

011: Saints in Outer Darkness

(based on Ch. 10 from The End of the Pilgrimage)

What happens to those saints who do not hear “Well done” at the Judgment Seat?

- we know they are excluded from attending the marriage supper and they will not be the bride and co-ruler of Jesus
- we know also they will not inherit a place in the heavenly New Jerusalem, the kingdom of the heavens, the city of reward
- where, then, do they go?
- the Bible says they go to OUTER DARKNESS
- that term is used only three times in the Scriptures, but it is greatly misinterpreted as HELL
- but is that what it means? is outer darkness really HELL?
- no, I believe traditionalists arrive at that interpretation because they incorrectly interpret those passages where outer darkness is used, as referring to UNBELIEVERS

but, as we shall see in this study, OUTER DARKNESS is NOT the fate of unbelievers but of believers

- when that is understood, it makes all the difference in interpretation
- let’s explore this in some detail
- I am going to read Matt. 8:5-10
- **Matt. 8:5-6** Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.”
- **Matt. 8:7** And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

- **Matt. 8:8** The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.
- **Matt. 8:9** For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.”
- **Matt. 8:10** When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”

The centurion in this narrative is obviously Roman, a Gentile.

- Jesus is amazed at this man’s simple faith, his dependence on Jesus to heal a servant back home.
- Even though the centurion is a man of great authority & power he, nonetheless, makes no demands on Jesus ...
- unlike the Jews, who were essentially demanding inclusion in the heavenly realm of the kingdom (*We have Abraham as our father*, the Pharisees had claimed in Matt. 3:9).
- Notice what Jesus says about these self-righteous Jews:
- **Matt. 8:11** I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.
- **Matt. 8:12** But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In context, the many coming from the east and west are Gentiles, and the children of the kingdom are Jews.

- They are children of the kingdom in the sense that the Messianic kingdom is for them, the covenant people of God, according to the Old Testament prophets.
- Nothing can change that.

- Indeed, Israel will one day be in the earthly millennial kingdom.
- Indeed, Israel will reign over the nations on Earth
- But the Jewish nation, by rejecting Christ's offer of kingdom inheritance and rulership, will not be allowed entrance into the heavenly realm of the kingdom, the city of reward.
- Instead, the nation, generally speaking, will be in the darkness outside — that is, in the earthly realm of the kingdom, not in the Messiah's direct presence.
- Of course, any faithful Jews will inherit the heavenly Jerusalem, and that is evidenced by the presence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens.
- The same is true of believers of any era of church history.

To interpret *outer darkness* as Hell is to suggest that the Jews, the children of the kingdom, will go to the lake of fire.

- But that is inconsistent with the term *children of the kingdom*, and the context of this passage, as well as the Old Testament prophecies.
- Some may question the *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, but that is simply an oriental way of expressing shame and regret on behalf of those saints who could have qualified for the heavenly kingdom, but squandered their inheritance, like Esau.
- They will sorrow over their lost opportunity.
- If only the nation had believed the message of John the Baptist and Jesus and repented of their sins and found national healing!
- If only they had gotten right with God! If only Christians would live for Jesus rather than self!
- We turn our attention now to two parables of Jesus, both found in Matthew's gospel.

- first, is the parable of the improper wedding garment
- I will read it – Matt. 22:1-14
- it is a bit lengthy, but it's quite a story!

Matt. 22:1 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:

- **Matt. 22:2** The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,
- **Matt. 22:3** and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.
- **Matt. 22:4** Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding."
- **Matt. 22:5** But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.
- **Matt. 22:6** And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*.
- **Matt. 22:7** But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Matt. 22:8 Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.

- **Matt. 22:9** Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding."
- **Matt. 22:10** So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests.
- **Matt. 22:11** But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.

- **Matt. 22:12** So he said to him, “Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless.
- **Matt. 22:13** Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- **Matt. 22:14** For many are called, but few *are* chosen.

The parable begins by comparing the kingdom of the heavens (the heavenly city of reward) ...

