

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

As you know, if you've been here for any of the previous 70 messages, we are working through the Gospel According to Mark. And something that I *always* do when I study the Gospels—we have to harmonize the four Gospels; and today, we're going to do a special event with that. First, let me eliminate a distraction over the reference that I published in our outline, saying that this morning's sermon is from "Mark Chapter 13, Verse 99." Why would I do that? Well, occasionally, as I've worked through certain books, I might come to the beginning of a chapter, and there's a concept that needs to be explained in detail—like, I would do it on "healing" before we come to the first healing in one of the Gospels—and I'll call that, say, Mark Chapter 3, Verse Zero, and then we'll do that little theological introduction to it. Well, this time, we have something that goes *after* the end of Mark Chapter 13; and when CDs get published, when it goes online, I want it to appear in the right order according to the verses, so I thought: "13:99—that's *perfect!*" And then I found out, when it goes on Sermon Audio, they have too sophisticated of a program—they won't *buy* any "13:99" stuff; so we'll have to do something different on Sermon Audio, but it'll be really cute on the Heritage Bible Church website, and maybe make somebody think twice about it.

Well, I want us to continue the Olivet Discourse, which is *all* of Mark Chapter 13—but there's *more* to it: it's also all of Matthew 24; and when Matthew 24 ends with the second coming of Christ, He goes on to what we call Matthew 25; and that's *very* important, and I want us to include it. So today's study in Mark is in Matthew Chapter 25. There is this instruction where Jesus said what's going to happen right after He comes, and He talks about what to do in light of the promise of His coming while you wait for it. So we'll go to Matthew Chapter 25; we can file it under the category: "Be On The Alert," because Mark has recorded those words already (Mk. 13:37; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted); and we'll look at these three sections of Matthew Chapter 25.

Now, you can barely do justice to any one of these three in one sermon; I'm going to do all three of them in one sermon. You'll have questions when we're done—that's okay. Go back and read the passage more and more—you will thrive on it. But we can take Matthew 25 and break it down to Verses 1 through 13, under the category: Be Alert; Verses 14 through 30, under the category: Be Faithful; and Verses 31 through 46, under the category: Be Sacrificial. I'm going to read the whole paragraph at once, and then I'll try to help you connect it to what we've been studying in the Olivet Discourse.

Let's start with the first 13 Verses: Be Alert. If you look at it in the context of Matthew—where there's a *silly* chapter break between Chapter 24 and Chapter 25—Chapter 24 ends with His second coming, and these are Jesus's next words: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

This is one of those parables—one of those instructive stories—based upon something that the people in that culture knew very well. The Jewish marriage process had three parts to it: The first was when the agreement was made that the couple would be married; that was most often arranged by the parents; if there was a dowry, that would be arranged, and all that. The second stage was betrothal; in a ceremony, much like what we call a marriage ceremony, the bride and groom would come and exchange vows in public, in the presence of family and close friends. At that point, from that day on, that couple was considered married; the relationship could only be ended by divorce or death, even though the marriage had not yet been consummated, even though they did not yet live together. If the husband died during that betrothal period, the bride was considered a widow. Most famously, Joseph and Mary were in the betrothal period when Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18); hence the command: "Don't be afraid, Joseph—go ahead and take her as your wife." And he did, "but kept her a virgin until she gave birth" (vs. 25) "to her firstborn" (Lk. 2:7).

Now, during that betrothal period, the groom had to be busy: he would be establishing himself in a business or in a trade so he could support his new family which was about to begin; he would make provisions for a place for the couple to live (see Prov. 24:27). At the end of the betrothal period came the part that Jesus used for this parable: that was "the wedding feast" (vs. 10). That was the big party; that was the celebration. It involved the whole community; and depending on the status of the families involved, it could last a week.

The celebration starts with the groom coming with his groomsmen to the bride's house, where the bride and her bridesmaids—the "virgins" in this parable—are waiting with her. Then together, the bride and the groom *and* the groomsmen and the attendants of the bride—they would parade through the streets, proclaiming that the wedding feast is about to begin; its time for the celebration. The procession was usually at night, so lamps or torches were used by the wedding party, both to light their way and to attract attention. It was *the biggest deal in town* when there was a wedding feast! At the end of the wedding feast, the groom's close friend—we would call him the "Best Man"—he takes the hand of the bride and places it in the hand of the groom, and then the couple is left alone, sent off together; the marriage is consummated, and the couple begins living their new life in their new home.

