

Matthew 25 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 25:1-13 THE KING AND HIS MARRIAGE PROCESSION

Our Lord was still seated, with his disciples, upon the Mount of Olives (see chapter 24:3). The instructive parable that follows was spoken by him in continuation of the discourse we have been considering. It is evidently intended to set forth, under a familiar figure, the need of preparation for the King's glorious appearing when he comes to claim his bride. To those of us who will not be alive at Christ's Second Advent, the midnight cry, "Go ye out to meet him," will sound forth at the hour of death.

Matthew 25:1-2. THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

According to Oriental custom, the bridegroom is represented as having gone to the house of his bride's father, whence he would conduct his spouse to her future home. The parable opens at the point where some of his professed friends are waiting to join the procession, and go in with him to the marriage-feast. Thus is the nominal Church of Christ waiting for the coming of the Lord. There did not seem to be much difference in the eternal appearance of the "ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." They were all virgins, they all took their lamps, and they all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They all made a profession of attachment to him, which led them to separate themselves from their other companions and acquaintances, that they might go forth to meet him on his wedding-night.

There was, however, a vital and essential difference between them: "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Let us faintly hope that we are not to gather from our Lord's words that one half of the professing Church is composed of those whom he calls "foolish." Yet our Savior would not have spoken of so great a proportion if there were not really a very large admixture of foolish professors with the wise possessors of the grace of God.

Matthew 25:3. Them that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

They may have thought that, if they had lamps that were similar to those carried by others, it would be sufficient. Perhaps they judged that the secret store of oil, being unseen, was unnecessary. They were willing to carry a lamp in one hand; but to devote the other hand to the care of an oil-flask, was more than they were willing to do. It is the want of the oil of grace that is the fatal flaw in many a professor's lamp. Many have a name to live, but have not the life of God within their souls. They make a profession of attachment to Christ, but they have not the inward supply of the Spirit of grace to keep it up. There is a glitter or a flash, but there is no permanent light, and there cannot be any, for although they have "lamps", they have "no oil with them."

Matthew 25:4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

They had oil in their lamps, and oil with their lamps. Lamps are of no use without oil; yet the oil needs the lamp, or it will not be used. Grace should reveal its presence, faith in Christ should be avowed; but it is worse than useless to make a profession of love to Christ, unless there is a secret store of grace by which the external part of religion may be maintained even before the allsearching eye of the King himself. Unless the Spirit of God be in us, indeed, and of a truth, we may for a while make a fair show in the flesh, but the end will be the blackness of darkness for ever.

Matthew 25:5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

How sadly true it is, that, in the history of Christ's Church, genuine saints and mere professors have often "slumbered and slept" side by side! Those who have the oil of grace are not always wide awake to serve their Master, and watch for his appearing. In the case of even true believers, the delay in Christ's coming causes disappointment, weariness, and lethargy; and his Church falls

fast asleep, when she ought to be watching for her Lord. As for the “foolish”, whether self-deceived or hypocrites, there being no true life of God in the soul, after a while their apparent earnestness disappears, and Satan drugs them into a fatal slumber.

Matthew 25:6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

That midnight cry, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh,” startled all the sleepers. It should be well if we all I thought more of the great truth of our Lord’s Second Advent. The oftener it is preached, in due proportion with other revealed doctrines, the more likely will it be to arouse both slumbering possessors and sleeping professors of love to Christ. As the midnight of this present evil age approaches, there is increasing need for all to be bidden to listen for the clarion cry, “Go ye out to meet him.”

Matthew 25:7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

The suddenness of the alarm made them all start to their feet, and begin to examine and trim their lamps. They could not go to meet the bridegroom without carrying a light; that was an essential part of their preparation for joining the King’s marriage procession. Those virgins who had “oil in their vessels with their lamps” soon finished their trimming, and were ready to start; but those who had “lamps” but “no oil” were unable to perform the necessary trimming. It is a pity that any should have to be trimming their lamps when they come to die, or when the sign of the Son of man appears in the heaven; but if that work is attempted without the Spirit or the grace of God, it will be an eternal failure.

Matthew 25:8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

They now began to value what they had aforesaid despised; they had been so foolish as to think that oil was unnecessary, now they saw that it was the one thing needful. Hence their request to their wiser companions: “Give us of your oil.” They gave a dreadful reason for their request: “for our lamps are gone out,” or, going out; the dry wick flickered a while, and then died out in darkness, like the snuff of a candle.