- to a king (God the Father) who prepares for his son’s marriage (Jesus uniting with His bride, His faithful co-regent).
- From the parallel text in Luke 14:16-24 we learn this wedding is, more specifically, the wedding supper, or feast, which precedes the actual wedding.
- It is equated with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Rev. 19:7-9, which inaugurates the millennial kingdom.
- Virtually all commentators identify the King as God the Father and His Son as Jesus Christ.
- In vs. 1-6 the servants that invite folks to come to the wedding are likely the Old Testament prophets and perhaps John the Baptist.

Those who are invited to the wedding by the King’s servants are the Jewish people.

- now let me park here a moment
- traditionalists say this invitation is unto salvation
- in other words, they say unbelievers are invited to be saved
- but that’s not the context at all
- the first century Jews to whom Jesus is speaking are already believers in an OT sense

- in a previous study, we explained how national Israel applied the blood to the doorposts at the original Passover
- that is a picture of salvation
- Today we sing: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you”
- Israel had been saved on the basis of the blood of the lamb, which was a type of the coming Lamb of God
- thus, Jesus is not inviting them to be saved
- He is inviting them to repent and get right with Jehovah God, in the spirit of 2 Chron. 7:14 to they can inherit a place of ruling with Jesus the Messiah in the heavenly realm of the kingdom, the New Jerusalem
- the nation had already been promised rulership in the kingly realm, but now Christ was offering something more, something greater
- did they accept His offer?
- no! v. 3 says they were not willing to come to the marriage supper

in fact, they make light of the invitation and ignore it (v. 5).

- to make matters worse, those invited (via their religious leaders) persecute and kill the prophets and John the Baptist (v. 6).
- This may also be referring to Jesus and His disciples, who are ultimately persecuted and martyred.
- How does the King respond to this treatment of his servants?
- The King, in His anger, sends forth His armies, destroying the murderers and burning up their city.
- Most conservative commentators see this as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

- The King insists on moving ahead with the wedding, as everything has been meticulously and beautifully planned.
- So He sends His servants out again (v. 8).
- This time, the servants (very likely the apostles) are instructed to go outside the city (Jerusalem) into the highways and hedges, compelling all those who will come, both bad and good — v. 10.

who are the bad and good?

- Some say this means the Gentiles and the Jews
- but that doesn't seem to fit the context, for the servants are now inviting out in the highways, referring to Gentile territory
- Rather, this seems to be a reference to two types of believers that are living sinfully in first century Israel
- They both need to get right with God:
 - 1) the tax collectors and harlots (vice sinners)
 - 2) the scribes and Pharisees (self-righteous sinners)
- As in Israel, so in the church
- there are many believers in the 21st century who are either indulging in sins (vice-like sinners) or gloating in self-righteousness, hypocritical, and attempting to keep a list to be spiritual (self-righteous sinners)
- both groups need to repent and accept Christ's kingdom-of-the-heavens offer

Thus in the parable, the King commands His servants:

"Compel both vice-like sinners ("bad") and self-righteous-like sinners ("good") to come to my marriage feast."

- in other words, get right with God and qualify to be at the marriage supper
- The wedding is finally filled with those who respond to the king's invitation.

- What about the man who comes to the wedding but is not properly attired?
- His offense is that he is not wearing an appropriate wedding garment.
- This out-of-place man suggests a real rubbing point, not merely for the King but for all who would correctly interpret the passage.
- Some say the wedding garments refer to both the imputed righteousness of Christ and the imparted righteousness of the saints.
- They argue that saved people live and act like it, and thus the impartation of robes of righteousness must, of necessity, accompany any persevering saint.
- Those who have not persevered in righteousness are not true saints and will not stand before Christ at the Judgment Seat, much less be present at the Marriage Supper, they would claim.

But is that what Jesus is saying in this parable?

