suggests that the lack of some preparation for the kingdom (obedience) indicates one does

<sup>36</sup> This is in contrast to Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1985), 87.

<sup>37</sup> Hodges agrees that the garment is not simply the robe of "alien righteousness" given to believers at the moment of salvation. He agrees that it represents fulfillment of some obligation which "acceptance of the King's invitation places upon him" (ibid., 88). The difference from the above analysis is that Hodges redefines what is missed because of one's lack of preparation. For him, the unprepared one will miss the banquet, but not the kingdom itself, since he is a believer. Hodges thinks the disobedient believer (the "evildoer" concerning whom it is pronounced, "I never knew you") will only miss the banquet; but since he is a believer, he will later experience the joys of the kingdom, even if it means he will never experience all that "co-heirs" with Christ could experience (ibid., 90).

not belong to it in the first place, the parable of the Narrow Door (Luke 13:23-30) focuses on the pleas of those excluded. Some claimed the door should be reopened for their sake. They reasoned that they had already had table fellowship with Jesus while He was in His earthly ministry and therefore they had a right to be included. They were left out of the kingdom even though they had time to respond. And as in Matthew 22:11-14, the ones rejected were those who were originally expected to respond (viz., the Jewish audience).<sup>38</sup>

But the controller of the door, Jesus Himself, saw such claims to the kingdom as insignificant. It may upset the rejected ones that those whom they deemed less deserving were allowed in, but the rejection stands. As in Matthew 7:15-23, it was not those who claimed any right to the kingdom who would be accepted. It was not even those who had performed miraculous deeds because of their supposed association with Jesus. Instead, Jesus rejected those who were "evildoers" even though they claimed to be associated with Him. The justification for acceptance or exclusion in the kingdom is found, once again, not simply in a claim, but in the evidence of that claim—one's works.

#### PARABLES FROM JESUS' ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

This section includes four consecutive parables from the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25<sup>39</sup> along with two parallels—the parable of the Good and Bad Servants (Luke 12:41-46) and the parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27).

#### THE GOOD AND BAD SERVANTS (MATT. 24:45-51; LUKE 12:41-46)<sup>40</sup>

This story reflects a fairly common practice of selecting a slave<sup>41</sup> to be chief among the domestics in a household. Manson

<sup>38</sup> In Matthew 8:11-12 the "sons of the kingdom" (the Jews) were rejected, even though it is clear that the kingdom was supposed to be their inheritance.

<sup>39</sup> While Matthew 24:4b-35 is a description of the phases of the future and is primarily informative, 24:36-25:30 is parenetic and contains exhortations to vigilance. For general structural analysis of Matthew 24-25, two useful sources are Victor Kossi Agbanou, *Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthieu 24-25: Tradition et Rédaction* (Paris: Gabalda, 1983); and Jan Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished: The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 152.

<sup>40</sup> The similarities, even at the verbal level, are remarkable (Craig L. Blomberg, "When Is a Parallel Really a Parallel?" 81; Agbanou, *Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthieu*, 134; and C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2 vols., 2d ed. (reprint, New York: KTAV, 1968), 2:314-15).

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 24:45 uses *δοῦλος*, while Luke 12:42 has *οἰκονόμος* to reflect more specifically the idea of a steward. The motif of slavery is commonly used of Christians (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Cor. 4:5).

appropriately translates Jesus' rhetorical question as a statement: "If anyone deserves the name of wise and faithful steward, it is he, who being left in charge of his fellow-servants, devotes himself to their welfare."<sup>42</sup> After having been away for some time, the master on his return praises the servant for fulfilling his task. The servant who is found performing such responsibilities faithfully is called blessed (*μακάριος*, Matt. 24:46; Luke 12:43).<sup>43</sup>

There is an alternative outcome, for a servant may prove unfaithful, and such behavior results in severe punishment. While Luke did not call this servant evil (*κακός*) as did Matthew (24:48; compare the descriptions in 21:41; 25:26), there was no need for Luke to do so. The character of the faithless servant (in both Gospels) is evident in his treatment of those left in his charge. Both Matthew and Luke noted that the wicked servant had made a decision in his heart<sup>44</sup> and was motivated in his actions by an assumption that the master would be away a long time. The servant used his master's delay as an excuse to take advantage of his fellow slaves.