The bridesmaids—the "virgins" here—represent the people who are friends of the bride; in our world, the ones who profess to know Jesus Christ. They claim to be looking forward to His coming. They dress the part—not necessarily an ugly bridesmaid dress, but they dress the part; at casual glance, you can't tell between those who are actually prepared and those who aren't. Now, a torch or a lantern without any fuel is a worthless burden; it doesn't accomplish anything! A profession of faith in Jesus Christ *without really knowing Him* is *even worse*—it's *more* worthless, because it leaves a person in eternal spiritual darkness, but *deceived* into thinking otherwise (see Titus 1:16; cf. Prov. 14:12; 30:12; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Jn. 2:4-5).

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

Now, at the time when people realize that they haven't prepared to meet Christ, they will immediately try to get into His kingdom on the coattails of others who have actually prepared themselves (e.g. Matt. 3:9)—but it can't be done that way. Spiritual life is nontransferable. "The door was shut," it says (Matt. 25:10); it's a picturesque way to say that once Jesus returns, there is no more opportunity for people to make up their minds to get ready for His kingdom (see Lk. 13:25-27).

Now, remember the context: This is in the timeframe immediately *after* Jesus comes again. So the parable is set in the timeframe of the second coming, and it portrays the terrible fate of people who, despite living through the Tribulation, will not have been prepared to meet Him when He returns. There's a same principle, though, that applies now; this isn't just one of those things far off for *those* people. The principle is that there are those who fail to prepare to meet Christ *now*. Just like some being ready for the bridegroom pictures those who, in the last days, are going to really be ready for Christ, there will be those who look like—and they try to *act* like—they belong to Christ, but they're the ones now who do things on the *outside* to make it *appear* that they are believers *when in fact*, they're not ready! And just as there will be people like the virgins who don't have oil for their torches at that time, there are people who do things that appear to be Christian *in this age*, but they don't actually know Jesus Christ.

Remember the Parable of the Four Kinds of Soils (Matt. 13:3-23); two of the four bear no fruit; they're not saved (Jn. 15:6). Remember the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30); the tares are weeds that look just like wheat, right up until the very end. Remember the Parable of the Dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50); not everything caught up in the net in the ocean is actually a good fish (cf. Matt. 22:1-14). So this is something we've known about (cf. Jn. 1:47; 8:41-42); Jesus applies it again at this time. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, it says this, which Jesus will say to certain people at that time: Matthew 7:23—"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." And remember: just before that, they're going to be crying out, "Lord, Lord! Didn't we do all these things? I mean, look at my awful bridesmaid dress! Do You think I'd wear this for *nothing*?" "Well, I never knew you!" (see also Lk. 13:24-28) So in other words: Be prepared. Be Alert.

Next paragraph, second exhortation here: Be Faithful. Matthew 25, picking it up at Verse 14—"For it"—for "it" what? For the wedding feast, the kingdom—"For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

"Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

"And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Now, *this* section shows what Jesus expects of you while you await His return to Earth. I've suggested you could summarize this passage as if it was a very brief letter that goes like this: "Dear friends, I have some things for you to do while I'm away. What you *do* about it is up to you. We'll settle up when I see you again—and I would rather reward you than punish you."

So this guy gives money to his slaves to take care of for him. A "talent" is a sum of money; a "talent" is not the ability to play the tuba. It's a measure of weight, actually (see 2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Chr. 20:2; Ezra 8:26). The value of a coin depended upon its weight and what it was made of. A gold piece is worth more than a silver piece; a silver piece is worth more than a bronze piece, or whatever. It depended on what the metal was, what the value of it was. But it doesn't matter what the exact thing was; the word translated "money" in Verse 18 is actually the word for "silver," and that word was used also, in general, for money. So the emphasis is not on the value of the talents; the emphasis is on what's *done* with them.

And there are a couple of crucial features here concerning these talents. One is: What the slaves are entrusted with belongs to the master. What you have entrusted to you, during this life, belongs to God (see Prov. 10:22; Col. 1:25; 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Until you see *your life* that way, you don't understand what it means to live as a Christian! We're not in a race to accumulate as much *stuff* as we can—like it was said of one guy: "He was a self-made man who worshiped his creator." You can get all wrapped up in yourself and think this is *your* stuff. It's *God's* stuff! Oh, and by the way: Would you notice that when the "wicked, lazy slave" tried to give it back to the master, what did he say to do with it? "Give it to the others." This is meant to be a way for you to be rewarded in heaven, based upon what you do with what God entrusts to you here (see 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Jn. 8; Rev. 22:12).