Those are terrible words, “our lamps are gone out.” It is worse to have a lamp that has gone out than never to have had a lamp at all. “Our lamps are gone out.” The foolish virgins seemed to say, “We thought everything was ready for tonight, we even gloried in our lamps, we promised ourselves a bright future, we thought all was well for our share in the marriage-supper; but our lamps are gone out, and we have no oil with which to supply them.” May no reader of this page ever have to utter this bitter lament!

Those who are putting off their repentance till their dying hour are like these foolish virgins; their folly has reached its utmost height. When the death-sweat lies cold on the brow, the neglected oil of grace will be valued.

Then will come the despairing cry “Send for a minister to pray for me, get in some Christian people to see what they can do for me.”

Matthew 25:9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves,

No believer has more grace than he needs: “the wise” virgins had no oil to give away. They gave the best advice they could under the circumstances, although it was of no avail: “Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” There is a proper place where the oil can be bought at the right time: we are bidden to “buy the truth,” grace is sold in God’s market on gospel terms, “without money, and without price;” but when the midnight cry is heard, the day of grace has closed, and buying and selling are over for ever.

Matthew 25:10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Undoubtedly, there are death-bed repentances; but it is to be feared that, in the great majority of cases, people who wake up so late

to a true conviction of their condition will find that, while they go to buy the long despised grace, “the bridegroom ” will come. The poor head may be so distracted with pain that the mind may not be able to catch the idea of what faith in Christ is; mental capacity may wholly fail in that dread hour. The risk is so great that none but the fatally foolish will postpone till then the preparation for the King’s coming. “They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: ” their readiness consisted in having lighted lamps, or flaming torches; our preparation for death or Christ’s coming, is the possession of grace in the heart. “And the door was shut: ” when that door is once shut, it will never be opened. There are some who dote and dream about an opening of that door, after death, for those who have died impenitent; but there is nothing in the Scriptures to warrant such an expectation. Any “larger hope” than that revealed in the Word of God, is a delusion and a snare.

Matthew 25:11, 12. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, lord, lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

“The other virgins ” were not “ready” when the bridegroom came; and there is no hint in the parable that they were any more ready when they came and clamored at his closed door, “Lord, lord, open to us. ’ “We came to meet thee, we carried lamps, we were with the other virgins; Lord, Lord, open to us! “His answer tolled the knell of any vain hope of admission that they might have cherished: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” “If any man loveth God, the same is known of him.” (Corinthians 8:3, R.V.) The Good Shepherd says, “I know mine own, and mine own know me.” (John 10:14, R.V.) Those whom Jesus Christ knows in this sense, he loves; and they love him because he has first loved them. The foolish virgins had professed to be the bridegroom’s friends, yet they were proved to be not even his acquaintances. May none of us ever hear from the blessed lips of the heavenly Bridegroom that terrible death-sentence, “I know you not”!

Matthew 25:13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Our Lord again enjoins upon his followers the duty of watchfulness, as in chapter 24:42; and repeats, in a slightly-altered form, the reason previously given: “For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. ” It is idle to say that we may find out the year, if not the day and hour, of Christ’s coming. The time of the end is hidden, and shall not be known until suddenly, he shall appear “in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory.” It should be our one great concern to be sure that we shall be ready to meet him whenever he may come.

MATTHEW 25:14-30 THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Matthew 25:14, 15. For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straight way took his journey.

Our Savior had been speaking of himself as the heavenly Bridegroom; now he compares himself to “a man traveling into a far country. ” The word “traveling” suggests that our Lord has only gone away for a season and that he will return when his purpose in going into the “far country” is accomplished. When he went back from earth to heaven, it was a long journey; but he did not leave his servants without needful supplies during his absence. He “called his own servants ”, his bondservants, his household servants; “and delivered unto them his goods. ” The servants were his, and the goods also were his; his slaves could not claim as their own either their persons or their possessions; all belonged to their lord, and were to be used for him.