But the master will return-at an unanticipated time (Matt. 24:36, 42, 44, 50; cf. 25:13). The one who is not vigilant will also not be faithful to his charge, for he is not motivated by the return of one who will hold him accountable. As suggested in the previous article, terms like "unfaithful" (*οἱ ἀπίστοι*, Luke 12:46) and "hypocrite" (*οἱ ὑποκριταί*, Matt. 25:51) indicate this slave is ultimately unbelieving. The consequence of this unbelief is destruction, as seen in the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 24:51) and the dichotomization (*διχοτομήσει αὐτόν*, Luke 12:46).<sup>45</sup>

In summary, when the Son of Man returns He will bless the

<sup>42</sup> Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> The term *μακάριος* suggests divine approval, not simply "happiness" (Matt. 5:1-11; 11:6; 13:16; 16:17). Jeremias misses the force of the text when he asks, "Why would anybody want a promotion on a job since it would only mean more responsibility?" (*The Parables of Jesus*, 56, n. 25). As Manson notes, the essence of "reward" suggests that the new responsibility will bring great pleasure to the servant, and Jesus' audience would have agreed with His perspectives here (*The Sayings of Jesus*, 118).

<sup>44</sup> Manson notes that the phrase "say in his heart" (cf. Luke 12:17) is a Hebrew idiom for "think," as in Psalms 14:1 and 53:1 (*ibid.*).

<sup>45</sup> Luke's judgment of the servants is more detailed, for while Matthew cited only two options, Luke presented four kinds of judgment. Whether Luke 12:47-48 suggests varying degrees of perdition or blessing can be debated; but the judgment on the dichotomized servant is unambiguous because of Luke's usage of "unbelievers" (v. 46; see previous article). For a discussion of the varying judgments given at the end of Luke's account, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1974), 143-44; and Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, 47-48.

faithful and judge the unfaithful and hypocritical. While the hour is not known, all are to be faithful at doing what they are assigned. The second servant is called "evil" and is condemned eternally because of his unfaithfulness to his assignment. In fact the unfaithfulness was the proof of his evil nature, as suggested by the reference to the man speaking "in his heart."

#### THE TEN VIRGINS (MATT. 25:1-13)

In this parable the kingdom is being compared not to ten virgins but to a wedding.<sup>46</sup> "That is how it is with the coming of God's Kingdom, as when a group of girls with torches brings in the bridegroom."<sup>47</sup> At the time of the kingdom's entrance the events can be compared to this story concerning the virgins.<sup>48</sup>

The point of the parable is to examine what makes the wise and foolish virgins different, leading in turn to their different outcomes. Some were "ready" and some were "not ready."<sup>49</sup> While the delay of the arrival of the groom aids in telling the story, the key is the lack of sufficient oil for the procession after the groom arrives.<sup>50</sup> Jesus did not explain why there was not enough oil, nor whether the torches (or lamps<sup>51</sup>) were lit during the hours spent waiting for the groom. He stated only that the unwise had insufficient oil for the task. The result was the rejection of those who were unprepared.

Obviously the nature of the preparation in this parable is problematic. The tendency is to suggest that oil is a symbol for

<sup>46</sup> The wedding feast, as previously noted, depicts full communion with God in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11; 22:1-14; 26:29; Luke 12:37; 14:15-24; 15:23-24; 22:15-18; Acts 10:41; Isa. 25:6-8).

<sup>47</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1966), 137 (cf. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 466; and Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished*, 154). On introductory formulas, see Eta Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables* trans. John Sturdy, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 16-18.

<sup>48</sup> Virtually all writers argue, correctly, that the number ten should not be pushed. As A. B. Bruce suggested long ago, the number ten came to their mind just as "a dozen" comes to a modern Western mind ("The Synoptic Gospels," 299). The reference to "five" in verse 2 should be treated similarly.

<sup>49</sup> This division between the "ready" and the "unready" is pursued throughout the surrounding parables (24:40-44; 24:45-51; 25:2, 8-9; 25:20-29). Agbanou notes that the reality of their foolishness is not discovered until the point of crisis (*Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthew 24 25*, 146, n. 7). In fact the parable focuses primarily on the ones who were rejected (cf. Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables*, 192).

<sup>50</sup> Much is made of the element of delay in the secondary literature because of assumptions about the extent of Jesus' knowledge of the future. But Kummel makes the discussion immaterial by arguing that the delay is only a literary device presented to explain the flow of events (*Promise and Fulfillment*, 58-59).