Another observation about these talents: They were entrusted "each according to his own ability" (vs. 15). The absolute value of what is entrusted to you—*that's not the issue!* The issue is: God knows you perfectly, and He entrusts to you *precisely* what He enables you to handle. Talk to almost anybody who takes a missions trip, and goes to a different part of the

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

world than where we live, and usually the contrast is pretty obvious: they do *so much* with *so little*, and we do *so little* with *so much*. That's not just to beat up on our society and our culture; but recognize: We are stewards.

Notice that the slaves were also granted freedom to make decisions about what to do with the money. The master expected them to know what he wanted done with it. You know what God wants you to do with what He's entrusted to you, because He's given you His entire Word, which is: "everything" you need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). You have great freedom about how you apply your diligence to the things that He has entrusted to you...but you're going to give an accounting to Him.

Two of them spent the time that the master was away, doing business. The verb tenses clarify: it wasn't a matter of one colossal investment; this was the everyday process of doing business, living life. Like one guy once famously said: "You know what it is about the Christian life? It's *so daily*." (see Lk. 9:23) It's not one colossal sacrifice, it's the daily decisions—over and over and over (Deut. 10:12; 1 Ki. 8:81; 2 Chr. 34:31; Mic. 6:8; Col. 1:10; 2:6).

Notice, also, that the basis for the difference, between what was entrusted to them, was their "ability" as assessed by the master. That means—and you can draw a principle from this—they weren't expected to do exactly the same things (1 Cor. 12:14-19). People vary greatly in their natural talents, in intellectual abilities, in the knowledge of God's Word, in training, in personality, and in opportunities—we don't all have the same opportunities to even *try* the same things. There is great diversity in what God allows and provides, but there is the same responsibility. Rewards from God are *not* based on the market value of what you have and what you do; rewards from God are based on the *quality of your character* and upon your personal faithfulness with what God gave to you (see 2 Cor. 8:12). Would you notice that, for the two that did well, the same eternal joy of the Lord is granted to them. Ten talents, four talents—the full joy of their master. Now, there will be differences between people in heaven, but there will be full joy for all who are there.

Now, what about the third guy? He obviously didn't know the master well at all. His self-serving excuses don't hold any water, *and* they impugn the character and the motives of the master. Notice, he accuses the owner of basically being unmerciful and dishonest. This picture's a person who represents God in his own thinking, and he reflects his bad theology by his action. This person is blaspheming God! This man, by the way, does not represent an atheist; he does not represent one who openly rejects God. He recognizes the master as the legitimate owner of the talent. He is certainly willing to *receive* something from the master. Would you notice: he doesn't misuse what he received, like the prodigal son did. He doesn't embezzle from the master, like that unmerciful servant in the parable in Matthew 18 did. He just fails to make his actions match up to what he claims to believe.

He calls the master "a hard man." Boy, that's not a nice way to talk about God! God is not "hard"—He's the *ultimate* in mercy! (see Ps. 103:8; Eph. 2:4) And the idea of Him "reaping" where He "did not sow" is absurd—He sowed *the whole thing*; He created the whole world! (Ps. 95:5) The idea of Him "gathering" where He "scattered no seed"—that's *equally* silly!

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

The man represents the person who *claims* to be a Christian, but he has a *terrible* view of God! He concludes that God is uncaring, distant, unjust, and not dependable. You know, some people judge God by their own experience and by their sin-cursed reasoning (Ps. 50:21; Ezek. 18:25; 33:17), rather than judging themselves by God's Word (Heb. 4:12).

The master in the parable even meets the man where he is. "Well, if you *did* know that I reap where I don't sow, if you *did* know that I gather where I have scattered no seed, you should have at least opened up a savings account!" I mean, in our world, that's worth, what?—0.27 percent? "You could have *at least* gotten some interest on it!"

And did you notice what God called him? "Wicked, lazy" instead of "good and faithful." That tells you the definition of what faithful means. Just think of lazy—we all have that gift; think of the opposite of it: The faithful one is the one who gets the job done (see Prov. 12:27). God requires of you that you expend effort to be faithful with all that He entrusts to you.