He did not entrust to all the same quantity of goods: “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability .” He was the judge of the ability of each of his servants, and he made no mistake in his allotment of the talents to them. We may rest assured, if we are the Lord’s servants, that he has bestowed upon us as many talents as we can rightly use, and quite as many as we shall be able to account for when he returns. The all-important matter for us is to be faithful to the trust committed to us. “And straightway took his journey: “our Lord knew all that was to happen before he left the earth, — his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection; but he calmly talked of it as a man might speak of his preparations for traveling into a foreign country. He has gone, and his servants are left behind to make the best use they can of his ascension-gifts while he is absent.

This parable, like that of the ten virgins, has to do with real and nominal Christians, with all who are or who profess to be the servants of Christ.

The "talents" are anything and everything that our Lord has given to us for use here as his stewards.

Matthew 25:16-18. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

It is very significant that our Savior said that "he that had received one " talent "went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. " Many who have "five talents " or "two " have not "traded with the same, " and so gained "other five " or "other two "; but Jesus knew that it was the servant with one talent who was most exposed to the temptation to do nothing because he could only do a little. There are perils connected with the possession of five talents, or two; but the man who has only one talent is in equal if not greater danger. Let us all remember that, as it is a sin to hide one talent in the earth, it is a greater sin to hide two or five talents. It was "his lord's money" that the slothful servant hid. It would have been wrong to bury what belonged to himself; but he was doubly blameworthy in hiding that which had been entrusted to him by his lord, instead of trading with it so as to increase it. Are any of us thus sinning against our Savior?

Matthew 25:19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

There is a reckoning-day coming, even though "a long time "may elapse before "the lord of those servants cometh. " Jesus is coming back from the far country whither he has gone; his own word is, "Behold, I come quickly." We must not leave this great fact out of our reckoning; and as his stewards, we must be prepared at any moment for him to come and reckon with us as to the talents with which he has endowed each of his servants.

Matthew 25:20, 21. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, lord, thou deliveredst unto me, five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Have all of us, who "received five talents " from our Lord, "gained beside them five talents more "? I trow not. Have we double the grace we had at first? Twice the tact with which we began our service for God? Twofold adaptation to the work he has given us to do? It was so with this servant; and therefore, his lord commended and rewarded him. There was no proportion between his service and its reward: "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. " He who is faithful to his Lord shall have greater opportunities of proving his loyalty and devotion in a higher sphere; and in addition, he shall share the bliss of his Lord's return: "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord. " This is not the servant's portion, but the Master's portion shared with his faithful servants.

This will be the consummation of all heavenly delights; not so much that we shall have a joy of our own as that we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

Matthew 25:22, 23. He also that had received two talent, came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

This servant's commendation and reward are exactly the same as those given to his more highly privileged brother; as if our Savior would teach us that it is not the number of our talents, but the use we make of them, that is the essential matter. He does not expect as much from the man with two talents as from the one to whom he has given five; what he does expect is that they should both be faithful over the few things he has committed to their care. It was so with the two servants mentioned in the parable. The second had doubled the capital received from his lord, even as the first had done with his larger amount of trust-money;

therefore they were equally praised and blessed.

Matthew 25:24, 25. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

At the day of reckoning, the unfaithful as well as the faithful have to give account of their stewardship. This man's words were self-contradictory, and his excuse was self-condemnatory. He said that he know that his lord was a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed, yet he confessed that the talent he brought back had been given to him by this master whom he represented as severe and unreasonable. He also admitted that it was his lord's money that he had hidden in the earth: "thy talent." It was entrusted to him, and yet even the servant owned that it did not belong to him: "Lo, there thou hast that is thine." "I have not made any addition to thy talent; but I have not lost it, nor given it away; I have brought it back, lo, there it is." He seemed to speak as though this was all that could be rightly expected of him; yet he was evidently not satisfied with himself, for he said, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." See how fear may become the mother of presumption. Faith in God begets holy fear; but servile fear is the parent of doubt, which in its turn has a family of unbelieving rebels.

Matthew 25:26, 27. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

"His " took the "wicked And slothful servant " on his own ground, and condemned him out of his own mouth. The master did not mean to admit that he was such a one as he had been called by the "malicious and lazy slave", as the original might be literally rendered; but supposing the servant's words had been true, what ought he to have done? If he was afraid to trade with his lord's talent on his own responsibility, he might have taken it to the bankers, who would at least have kept it secure, and added interest to it while it was deposited with them.

