



TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THE TRIBULATION

Volume II – Part 3

by

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INTRODUCTION:1

Fascinating! Digesting Doug Shearer's exposition of Matthew 24-25 has generated a plethora of responses – some accusing him of hyper-Calvinism and others asserting his Armenian doctrine of works. Still others are outraged that tribulation awaits us all—especially those who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” – and as our beloved brother *Wally Magdangal* (and I strongly urge you to link to his name/site) exclaims his favorite verse of Scripture: “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...” (John 15:20); even so, triumphant testimony shall be the hallmark of every true believer in the Latter Days—“Many will be purified, made white, and refined” (Daniel 12:10a).



This final portrait illustrates our service to all is a service unto the Lord Himself—serving others, through the Spirit of Christ who is our Life, is directly related to ministry to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus, and is subsequently rewarded!

Matthew 25:34-39

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...
For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me*

*drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison,
and ye came unto me.*



Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
Matthew 25:34-39

In verse 34, Jesus turns to the sheep on his right and invites them into the “kingdom.” In this sixth and last parable - with its emphasis on the gospel alone and with all mankind in view - the word “kingdom” (“βασιλεια”) is freighted with a meaning that goes beyond just the Millennial Kingdom. It’s far more inclusive

than that. Fundamentally, what it implies is salvation itself - much akin to what we find in Matthew 13:19.

*When any one hears **the word of the kingdom**, and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he who receives seed by the way side.*
Matt. 13:19

Clearly, here in Matthew 13:19, when Jesus says, “the word of the **kingdom**,” it’s tantamount to saying, “the word of **salvation**.” And that’s exactly what we have here in Matthew 25:34. Jesus is inviting the sheep on his right into the joy of salvation - a blessing God made ready long before the foundations of the earth were established.

Merit or Mercy

On the face of it, the salvation into which the sheep are being ushered appears to be based on merit. But that flies in the face of every tenet of Christian dogma. Salvation is not grounded in merit, but in the grace and mercy of God. It’s wholly undeserved. No other doctrine is more central to the Christian faith. Paul sums up its importance in Romans 3:24.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...
Rom. 3:24

Some Commentators suggest that what’s meant here is not that the good deeds enumerated in verses 35 through 39 merit salvation, but that they reflect salvation. But that’s a stretch - largely because verse 35 begins with the adverbial conjunction “for;” and syntactically that means verses 35-39 are intended to explain verse 34. In short, verse 34 is linked causally to verses 35-39 - or, put straight up: Why are the sheep ushered into salvation? It’s **because** ...

- when Christ was hungry they brought him food;
- when he was thirsty, they gave him water;



- when he was a stranger, they took him in;
- when he was naked, they clothed him;
- when he was sick, they visited him; and
- when he was in prison, they sought him out.

No, the explanation lies elsewhere.

Matthew 10:7-15 - An Interpretive Model

What we have here is a *metonymy* drawn from Matthew 10:7-15.

There Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel throughout Israel - from village to village and from city to city. It was the first “missionary” journey he sent his disciples on - and his instructions are quite specific...

*And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils:
freely ye have received, freely give.
Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet
staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.
And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is
worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.*

*And when ye come into an house, salute it.
And if the house be worthy, let your peace
come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your
peace return to you. And whosoever shall not
receive you, nor hear our words, when ye
depart out of that house or city, shake off the
dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall
be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and
Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for
that city.*

Matt. 10:7-15

Notice in verse 7 Jesus tells his disciples to preach a specific message: **“the kingdom of heaven - meaning salvation - is at hand.”**

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of

heaven is at hand.

Matt. 10:7

... but as Jesus continues his instructions, the “messenger” **becomes** the “message” - until finally verse 14 is reached ...

*And whosoever **shall not receive you**, nor hear your words, when ye
depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.*

In having rejected the “messenger,” they have rejected the “message.” Likewise, in having welcomed the “messenger” (verses 11-13), and ministered to his needs, they have embraced the gospel “message.” Once again, the messenger has become the message. It’s a figure of speech called a *metonymy*.

The Word “Worthy” in Matthew 10

Finally, because it’s apt to cause some confusion, let’s take a close look at the word “worthy” (“αξιός”) in verse 11 ...



And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; (“αξιος”) and there abide till ye go thence.

Matt. 10:11

It’s a word that reflects a range of meanings - including “deserving,” but also “appropriate” or “fitting.” It conveys a sense of “equivalence” (See the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I). And here “appropriate” or “fitting, not “deserving,” is the far better choice. What Jesus is saying, therefore, is quite simple ...

“When you come to a town, try to determine who might “fit” the gospel - meaning who might be “open” to the gospel - and stay there.”

The *God’s Word Translation of the Bible* - while not without fault - gives the correct meaning. It reads...

When you go into a city or village, look for people who will listen to you there. Stay with them until you leave (that place).

In short, Jesus is not telling his disciples in Matthew 10 to search out persons who deserve the gospel, but who *are open* to the gospel.

Application of Matthew 10:7-15 to Matthew 25:35-46

Just as in Matthew 10:7-15 the messenger is the message, so in Matthew 25:35-46 the messengers, called “my brethren,” are the message. They *embody* the message. They represent the faithful, courageous believers throughout history who, notwithstanding the persecution and suffering it entailed, have witnessed to God’s goodness and mercy - that he’s “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Harkening to them is tantamount to harkening to the gospel. Once again, what we have here is a classic metonymy.