So, Be Alert—you don't know when He's coming. By the way, have you caught on?—Matthew 25 is an exposition of that verse: "Of that day and hour no one knows" (Matt. 24:36), so here's what to do while you wait for that time. Be Alert. Secondly: Be Faithful.

Thirdly: Be Sacrificial. The last 16 verses of Matthew 25, starting at Verse 31—"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory"—see previous chapter, where He described that—"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." Why a throne? He's the King; this is the beginning of the kingdom.

"All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 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; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' "

Now, let me insert something before I finish reading that section. When is this set? The second coming of Christ. When is the second coming of Christ? It's after the "70th Week of Daniel." The 70th Week of Daniel is the most horrible seven years this planet will ever see! (Dan. 12:1) These will be everyday realities: people without anything to wear, without anything to eat, without any shelter, without anybody caring for them. They will have just lived through that time when they *that desperately* need one another!

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

Now, continue: "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these"—and surely, He's pointing to the sheep when He says that—"you did not do it to Me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Okay—there will be a lot of things I don't get to here, but let me pick out a few important things. At that time—immediately after Jesus returns, He sits on His throne—"All the nations will be gathered before Him." Every person alive on Earth, at the time that the Lord returns, will be part of this judgment. Now, yes,—many will be killed in the Battle of Armageddon, but this is apparently right after that. And from the rest of the paragraph, we can tell that this is a judgment of every living individual in every nation.

Yes, it says He's going to gather "all the nations" before Him—that's a way of saying: He's going to gather everybody before Him; but He's not going to separate them nation-from-nation: "Okay, well, this nation had 51 percent who did pretty good, and this nation had 49 percent; we'll kill everybody in this nation, and we'll bless everybody in this nation." It's clearly an *individual* judgment, because all of the things done here are done by individuals—"You taking Me in and clothing Me," etc. etc.

All the people are going to be separated "as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." Now, all of you who own large flocks of sheep and large flocks of goats would have no need of explanation. For the rest of us, let me just say that in that culture, sheep and goats were frequently herded together; but sheep are docile, gentle, skittish...goats are a little more unruly and rambunctious. So, since goats can upset sheep, the shepherd would guide them to wherever they were going, but he would separate the sheep from the goats for grazing and for sleeping at night; so separating sheep from goats was a pretty well-known word picture.

The point is: *everyone* falls into one of two categories (see 1 Jn. 3:10; cf. Matt. 12:30; Rom. 8:5; Gal. 4:29). There are those who will end up blessed in the presence of God for eternity, and there are those who will be sent away to eternal punishment (Dan. 12:2; Jn. 5:29; Rom. 9:22-23; Rev. 20:15); you're going to be one or the other. You are a sheep or a goat. Which is it? There are only two eternal destinies. This passage is here to smack you on the forehead and say: "Which destiny is yours?" (see 2 Cor. 13:5; Heb. 4:1; 2 Pet. 1:10) There's no one exempt from being held accountable to this passage.

Those who know the Lord and who are alive at the second coming—they're going to be ushered into the kingdom, just like the ones in the previous parable that were entering into the joy of the master. Now, that needs a couple of comments. If you ever encounter somebody who wants to say that salvation is by works, this is a passage that they love to cite, because—yes, it does cite deeds done by those who enter the kingdom, and citing those deeds is related

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

to them entering into the kingdom. But "salvation by works" is not what this passage teaches. If that's the case, then this passage—from the lips of Jesus—teaches something *contrary* to the rest of the Bible (1 Cor. 14:33a). Salvation is by grace through faith, plus *nothing* (see Eph. 2:8-9; cf. Acts 15:10-11; Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:5).

But even within this passage, it *refutes* "salvation by works." The basis for entrance into the kingdom is described here three ways in three phrases—*none of them* have *anything* to do with "salvation by works." First of all, He says: "Come, you who are blessed of My Father" (vs. 34)—not, "you who did enough to get there"; "you who the Father blessed." Salvation is the work of God (see 1 Cor. 1:30; cf. Jn. 6:44, 65; 17:2, 6).