If we cannot trade directly and personally on our Lord's account, if we have not the skill or the tact to manage a society or an enterprise for him, we may at least contribute to what others are doing, and join our capital to theirs, so that, by some means, our Master may have the interest to which he is entitled. His talent must not be buried in the earth; but must be invested wherever it will bring to him the best return at his coming.

Matthew 25:28-30. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The servant who had gained five talents to his lord's five was allowed to keep them all, for his master spoke of "him which has ten talents." The unused talent of the slothful servant was also given to him, for he who uses well that which is entrusted to him shall receive more. He who has faith shall have more faith. He who has a taste for divine things shall develop a greater appetite for them. He who has some understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom shall understand them more fully: "For unto every one that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance." To lose the talent that had remained idle, was only a small part of the doom of "the unprofitable servant." His lord ordered him to be "cast into outer darkness", and his punishment is indicated by that oft-repeated refrain of our Savior's revelation of the horrors that await lost souls: "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." If we give any description of the world to come which is at all terrible, we are supposed to have borrowed it from Dante or Milton; but the most awful and harrowing descriptions of hell that ever fell from human lips do not exceed the language of the loving Christ himself. He is the true lover of men who faithfully warns them concerning the eternal woe that awaits the impenitent; while he who paints the miseries of hell as though they were but trifling is seeking to murder men's souls under the pretense of friendship.

MATTHEW 25:31-46 THE ROYAL AND UNIVERSAL JUDGE

Here we have the King's own description of the Day of Judgment; and in the solemn silence of our spirits we may well put off our

shoes from our feet as we draw nigh to this holy ground.

Matthew 25:31. When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: Our Savior had a wonderful series of contrasts passing before his eye as he uttered this sublime prophecy.

Within three days he was to be crucified; yet he spoke of the time "When the Son of man shall come in his glory." He had with him a little company of disciples, one of whom would betray him, another would deny him, and all would forsake him; yet by faith he saw the heavenly retinue that would attend him at his coming: "and all the holy angels with him." Wearied and worn with his labors, and saddened because of the hardness of men's hearts and the impending doom of Jerusalem, he sat on the slope of the Mount of Olives; but his thoughts were projected across the ages as he told his hearers of the glorious throne he would occupy in the day when he should return as the Royal and Universal Judge of mankind: "Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." The great white throne shall be set on high, all pure and lustrous, bright and clear as a polished mirror, in which every man shall see himself and his sins reflected; and on that throne shall sit "the Son of man." Behind the Kingly Judge, "all the holy angels" shall be ranged, rank on rank, an innumerable and glorious body-guard, to grace the court of their enthroned Lord on the day of the last great assize; and, at his bidding, to remove from his presence all whom he shall condemn.

Matthew 25:32, 33. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

In the last great day of the Lord, all nations that have ever existed on the face of the globe shall be gathered before the judgment-seat of Christ. The earth, which is now becoming more and more one vast graveyard or channel-house, shall yield up her dead; and the sea itself, transformed into a solid pavement, shall bear upon its bosom the millions who lie hidden in its gloomy caverns. All mankind will be assembled before their Judge: "and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall fail because of him." At first they will be gathered together in one heterogeneous mass; but the myriad multitude will speedily be divided into two companies: "and he shall separate them one from another." The King will be the divider in that dread day. How he will separate them, no one can tell, except that it will be "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Not one goat will be left among the sheep, nor one sheep with the goats. The division will be very close and personal: "one from another." They will not be separated into nations, nor even into families; but each individual will be allotted his or her proper place among the sheep or among the goats. "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." There will be only two companies, one on the right hand of the Judge, and the other on his left. The Lord Jesus Christ "shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing"; and all who will be summoned before his dread tribunal will be either alive from the dead, or still dead in trespasses and sins. There will be no middle company in that day, as in God's sight there is no third class even now. All our names are either in the Lamb's Book of Life or in the Judge's Book of Death.

Some have taught that the judgment here foretold is that of the professing Church, and not of the whole world. There may be some ground for their belief; yet it seems impossible to apply the full meaning of our Savior's majestic words to any scene except the general judgment of the whole human race.