<sup>51</sup> Commentators disagree over whether λαμπάδας refers to torches or ordinary house lamps.

"works," the lack of which, in turn, is the basis for the rejection of the unprepared. But this connection remains uncertain.<sup>52</sup> Within the parable itself Jesus used the oil primarily as a literary foil or test to help identify the necessary preparation. Still the larger context of the surrounding parables does suggest such a connection; therefore connecting oil with good works cannot be rejected out of hand.<sup>53</sup> Assuming that the parable was not to be interpreted independent of its context (nor in another context),<sup>54</sup> the suggestion of a connection with good deeds is unmistakable in the broader strokes of the parable's message. The story discusses only two categories: those who are ushered into the kingdom and those who are excluded.

Once the door to the feast is shut, the one introduced as the groom serves as a judge, and his statement of their rejection is unequivocal. His response ("I do not know you," 25:12) indicates he had no personal association with them.<sup>55</sup> In a real-life wedding such a statement would sound strange, for surely a groom would know those in the wedding party. Thus the rejection statement is a twist in the story that calls attention to itself, since it puts the picture at odds with normal weddings.

The response by the groom is not simply a calloused rejection of those whose entire life had been spent trying to enter the kingdom. Rather, this rejection comes despite appearances, for those who were rejected only appeared to be prepared for its coming by bringing lamps. As in the parable of the Narrow Door (Luke 13:24-25), once the door is closed, it is too late. In light of such an outcome the parable ends (Matt. 25:13) with the imperative "be alert" or "keep watch" (γρηγορεῖτε).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Three major interpretations of "oil" can be found: (1) the Holy Spirit (e.g., David was anointed with oil by Samuel; 1 Sam. 16:13); (2) the act of repentance (based on Matt. 6:17; Fenton, *Saint Matthew*, 396); and (3) good deeds (Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 499). For examples of the use of allegory among early writers, see A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," 1:301. Chrysostom viewed the lamp as symbolic of virginity and the oil as a reference to pity; thus moral continence was said to be worthless without charity. Carson resists any allegorical meanings behind the oil ("Matthew," 512-13).

<sup>53</sup> A key to understanding Matthew's fifth discourse is his use of the terms ποιέω and τηρέω (e.g., Matt. 25:31-46), arguing for a connection with good deeds. Yet the specifics are difficult to certify (cf. Karl Paul Donfried, "The Allegory of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) as a Summary of Matthean Theology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 [1974]: 419-20).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Don O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 122—24.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 175; and Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished*, 160.

<sup>56</sup> Of course one need not stay awake to be prepared, for preparation assumes arrangements ahead of time (Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 327).

Ultimately it seems that the division between the two groups of virgins is not between two widely disparate groups. All ten virgins are viewed as anticipating the kingdom and expecting entrance into it. No distinction was made until the time of the crisis—when the groom arrived. The foolish virgins are not those who have no interest in the things of the kingdom, but are those who, despite their interest, are not prepared. Matthew's initial readers would likely have understood that the parable is not about those who clearly and blatantly reject the gospel. It is about those who are "close" to the gospel message and yet have not experienced the reality of it, as seen by their lack of preparation. In the broader context of Matthew 24–25 this preparation would include obedience to the will of the Father.

THE PARABLES OF THE TALENTS AND THE MINAS<sup>57</sup>  
(MATT. 25:14-30; LUKE 19:11-27)

The lessons of these two parables are similar, though the vehicle for the teaching is slightly different.<sup>58</sup> In Matthew the tal-

<sup>57</sup> The relationship between these two parables is a well-known problem (Blomberg, "When Is a Parallel Really a Parallel?" 81; Boucher, *The Parables*, 139; Carson, "Matthew," 8:515; John Dominic Crossan, In *Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* [New York: Harper & Row, 1973], 100-102; M. Didier, "La parabole des talents et des mines," in *De Jesus aux Evangiles. Tradition et Redaction dans les Evangiles Synoptiques*, ed. I. de la Potterie [Gembloux: Ducolot, 1967], 2:248-71; Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 114; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 2:1228-29; Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 328; Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 245; J. Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 5th ed. [Pustet: Regensburg, 1965], 348-50, Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* [London: Macmillan, 1936], 282; and David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1984], 71-76). On the supposed "throne claimant" in Luke (esp. 19:14, 27), and its historical connections, see Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 17.8.1; 17.9.3-4; 17.11.1-4; idem, *The Jewish Wars* 2.2.2-3; 2.6.1-3. See also the discussions by Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 117-18; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 63; Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished*, 180-83; Lane C. McGaughey, "The Fear of Yahweh and the Mission of Judaism: A Postexilic Maxim and Its Early Christian Expansion in the Parable of the Talents," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 241; Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1915; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 36,3; and F. D. Weinert, "The Parable of the Throne Claimant (Lk. 19:12, 14-15a, 27) Reconsidered," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 505-14.