Secondly, He says: "Inherit the kingdom." It's an inheritance, it's not what you've *earned*—just like Romans 6:23 says. He says this is "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." That echoes the doctrines of Election and Predestination, as taught elsewhere in Scripture (e.g. Jn. 6:37; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9), which is *antithetical* to "salvation by works"! Before you could ever *do* a work is when God made the choice (see Heb. 11:6 with Ac. 3:16; 16:14; 18:27; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:1).

What, then, about these good deeds? Well, it's *good* to take care of your brothers and sisters who have desperate need. The good deeds described here are good things, but *they* are not the *source* of salvation—they are the *result* of salvation! (see Ezek. 36:27; cf. Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13; Jas. 2:26; 1 Jn. 2:3-5) Or, if you want to make a nice little rhyming statement: They are not the *root* of salvation, they are the *fruit* of salvation. That's how you can tell who are the sheep and who are the goats. If you are a sheep, this passage describes *how it shows*.

Salvation is not by works, it is always by grace. Judgment is *always* on the basis of works. God *always* judges fairly. He *never* misses a detail (Rev. 20:12; cf. Ecc. 12:14). He judges *exactly* according to His righteousness (Ps. 7:11; 9:8) and according to His Word (Prov. 13:13). If you're in Christ, standing in His grace, you are judged based upon Christ's merits (see Rom. 8:33-34; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Will your *works* be judged? Yes—First Corinthians Chapter 3. All the things you have done that are worthless—they're all going to be "burned" away (vs. 15), and all you're going to be left with is the "gold, silver, precious stones" (vs. 12), which will be rewarded for eternity in the presence of your Master. Now, if you're *not* in Christ, you will *not* be judged on *His* merits, you'll be judged on *your* merits (Jn. 8:24). Everyone will be different.; everybody's score in this judgment will be different; and all of the ones who have anything other than a score of *absolute perfection* (Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10) will be sent to the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12-14). God is totally fair! He's is also just *incredibly* merciful and kind and gracious, to provide the way of escape from the judgment that you deserved.

Jesus describes a principle here that applies just as much right now as it will during the Tribulation: The way that you serve the Lord is to serve other Christians. When you serve other Christians, you are serving the Lord (Jn. 13:34). So even though this specific judgment involves people who have come through the Tribulation—which is very different from the era in which we live—the principle applies just the same today: If you belong to Jesus Christ, it shows by how you treat His people (1 Jn. 3:16-17; 4:20).

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

A Christian who doesn't sacrifice time, energy, resources to serve others—that's an oxymoron. A Christian who doesn't do that *probably* isn't a Christian—if you're not doing what Christians do. So, should you be worried about somebody who claims to be a Christian but doesn't want anything to do with coming to church? Yes you should be. Should you be worried about someone who merely attends church, but rarely does anything to benefit anybody else? Yeah, you really ought to be. Should you be worried about your own soul if you aren't actively involved in sacrificially serving others who name the name of Christ? Well, yes—that's *precisely* Jesus's point! That's *precisely* why He included this in the Olivet Discourse.

Now, I've not covered *everything* in the passage, but I want to pluck out of here, also from this passage, three things that it tells you about Hell; it tells you more than three, but I'll pick out three for you. Three things about Hell from Matthew 25:31 to 46. First of all, did you notice: Hell—or, "lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15); we usually use the shorthand "Hell"—Hell was not designed for people; it wasn't designed for men and women. It is the place that God decreed to send Satan and the angels who followed him and became demons (vs. 41). Men and women who go there only go there because they bought into the lies of the Devil; they didn't receive the free gift that is offered to them (Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 3:18; 2 Thess. 1:8).

Second thing that is taught here: Hell is apart from God. Look back there carefully—you'll notice the word "Depart" (vs. 41). It's clear: "God is light" (1 Jn. 1:5), so Hell is "outer darkness" (vs. 30; cf. Rev. 22:15); "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16), so Hell is the total absence of love (Dan. 12:2b); God is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," according to Second Corinthians 1:3, so Hell is the total lack of comfort and the absence of mercy—therefore, it is eternal *torment* (Is. 66:24; Matt. 8:12; Mk. 9:47-48; Lk. 16:23-25; Rev. 14:11; 20:10).

