

Excerpts from Chapter 11 of The Book

“How to Recognize the Antichrist and Not Make a Fool of Yourself!”

What Matters Most?

Matthew 24 or Matthew 25: Endtime Events vs. Eternal Character

Matthew 24

Endtime Events
Signs & Prophecy
Temporal Focus

VS

Matthew 25

Eternal Character
Service & Readiness
Kingdom Values

John Patrick

What Matters Most?"

Matthew 24 or Matthew 25: Endtime Events vs. Eternal Character

The Second Coming of Jesus will, no doubt, be the most exciting and glorious day in all history. However, in Matthew 24, Jesus warns us three times to not be deceived. He even questioned whether there would be faith upon earth when He returns. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Matthew 24, which is mostly comprised of Jesus' Endtime discourse, is a thrilling and fascinating chapter. Yet, it only covers a brief segment of history. The following chapter, Matthew 25, is far more important to our spiritual lives as it covers all of eternity and how we will live our lives there. Our present life is but a vapor compared to eternity.

The Eternal Perspective of Matthew 25

C.S. Lewis noted, "Either I am going to heaven or He is coming for me, does it really matter?" Whether through death or Christ's return, our current life is merely a transition to our eternal life. Any present worries are part of the journey and will fade when we enter God's eternal Kingdom.

The teachings about the Endtime are not the essence of Jesus' message. Our main goal is to love God and others with all our hearts and do the work of establishing His Kingdom of Love on earth. As Mother Teresa once said, "Be the living expression of God's kindness: Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier."

While Matthew Chapter 24 focuses on the signs of the end and Christ's Second Coming, Matthew Chapter 25 begins with the Parable of the Ten Virgins. All ten virgins had oil lamps. Some had sufficient oil in their lamps at the hour of Jesus' coming, and others were unprepared and without oil in their lamps and missed the wedding of the Bridegroom.

And at midnight a cry was heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But he answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you." Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (Matthew 25:6 -13).

This parable reminds us how we must be spiritually ready at all times, since we will meet Christ either when He returns to earth or when we die - and we don't know when either will happen.

There are various interpretations of what the 'oil' represents in this parable. One common interpretation is that it represents the presence of God and the Holy Spirit in our life. According to this view, it's the oil of God's spirit that keeps the fire of love burning in our hearts.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "To be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honor beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache." One glimpse of Jesus will make all life's tests worth it all.

Matthew Chapter 25 concludes with the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, a story that passes far beyond the region of parable into that of divine realities with the soul-searching questions we'll face on Judgment Day.

According to Matthew 25: 31-46, the world, including the Church, will be judged according to the charity which they exercised towards men, manifested by both physically and spiritually caring for the poor, the sick, the refugee, the destitute, the widow and the orphan.

The righteous ask on the Judgment Day: "When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" (Matthew 25:39).

Jesus answers: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

How we live our lives during our time on earth is what ultimately counts, not whether or not we fully understand Endtime prophecy and can put a label on every horn and beast mentioned in the Books of Revelation and Daniel.

The Call to Watch Our Hearts

Jesus repeatedly told us to watch – not primarily for the signs of His coming, but to watch our own hearts and examine ourselves to ensure we remain faithful. As He warned:

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the son of man (Luke 21:34-36).

As believers, we are called to:

Love God and Love Others

Share the Gospel

Live and Teach Jesus' Teachings

Walk Humbly Before God and Man

If we are faithful in these things, our hearts will be prepared for whatever comes.

Our Calling to Selfless, Other Centered Love

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:35-

36).

Anne Graham Lotz teaches, "The first secret to loving others is to immerse yourself in a love relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – and abide there."

Loving others is of utmost importance. It is our liturgy and our spirituality. Loving and caring for others can be the cure for many of our own problems. "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). If you are feeling sad, unloved, lonely, or empty, reach out to give to someone else who is in even greater need, and you will sense the life of God within you start to grow stronger.

In our earnest desire to please God, we must remember that we are saved solely by His grace, not by our good works or how much we know. Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5 and John 3:16 make clear that eternal life is God's pure gift to us, and our service to Him should naturally flow from gratitude for His boundless mercy.

Since time immemorial, humanity has attempted to earn God's love through religious rituals, sacrifices, and strict adherence to countless laws in pursuit of righteousness. Yet for many, religion remains merely human striving to earn what God freely gives – His love.

Something new began for all mankind with the life of Jesus. Through His death on the cross, Jesus ushered in a new covenant, a new agreement between God and man, a new era of amazing grace. It cost us nothing, but it cost the Giver everything. God does not love us because of the works we do for Him. While He may appreciate our good works, He values most of all our love for Him!

God seeks relationship with you, not ritual! As 1 John 4:12 tells us, "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us." Think of it – the Creator of the universe actually dwells within us. There can be no greater intimacy than this!

The Primacy of Love

Matthew 25 emphasizes physical acts of charity which are important. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (See Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told us to let our lights so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify our Father in heaven (See Matthew 5:16).

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Whoever thinks that he understands the Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up the twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought."

The Parable of the Good Samaritan was an important teaching in the Early Church. It's found in Luke 10:25-37. Church fathers often used it in their teachings.

The Early Church understood this parable as a literal moral lesson about helping others regardless of their background, ethnicity, religion or social status. Some saw the Good Samaritan as representing Christ helping wounded humanity.

The parable was particularly relevant to early Christians because they were often caring for sick people during plagues and helping travelers and strangers – practical applications of the parable's message. They saw this kind of sacrificial care for others as a defining feature of Christian life.