Matthew 25:34. 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:

Turning first to the chosen company on his right hand, the "great multitude, which no man could number," the King will say to them, "Come." They had accepted his previous invitation, "Come unto me; now he gives them another and a more glorious "Come," which was, however, included in the former one; for when he said, "I will give you rest," heaven itself was promised to them. The King calls his loved ones by a choice name: "ye blessed of my Father." We shall not know what bliss that title implies until we hear it from our Savior's lips; and even then we shall only begin to understand what we shall continue to enjoy throughout eternity.

All true believers are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, so the King will next say to them, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The "inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," is the inalienable right of all who are made kings and priests unto God; and that which has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world must be possessed by them when the world itself has answered the end of its creation, and has been burned up.

Matthew 25:35, 36. 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.

The King dwells with great delight upon the details of his servants' kindnesses to himself. Are we, then, after all, to be saved by our works? By no means. Yet are our works the evidences of our being saved. If our actions are such as Christ will commend at the day of judgment, they prove that we are saved by grace, and that the Holy Spirit has wrought effectually in us, and through us. The services mentioned by the King were all rendered to himself: "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. " There is no mention of what the righteous had said, or of what profession of love to Christ they had made; the commendation was for what the King declared they had actually done by way of ministering unto him.

Matthew 25:37-39. 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?

They will bashfully disclaim the praise pronounced by the King. They had no idea that there was anything meritorious in what they had done; they never dreamed of being rewarded for it. When the saints stand before the judgment seat, the bare thought of there being any excellence in what they have done will be new to them, for they have formed a very lowly estimate of their own performances. They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, for Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus. They did it because they delighted to do it, because they could not help doing it, because their new nature impelled them to it.

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.

Christ has much more to do with his brethren's sorrow than we sometimes think. Are they hungry? He puts it, "I was an hungered." Do they thirst?

He says, "I was thirsty." The sympathy of Christ is continuous, and all adown the ages he will perpetually incarnate himself in the suffering bodies of his tried and afflicted people. Hence the opportunity of doing him service so long as we are here.

Matthew 25:41. 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.

Every word in the King's sentence upon those on his left hand will strike terror into their hearts. "Depart from me: " to be banished from Christ's presence, is hell. "Ye cursed: " they could not plead that they had either kept the Law or obeyed the Gospel; they were indeed doubly cursed. They were bidden to depart "into ever lasting fire, prepared: for the devil and, his angels. " They had joined the devil in refusing allegiance to the Lord; so it was but right that, imitating his rebellion, they should share his punishment.

Matthew 25:42, 43. 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.

Two little words, "no " and "not " explain the difference between their conduct and that of the righteous. To those on his right hand, the King will say, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat," but to those on his left hand, he will say, "Ye gave me no meat. " This omission on their part was no small matter; it was fatal, and it was visited with the eternal death-sentence, "Depart from me." Men may think lightly now of their want of love to Christ, and their neglect to care for his poor brethren, but their conduct will appear in another light in the blaze of the last great day.

Yet, even then, some will try to justify themselves.

Matthew 25:44. 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

What a deceiver is sin! How presumptuous, that even in the presence of the Omniscient Judge, it denies its own real character; and makes its votaries pretend to have attained to the divine standard of holiness!

Matthew 25:45. Then shall he answer them, saying Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of thee, ye did it not to me.

Our Lord does not mean to teach that men will be condemned because they have not been charitable to the poor and needy, or that they will be saved if they are generous and openhanded. That would indeed be salvation by works, to be boasted of to all eternity. He does mean that only those who produce such fruit as this prove that "the root of the matter" is in them; by ministering to his poor brethren, out of love to him, they show that they are the subjects of that distinguishing grace which makes them differ from others. All our future depends upon our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25:46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

"Everlasting" and "eternal" are different translations of the same Greek word. The "punishment" is of the same duration as the "life." The one is no more temporary or terminable than the other. In heaven "the righteous" will be for ever anticipating future bliss while enjoying present perfect happiness; and in hell, the unrighteous will be ever looking forward to "the wrath to come" while enduring what our Savior here describes as "everlasting punishment" in "everlasting fire" (v. 41). Between heaven and hell there is a great gulf fixed, an awful abyss that cannot be crossed, so that the separation between the sheep and the goats will be eternal and unalterable. God grant that none of us may be on the wrong side of that great gulf!