<sup>58</sup> Matthew presented the Talents to picture how a faithful slave is to act. While the Ten Virgins emphasized "wisdom" (φρόνιμος, 25:2; cf. 24:45), the Talent parable focuses on the term "faithful" (πιστὸς, 25:21, 23). Luke put the Minas in a different context, occurring after Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (19:1-10) and before His entry into Jerusalem (19:28-40). Luke noted that the Minas parable was told because of a misunderstanding about the current presence of the kingdom among them (19:11; cf. 17:21). No more eloquent example of the kingdom's presence could be found than its presence in the household of Zacchaeus (19:9). The salvation of one like Zacchaeus suggested to Jesus' followers that the kingdom would soon appear and bring with it the reality of freedom from oppressive Rome (cf. Acts 1:6). In light of such an expectation, Jesus was forced to add a corrective note to popular expectations (not uncommon in this section of Luke; cf. 17:20-24; 18:1-8; 21:8-9), ex-

ents are distributed based on the abilities of the individuals to use them and produce results; in Luke the minas are distributed evenly between all the servants. In Matthew, assessments are based on the profit relative to the gift entrusted (the first two servants are given the same praise and reward despite their different earnings); in Luke, evaluations are determined by how much profit each is able to make based on a common starting point. In each case faithfulness to the assigned task results in rewards that include more responsibility and joy in the future. "The reward of a duty [done] is a duty [to be done]."<sup>59</sup>

In both passages the third servant portrays rejection. Ostensibly the reason he hid his talent was his fear the master was hard on his servants. By declaring his desire not to risk the master's property, the servant virtually made his laziness into a necessity, even a virtue. He attempted to excuse his own actions by blaming the master.<sup>60</sup> The slave was suggesting that if he had made any profit the master would have taken it all away, or if he had lost it the servant would have been held responsible. In returning the talent to the master the servant was succinct and blunt: "See, you have what is yours" (ἴδε ἔχεις τὸ σόν, Matt. 25:25).<sup>61</sup>

Assuming the servant's own reasoning, he had the weakest excuse of all of them, for he had the least to risk. As Carson notes, "Grace never condones irresponsibility; even those given less are obligated to use and develop what they have."<sup>62</sup> Instead of being praised as a "good and faithful servant," the third servant was called a "wicked and slothful servant" (πονηρὸν δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὸν, v. 26). The actions and words of the servant vindicated the true nature of his heart. He should have at least done something; he could have put the money in a bank so he could return it with interest (σὺν τόκῳ, v. 27).<sup>63</sup> The master did not necessarily accept

plaining that the consummated presence of the kingdom is yet future.

<sup>59</sup> M. Aboth 4.2. McNeile suggests that the responsibilities in the coming kingdom will be analogous to but much greater than the opportunities for service now (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 365).

<sup>60</sup> He felt the master was hard (σκληρὸς is emphatic) and was enriching himself at the cost of others (Matt. 25:24). A similar argument was used by Adam to blame God for giving him Eve, thus precipitating the fallen condition despite the obvious joys of the garden (Gen. 3:10–12).

<sup>61</sup> This phrase is a commercial statement suggesting the speaker's disconnection from liability concerning a trust (cf. *m. Baba Qamma* 9.2; 10.5; *b. Baba Qamma* 97a; 98a; 116b; 117b; *b. Sheb.* 37b). Bertram T. D. Smith shows that the attitude prevalent among rabbis was that the return of a gift intact would be the expected action of the day (*The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels: A Critical Study* [Cambridge: University Press, 1937]).

<sup>62</sup> Carson, "Matthew," 517.