“My Brethren” in Matthew 25:35-46

We now move on to verse 40 - which has become a source of heated controversy - with Pretribulationists often insisting that the word “brethren” is ethnically grounded - meaning Christ’s “Jewish brethren” ...

Matthew 25:40

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:40

... and arguing that what we have here are unsaved gentiles who have survived the Tribulation and who, though unsaved, have nevertheless ministered to the Jews during that terrifying seven year span of time and, consequently, are being awarded the privilege of being made denizens of the Millennial Kingdom.

But that doesn’t hold water. Once again, this sixth and final parable is not about rewards - *of any kind*. It’s exclusively about the gospel - what men and women throughout the ages, not just the seven years of The Tribulation, have done with the gospel ...

- whether they've hearkened to it and are therefore bound over to salvation or
- whether they've spurned it and are therefore bound over to damnation.

And verse 46, which completes the parable, leaves no room for doubt.

*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment:
but the righteous into life eternal.*

Matt. 25:46

The term "life eternal" is obviously synonymous with "salvation." No, what we have here is salvation - eternal life - a gift God affords anyone who acknowledges his sinfulness and cries out for mercy; it's clearly not a reward for ministering to the Jews during the Tribulation - or, for that matter, a reward of any kind whatsoever.

Matthew 25:41-46

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart
from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil
and his angels:*

*For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye
gave me no drink:*



*I was a stranger, and ye took me
not in: naked, and ye clothed me
not: sick, and in prison, and ye
visited me not. Then shall they also
answer him, saying, Lord, when
saw we thee an hungered, or
athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or
sick, or in prison, and did not
minister unto thee? Then shall he
answer them, saying, Verily I say
unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not
to one of the least of these, ye did it
not to me. And these shall go away
into everlasting punishment: but
the righteous into life eternal.*

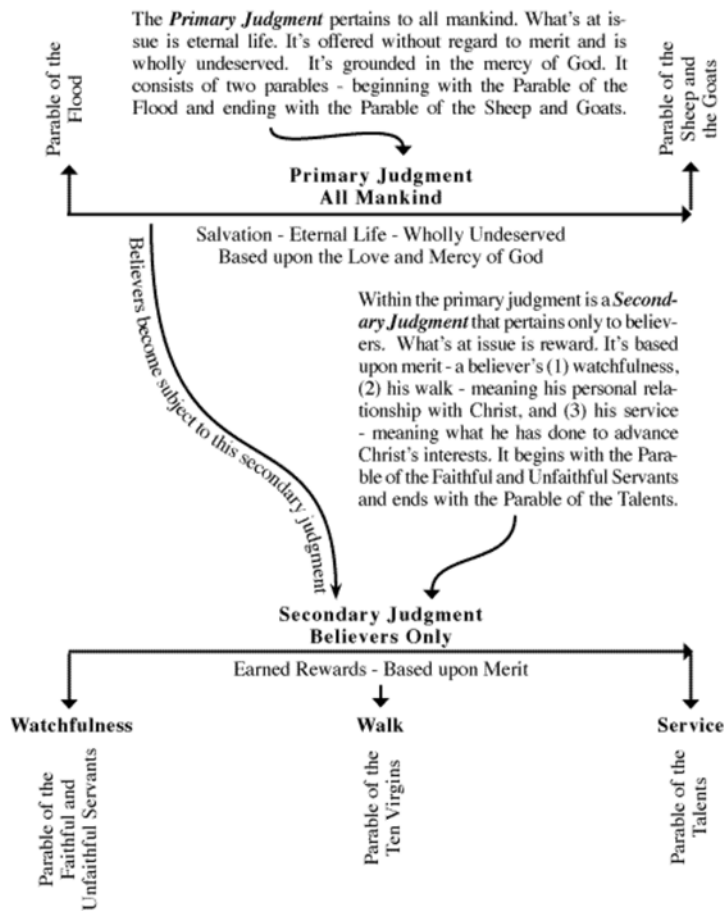
Matt. 25:41-46

Once again, what men and women have done with the messenger tells us what they've done with the

message, the gospel Christ sent them to preach. Here, they've spurned the messenger; so that tells us that they've spurned the gospel. And having spurned the gospel, their fate is sealed. The judgment pronounced against them is carried out.

Let's go all out

There's no excuse for us - any of us - missing out on what God has prepared for those who overcome. God has provided all that we need: He has forgiven our sins, adopted us as his very own sons and daughters, infused our lives with meaning and purpose, and empowered us with the Holy Spirit. He draws up alongside us and takes our hand into his - promising to never leave us nor forsake us. So, let' go all out - and cross the finish line having spent our all on the one who spent his all on us.



The six parables that follow Jesus' description of The Tribulation are often explicated in isolation from each other; and that leads to a gross misunderstanding of Jesus' intention. Once again, the first parable, the Parable of the Fig Tree, merely sets up the second and third parables. The second through the sixth parables comprise an *inclusio* - with the second and sixth parables forming the bracketing parables and the third, fourth and fifth parables forming the bracketed parables. All five of the parables that make up the *inclusio* revolve around the single issue of judgment - with the bracketing parables focused on salvation and the bracketed parables focused on reward. In short, the judgment that focuses on salvation surrounds and envelopes the judgment that focuses on reward - an altogether fitting portrait of the relationship between the two types of judgments.

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