The third thing this tells you about Hell is that Hell lasts *forever* (Ps. 81:15; Dan. 12:2; 2 Thess. 1:9). A lot of people don't like that idea. I don't like that idea! But that doesn't mean that, that's not what it says in the Scriptures. "Annihilationism" is the idea that, if you are not with Christ, there'll be a certain amount of suffering and then you just cease to exist. But that's not what the Bible says! Would you notice a side-by-side comparison in verse 46, right at the end of this: He mentions "eternal punishment" and "eternal life"—"punishment" and "life" are parallel, and they share in common *exactly* the same adjective: "eternal." The "punishment" of the wicked will last *exactly* the same duration as the "life" of the righteous: they are both for eternity. "Eternity" is the realm of existence of God, and it's *outside* of time as we know it! You won't have a stopwatch in heaven, or in the lake of fire. The best we can do to describe it is the idiom that's used often: "forever and ever" (e.g. Ex. 15:18; 1 Chr. 29:10; Ps. 10:16; 45:6; Phil. 4:20; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 4:9-10; 15:7); because from our perspective, that's what we think of. What is it to be *beyond* time? "That's a *long* time!" Well, that doesn't *fully* hold water, because I think it is *outside* of time; but you cannot find "Annihilationism" in the Bible.

Interestingly, J. Vernon McGee's Sunday sermon this morning: he was talking about this "rampant heresy in our days"—and he was preaching 50 years ago—of "Annihilationism." And he talked about preachers—nice guys, good people; one of them a son of a famous theologian. Nothing has changed in 50 years; there's still people talking about it today. Somebody e-mailed me this week, some stuff from somebody in a denomination in which they

Sermon Title: Be On The Alert!
Scripture Text: Mark 13:99

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-17-19

used to travel; and this guy is proclaiming that the lake of fire is not forever—it's not eternal. Well, okay...Would you mind telling me what this verse means: Revelation 20, Verse 10. This is after the thousand-year Kingdom. It says: "And the devil who deceived them"—he had been incarcerated for those thousand years (vs. 3)—"was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented *day and night forever and ever.*" There's just no human way to say it any more clearly than that! It's *not* a thing that *ends*! And if the punishment of the unrighteous ends, so does your eternal life—because they are described by the same word, in the same sentence, from the same Lord, on the same page in your Bible.

Now, as we wrap this up, I want you to take a step back. I'd like you to see a wide-angle view of all three parts of Chapter 25: The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats. In every one of them, Jesus portrays *lostness*, if we can invent that word. He describes people who are not saved—people who are not part of the kingdom, people who don't know the King, people who are not friends of the Bride and the Bridegroom, people that do not enter into the joy of the master, people that are cast into outer darkness. But would you notice how He describes that: The evidences of being lost, in all three of these, are *not* horrible sins committed; they are all simple acts of kindness or prudence which are *not* committed (see Jas. 4:17).

The five foolish virgins who had no oil for their lamps—they were not shut out of the wedding for immorality or theft or drug abuse or embezzlement or anything like that; they were left out because they were *unprepared* for the kingdom. The slave with the one talent—he was not cast into darkness because he stole...he didn't steal; he wasn't cast into darkness because he embezzled...he didn't embezzle; he was cast into darkness because he *failed* to do the bidding of his master to be a good steward! A person who is shut out of the kingdom of God is not condemned because of the greatness of his sin; he's condemned because of the absence of his faith (Jn. 3:18)—and it showed in his failure to act on behalf of people by sacrificing himself to help somebody who had a greater need. Those who are damned are not all equally wretched and reprehensible. If we had time—one of those things I didn't get to—we could talk about *degrees* of torture in Hell; that is a concept that is Biblical (e.g. Matt. 10:15). But their common reason, in this chapter, for being damned is: lack of faith; they wouldn't put their trust in the One who is represented here by the Bridegroom, by the Master, by the King Himself.

This passage is not just so you can theoretically think about those are going to come through the Tribulation; it's here, following on the theme that we've seen Jesus say: "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13)—so, you be a good steward of the days and the hours that you *do* have (Prov. 19:20; Phil. 3:13-14; 1 Pet. 4:2). Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for putting this, yet three more warnings, in Your Word. Thank You for providing everything we need, that we can rejoice to be with the Bridegroom, we can enter into the joy of the Master, we can be with You in Your kingdom, we can be with You and the New Heaven and the New Earth. Thank You, our Father, for sending Your Son to make it so. Please, don't let a soul go from here, falling short of genuine trust in You for Your goodness. And thank You for this amazing grace in which we stand. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.