<sup>63</sup> On *τραπέζιταις*, see Mark 11:15; Matthew 21:12; John 2:15; and Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 12.2.3. *Τράπεζα* is a common financial term referring liter-

the servant's description of him, but he responded that, if such a view is correct, it is more, not less, reason for the servant to exert himself.<sup>64</sup> The failure to use what was entrusted is viewed by the master as a grievous wrong, and so the master severed the relationship by removing the resources granted to the slave.<sup>65</sup>

Some argue the third servant is similar to those described in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15, in which judgment is pronounced on true disciples who have not been faithful. Despite unfaithfulness, these disciples are saved "as through fire."<sup>66</sup> In this view the third servant represents those whom Paul described as "carnal," those who are not producing fruit consistent with their salvation. The man was indeed called a "servant."<sup>67</sup> But this fact does not confirm this view.

ally to the table or bench that is used in transaction, later referring to those who do such business there (James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930], 639–40).

<sup>64</sup> It is unlikely Jesus was trying to discredit or do away with the Old Testament laws against usury in lending among the Jewish people (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35–37; Deut. 23:19), though interest could be charged to the Gentiles (Deut. 23:20). See W. W. Buckland, *A Textbook of Roman Law from Augustus to Justinian*, 2d ed., (London: Macmillan, 1933), 465.

<sup>65</sup> Such consequences are not so different from the destruction based on disobedience to the Old Testament lending laws (Deut. 28:44–45). Derrett argues this parable alludes to the chapters at the end of Deuteronomy on blessings and cursings to reinforce the book's recommendation of service with joyfulness of heart. Whatever the case, the command to remove the talent is consistent with contemporary financial laws indicating a severance of slave-master relations (*Law in the Old Testament*, 193–94).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on Luke's Gospel*, 309–10; G. H. Lang, *The Parabolic Teaching of Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 289–90; Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 90–95; idem, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 112; and Schweizer, *The Good News according to Luke*, 295. Lang believes the third servant is saved, but that he is being warned he would lose his inheritance. The inheritance, he says, is not the privilege of entering the kingdom, but the opportunity to receive rewards in the kingdom. All of Lang's support comes from Pauline passages (1 Cor. 6:7–11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).

<sup>67</sup> Lang writes, "It is wholly unwarranted to regard him as type of a false professor or one deceived as to relationship with Christ" (ibid., 290). Lang suggests that the vocative *κυριέ* identifies his personal relationship with the master.

However, in several instances in Luke the term *δοῦλος* is used without overtones of spiritual relationship, but simply to indicate a functional relationship of an inferior to a superior (e.g., Luke 7:2, 3, 8; 14:17, 21–23; 15:22). Also in the Matthean parallel (25:30) the one suffering the judgment was also called a servant, and his exclusion from the kingdom seems certain. The title *κυριέ* is no more significant here than the fact that the goats in 25:44 addressed the Son of Man as "Lord." In the future all will address Him as Lord (Phil. 2:11); thus the enemies are also subjects of the king. They are not any less his subjects because of their treasonous actions. Instead, that they are his subjects gives the king authority to condemn them to death. Lang's approach (and those who follow him) is an unwarranted application of the theological categories of Paul's thought to the categories of Luke's (and Matthew's) thought.

In both versions of the parable, while the specific elements differ, the criterion of judgment is the works of the servants. Their works demonstrate the reality of their trust in the master—or even an appropriate fear. Each servant was judged on his usage of the gifts entrusted, not simply the presence of the gift, for the third servant in both cases received a gift but refused to use it. Those servants who are faithful prove their trust and obedience to their master, whereas the actions of the third servant in both parables demonstrate his lack of trust toward the master. The disobedient servant's hatred is shown by "works" which prove his rejection of the master's kingship over him. So the king condemned this enemy in no uncertain terms.

Like the servants during the absence of their masters in these parables, disciples must faithfully be waiting, and true servants will be productive.

#### THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS: THE FINAL JUDGMENT (MATT. 25:31–46)

The parable of the Sheep and Goats is the most pointed of the parables being surveyed, for its parabolic elements only thinly veil the clear references to deeds and eternal judgment.<sup>68</sup> After setting up the story with a picture of separating sheep and goats as if night were coming on a flock in the fields,<sup>69</sup> the Son of Man, now under the title of King," pronounced blessings on the sheep and cursing on the goats. The clear reason for such discrimination relates to the deeds they perform. Such priorities are not new

<sup>68</sup> Many have wondered whether this passage should even be taken as a parable, since its parabolic elements concerning the sheep and goats are mentioned in only two verses (vv. 32-33). For the discussion see Agbanou, *Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthieu 24-25*, 178; Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 492; Carson, "Matthew," 8:518; David R. Catchpole, "The Poor on Earth and the Son of Man in Heaven: A Re-appraisal of Matthew xxv. 31–46," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 61 (1979): 355; Lamar Cope, "Matthew xxv:31–46. The 'Sheep and the Goats' Reinterpreted," *Novum Testamentum* 11 (1969): 34; J.-C. Ingelaere, "La 'parabole' du Jugement Dernier (Matthieu 25, 31–46)," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 50 (1970): 26; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 206; Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus*, 147; McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 368; Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 131; and John F. Walvoord, "The Judgment of the Nations," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 307.

<sup>69</sup> With darkness comes cooler temperatures, and goats gather for warmth while sheep are a bit heartier (Carson, "Matthew," 8:521; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 206; and Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 494). While the relative heartiness of these animals may explain how animals were treated at certain times of the day, it may not ultimately be germane because of the way Jesus described the separation of some on one side and some on the other.

<sup>70</sup> The reference to "my father" (πατρός μου) clearly presents Jesus as the King rather than the Father (thus presenting separate persons).

to either the New Testament or Jewish sentiment in general.<sup>71</sup> In addition, however, such criteria for judgment are not all Matthew said on the subject of how to enter the kingdom. Carson indicates that the "reason for admission to the kingdom in this parable is more evidential than causative."<sup>72</sup>

The surprise of the "goats" indicates they were not aware of the nature of the criteria: the Son of Man had identified with His followers in such a way that things done to them would also be done to Him. "True disciples will love one another and serve the least brother with compassion; in so doing they unconsciously serve Christ. Those who have little sympathy for the gospel of the kingdom will remain indifferent and, in so doing, reject King Messiah."<sup>73</sup> With such criteria in mind the destiny of the individual is left to two options: either he or she will gain an inheritance in the kingdom (i.e., eternal life), or he or she will be separated out for a never-ending punishment in "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

The rejection of the goats was not based on what they did, but on what they failed to do. It was a sin of omission toward "the least of these" (cf. the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31). God abhors not simply the performing of sinful acts but also the omission of deeds. Failure to do good is in fact to do evil. In addition the free gift of grace (as represented in Matt. 20:1-16) has to be reconciled with the role of works (as here in 25:31-46). The works are the fruit that demonstrates the reality of the conversion of one's heart. The love shown by these deeds of mercy springs from true faith. As Walvoord affirms, "What is presented here is not

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Job 22:7; 31:16-21, 31-32; Proverbs 25:21; Ezekiel 18:7, 16; *Tobias* 4:16; *Sirach* 7:35; *Testament of Joseph* 1:4-7; *Testament of Benjamin* 4:4 (divine reward for showing mercy even to sinners); 2 *Enoch* 9:1; 10:5; 52:8; 63:1, 3; *Sukka* 49b; *Nedarim* 40a ("He who visits the sick will be saved from the judgment of Gehinnom"); and m. *Aboth* 1.2 ("On three things the world stands, on the Torah, the Worship and the performance of kindnesses"). Gundry calls verses 35-36 a targum on Isaiah 58:7. Beare points out that the visitation of prisoners is apparently not mentioned in Jewish lists of pious deeds (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, 494), while at the same time there is no mention here of the burial of the dead, a prime duty of the pious (e.g., *Tob.* 1:16; cf. Matt. 8:21-22). *The Testament of Joseph* 1: 5-6 echoes many of the same elements as the deeds of mercy in Matthew—though it is interesting to note who fulfills those needs:

"I was sold into slavery, and the Lord of all made me free;  
I was taken into captivity, and His strong hand succoured me.  
I was beset with hunger, and the Lord Himself nourished me.  
I was alone, and God comforted me;  
I was sick, and the Lord visited me;  
I was in prison, and my God showed favor to me."