The Early Church lived the Parable of the Good Samaritan and Christianity rapidly spread throughout the whole known world.

Good works are important, but our works must stem from deep love for Jesus, not from seeking to look good in front of others or whatever other motive. It is such a temptation to sincere workers of the Lord to put God's service before God himself.

Jesus told the vibrant church of Ephesus, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). The foundation of all ministries is not service to God, but God himself – delighting in Him, not in outcomes. We often build our lives around other things – our jobs, family relationships, financial security, and social standing – rather than centering our lives on Jesus and His love.

True Faith versus False Appearances

The word "Christian" has been watered down over the past two millennia. Originally, it was a name given to Jesus' disciples nearly 20 years after His death: "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Today, many people have reduced the meaning of being a Christian to a simple weekly routine of attending church, singing songs, swaying to worship music, putting money in the offering plate and perhaps attending a weekly Bible study. For them, religious commitment ends there, with no deeper service or dedication to God beyond these Sunday activities. This stands in stark contrast to the early disciples, who faced persecution, imprisonment, and even martyrdom for their faith. For these early Christians, following Jesus wasn't a comfortable Sunday ritual but a daily commitment that often came at great personal cost – the loss of family relationships, social status, and sometimes their very lives.

The story of Judas may also offer some clues to why the Lord will say to some Christians that He did not know us. (See Matthew 25:12)

And while he yet spoke, behold a multitude, and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, 'Judas, betray you the son of man with a kiss?' (Luke 22:47,48)

When Judas brought Christ's enemies to capture him, he made a pretense of affection at the very moment of betrayal. Likewise, the crowds who shouted, "Hosanna in the highest," just days later, were screaming before Pilate, "Crucify him!"

All through time, the pages of history record the same pattern of enormous wickedness done under the garb of religion. God's name has all too often been pressed into the service of persecution and crime.

From the Pharisees' early attacks on the Christian community to the Catholic Church's Spanish Inquisition targeting Jews and Christians, false apostles have continually betrayed Christ's core teachings of "enemy love" and compassion, using religion as a mask for many an evil deed, continuing the tradition of betraying Christ "with a kiss." Both Israel and the Church have failed countless times to be the examples of God's love and mercy that they were called to be.

Jesus explicitly taught, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27) and "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). In America today, far too many Christians embrace pro-war positions and military solutions – creating a profound contradiction with Jesus' core teachings on enemy love and peacemaking.

On a personal level, how many men and women have betrayed each other "with a

kiss,” proclaiming a love that was not truly there – offering tender gestures that mask deceit, using intimacy as a weapon of manipulation, betrayal, and profound emotional treachery.

Yet this is all done by people who “love God,” but fail to live by Jesus’ Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. (Matthew 7:12)

Focusing only on loving God and failing to “love others as ourselves” led to horrible tragedies such as the Inquisition, witch burnings, crusades, ISIS and all kinds of horrific violent acts perpetrated out of our so-called zealous love for God. We do it all in the name of our religion.

The New Testament says don’t even think about how much you are “loving God” unless you are expressing it first and foremost through your love for others. Loving God can be outright dangerous if it leads you to religious fanaticism and away from Jesus’ heart of love for all. We can even love God so much that we look down upon those of other denominations, because they don’t believe like we do.

One of Jesus’ final prayers was that believers ‘may be one in Us’ (John 17:21), but our lack of love for others hinders the fulfillment of this earnest prayer.

Beyond Prophecy to Love

Christian spirituality and the Christian ethic are boiled down to a very simple premise, “Love God and love others as you love yourself.” The New Testament emphasis is to love others, love others, and love others.

The Early Church caught on to a very important principle: Our religion, our faith and our spirituality is worked out in the relationships we have with others, and in serving one another.

One of the best definitions of love comes from the late English professor Thomas Howard’s phrase: “My life for yours” – an echo of Jesus’ words: “Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

Paul wrote about the primacy of other-centered love in his letter to the Corinthians:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

The Love that Jesus and Paul talk about goes so far beyond earthly love, it is an “enemy love” beyond human comprehension, a love for the misunderstood, the condemned and even for the fallen.

The Russian monk Silouan of Athos wisely observed, “Whoever curses bad people, and does not pray for them, will never come to know the grace of God.” As Christians, we often fall into the trap of merely watching and criticizing others, rather than heeding Jesus’ command to watch and pray (Matthew 26:41). To truly follow Christ’s Golden Rule of doing unto others as we would have them do to us (see Matthew 7:12), we must draw a compassionate veil of silence over the faults of others.

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Paul envisioned the divine potential in each person. He travailed until Christ be formed in us (Galatians 4:19), transforming us into people who reflect the nature of Jesus (Romans 8:29), people who make each place and person better than when we found them.

Conclusion

The answer to life's problems is to have deeper love toward Christ, and our affections more thoroughly set on things above. Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26). For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul (Matthew 16:26)?

We do not readily forget the things we love; they are engraved on the tablets of our hearts. J. C. Ryle wrote that "the more our affections are engaged in Christ's service — the more easy shall we find it to remember Christ's words."

May we serve Jesus out of love and thankfulness for His infinite love for us, manifested by His laying down His life for us on the cross and the free gift of Eternal Life which His sacrifice brought to us!

Let us continually seek the true riches found only in Jesus Christ, looking forward to hearing those wonderful words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." (Matthew 25:21)

Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

— C.T. Studd