<sup>72</sup> Carson, "Matthew," 8:521.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

the basis or ground of salvation but the evidence of it. . . . Accordingly, while works are not the ground of justification for salvation, they can be the fruit or evidence of it."<sup>74</sup>

Are such deeds sufficient for justification? No (Matt. 20:1–16; cf. Luke 11:23), but this is the wrong question to ask. The real question should be, "Am I (the reader or hearer) reflecting my reception of the message?" Such works, as evidence of a truly changed heart, will be accurately judged by God, who truly knows the heart and who promises recompense based on deeds (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12–13). Matthew emphasized that disciples must do the will of the Father (e.g., Matt. 12:46–50). As Donahue notes, "No gospel is harsher than Matthew on an ethic of words without deeds" (6:2, 5, 16; 7:15–21; 23:13–15).<sup>75</sup>

#### BRIEF THOUGHTS ON THE SYNOPTICS VERSUS PAUL

Few question that Paul viewed faith as the key to justification and that faith results in the believer having the "right" to enter God's presence at the end of the age. In addition few question that the Synoptics view Jesus as having high requirements for those who enter the kingdom.<sup>76</sup> But it is at this very juncture that the writers must be brought together. When Paul discussed justification by faith, he was specifically identifying the "entrance" requirements. But when Jesus discussed discipleship, He viewed salvation from a full-orbed perspective—not just the entrance, but the life of commitment to His lordship.<sup>77</sup> In other words the Syn-

<sup>74</sup> Walvoord, "The Judgment of the Nations," 312. Walvoord views this as identical to the problems created by comparing James's discussion on works with Paul's texts on justification (John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* [Chicago: Moody, 1974], 202). The works give evidence of life. The adjective "dead" in James 2:17, 26 need not mean that the faith was at one time alive any more than that the phrase "dead rock" implies that a rock previously had life if it is now described as "dead." To be dead means to have no life. See John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 151–57.

<sup>75</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 31. Cf. Jan Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in Mt. xxiv–xxv," in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu: Rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972), 2309–42.

<sup>76</sup> For example Matthew 7:15–23; 10:24–28, 32–33, 37–39; 12:33; 16:24–28; 18:8–9; 19:16–22; 20:25–28; 21:27–32; 22:34–40; Mark 3:31–35; 4:24–25; 8:34–38; 9:43–48; 10:17–31, 42–45; Luke 6:20–49; 9:23–27, 57–62; 10:25–37; 11:33–36; 12:8–9, 31–34; 14:7–14, 26–35. This list is not to suggest Jesus viewed these "requirements" as prior to faith, for faith is a key element in Jesus' teachings, even outside the Gospel of John. See the examples of faith in Matthew 9:18–22, 27–31; 11:25–27; 14:31; 18:6; Mark 1:15; 9:42; 10:30, 52; 11:23–24; Luke 1:45; 8:12, 50; 10:21–24.

<sup>77</sup> Paul also viewed faith as a continuing process (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:20). "Faith is not simply the accepting of a justifying act of God, but the establishing as a result of a new relationship with Christ. . . . The new life was seen as a continual act of faith,

optic Gospels teach, "This is what the disciple, the one who has trusted Christ, does." This certainly includes faith in Jesus, but the presentation usually focuses on a disciple as one who follows hard after his master in obedience.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time Paul spoke of the rejection of the unrighteous based on their lack of good works (Rom. 2:6-10; Titus 1:16), just as Jesus spoke in His parables of those who would not gain the kingdom. Overall, this is a relatively brief element in Paul's corpus, but it is not thereby insignificant. On the other side the role of faith as a requirement for entrance into the kingdom in Jesus' message is also relatively rare, but it is hardly nonexistent.<sup>79</sup>

#### SUMMARY

In summary several points are worth highlighting. First, in each parable the judgment occurs at the consummation of this age.<sup>80</sup> While the timing of that event is unknown, each follower is to be ready for and anticipate the coming kingdom.

a continual appropriation of what Christ had done for him. This does not lessen the once-for-all character of justification, but highlights the constant grip of faith upon it" (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981], 592). Also see Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 204-30; Paul S. Minear, *And Great Shall Be Your Reward: The Origins of Christian Views of Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), 12, 40-53 (cf. 60-63); and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 205-6.

<sup>78</sup> For an example of free offer and serious demand in close context, see Luke 14:16-24 and 14:25-33. Luke 14:16-24 refers to the eschatological banquet to which people are freely invited, the only requirement being that they show up and accept the invitation. The next passage (14:25-33), addressed to those accompanying Him on His travels, concerns the necessity of counting the cost of following Christ (Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989], 74-76). The difficulty comes, though, in making the decision to enter the banquet separate from the life of discipleship (as Ryrie seems to suggest). Rather, Luke put these two elements one after the other to highlight two sides of the same coin. The banquet shows the broadness of the invitation and the free cost of attending (though the banquet clearly cost the master greatly). While the entrance is open to each one who will enter at no cost, the life of the disciple, assumed of all who enter the kingdom, will itself expect much and be costly. The first pericope looks strictly at the entrance point, while the second looks at salvation in its full-orbed perspective. Separation takes place only at the semantic and conceptual level.

<sup>79</sup> The account of the centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 is particularly instructive. Jesus commended the man's faith when He marveled at his insight into the nature of spiritual authority. Jesus then connected that faith with an illustration of the consummation of the age. Many will come from all over the world to recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but some of the "sons of the kingdom" will be excluded and cast into eternal punishment. The man's faith is the key by which those sons of the kingdom (Jews) might also enter the banquet in the next age.

<sup>80</sup> The judgments are presented so that both the righteous and the evil are judged at the same time. The picture is different from the one in Revelation 20 where judgment of the righteous and the evil is separated by one thousand years. This is an example of later revelation adding details to the earlier.

Second, the essential nature of the judgment is soteriological. The judgment will render decisions that are eternal in nature, reflecting the status of each human being with regard to his or her eternal relationship to the kingdom. Phrases such as "the darkness outside," the "fiery furnace," and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" describe eternal separation from the kingdom. They are not simply expressions of grief over a Christian life that did not count for much in the kingdom, for they are figures and phrases representing an eternal exclusion from the presence of God. With this in view, it has been suggested that salvation in these parables is viewed as a "whole," not simply as a point of entry. The "sons of the kingdom" and the "sons of the evil one" (Matt. 13:38) are on opposite sides of the soteriological divide. There is no room for purgatory, universalism, or a view that some may miss the heavenly "banquet" while yet retaining a right to entry into the kingdom (i.e. "salvation," in Pauline terms). Those who are rejected are permanently excluded.

Third, the basis for this eternal judgment is the individual's works. In some cases the emphasis is on faithfulness to a job assigned: perhaps in a picture of preparation for an event, or a picture of the fruit (καρπός) of the believer. But however it was pictured, works were the key to the judgment.

What complicates the problem is that the decision for rejection or acceptance is presented as a soteriological decision based on these works. Such a judgment is highlighted by the parables of the Wheat and the Tares (perhaps along with the Narrow Door and the Virgins) in which those who appear to fit into the proper categories do not do so (even when they think they do) since they were not properly prepared for the kingdom. Perhaps the clearest example is the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, in which eternal life and eternal perdition are the options meted out based on how people treated the followers of the Son of Man.

Works are not separated from the faith one exercises for entrance to the kingdom for works are evidence of that faith. A true change of heart will be reflected in a person's life.<sup>81</sup> A lack of that change is apparently enough to prevent entrance into the eschatological kingdom (the goats are prohibited from entrance because of their actions while the sheep are given entrance because of their

<sup>81</sup> Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 45, 92. It is true that in each parable the one who makes the final decision is the master or king. Yet to say such works are not evident to others before the end of the age overlooks the fact that in the parable of the Tares, the servants are aware of the incongruity of tares in a field of wheat. The servants are prohibited from tearing up the wheat, but this does not deny their ability to notice the reality of such inconsistency. Yet judgment will be left to the Son of Man, who alone knows the hearts of men.

works); but works are never ultimately separated from the faith of the individual, for it was also shown that works are not in themselves enough to impress the Son of Man positively in His role as judge (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).

Paul wrote with different emphases in mind, focusing clearly on the entrance requirements into salvation, namely, justification by faith. While the Synoptics support the role of faith in establishing one's relationship with God (usually in phrases such as "repent and believe the gospel"), they tend to emphasize the whole life of faith for the believer. In other words the life of a follower of Jesus is to be a constant exercise of faith in order to obey and please God. Paul clearly recognized this same truth, for he knew that something started by faith cannot be perfected by works (the burden of Galatians).

This material is cited with gracious permission from: x  
Dallas Theological Seminary  
3909 Swiss Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75204  
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)