- the fact that this man is even in the presence of the king indicates that he is a believer
- remember, all unbelievers remain in the grave until AFTER the Millennium
- the setting of THIS parable is BEFORE the Millennium, before the marriage supper commences
- this is an obvious picture of the Judgment Seat
- notice: the King refers to this man as *friend* – He is a believer
- When the King asks the man why he is not wearing the wedding garment, the man is speechless, literally muzzled.
- He can say nothing; he has no adequate response, for he knows better.

- This is not a lost man, waking up to the fact that he doesn't belong in Heaven.
- This is a saved man, waking up to the reality that he is not worthy to be part of the bride.

Again, I believe this scene is reminiscent of the Judgment Seat of Christ, when some are saved, yet so as through fire, and will undoubtedly have nothing to say for themselves.

- This passage implies that only those saints who are deemed worthy, based on their obedience —
- their righteous behavior, as determined by Christ at the Judgment Seat —
- will be allowed entrance to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and, thereafter, to the heavenly realm of the Messianic kingdom which is inaugurated by the Marriage.
- as I've said many times in our studies, not all saints are granted entrance into the city of reward

Some tend to discount this view of the parable because they interpret what happens to the improperly dressed wedding guest as being cast into Hell.

- But does the Bible say he is cast into Hell?
- don't you think if this man was being cast into Hell the Bible would clearly say that?
- listen again to v. 13
- **Matt. 22:13** Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
- Let us discuss these phrases one-by-one.
- First, *bind him hand and foot*.
- We must remember, this is a parable, a metaphor.
- The binding is not literal; it represents something.

- In the context of an unfaithful saint who does not inherit the city of reward, the binding of hand and foot indicates a loss of freedoms.
- This saint will not be able to move about as freely in the millennial world; they will not be able to participate in activities of significance.
- They will not be able to make an impact in the kingdom, for they will be constrained in their opportunities and confined to the earthly realm
- So the first recompense here is loss of freedom.

Second, Take him away and cast him into outer darkness.

- The word *cast* sounds violent to us. But it need not be.
- The same Greek word is used in Matt. 9:38, where Jesus tells us,
- **Matt. 9:38** *Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*
- sending out is this same Gr. word
- Thus, to *cast out* does not necessarily imply violence.
- In Mark 1:43, after Jesus healed the leper, *He strictly warned him and sent him away at once.*
- The phrase *sent him away* is the same Greek word, meaning to cast out.
- The word *cast* is simply the idea of thrusting forth; it need not have a negative connotation.

This man is sent to outer darkness.

- His offense is not wearing a proper wedding garment.
- He is not worthy to be at the wedding festivities.
- As I said earlier, the term does not refer to Hell.
- It is critical to understand that the term *outer darkness* simply means "the darkness outside."

- These marriage feasts would typically be held at night, so that one put outside would be in relative darkness compared with the brightness of the banquet hall.
- But we must remember: this is a parable; it is a metaphor.
- The darkness outside is likely referring to the earthly realm of the kingdom in contradistinction to the bright and glorious heavenly ruling realm.

Think about those Christians who want be at the marriage festivities with the bridegroom, for it is beautiful, and it is full of blessing.

- But they don't qualify to be there; they are sent outside.
- Like the foolish virgins, they hear those words from the lips of Jesus:
- "I do not know you. I don't have an intimate relationship with you. You don't qualify to be at my wedding."
- They long to be inside the bright and beautiful banquet hall rather than outside in comparative darkness.
- Furthermore, they long for freedom, rather than being restricted in activities.
- How do they respond to the loss of inheritance?
- As v. 14 says, with *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.
- They sorrow and agonize over their foolishness, consciously regretting it; they are full of remorse and grief.

While that *could* describe the emotional state of one in Hell, could it not also describe the emotional state of one who has been excluded from the glories of the kingdom?

- think about this:
- If some believers, based on Christ's determination at the Bema, are excluded from the Marriage Supper, because their life is not worthy of receiving a righteous wedding

garment, will they not weep and consciously regret being put out?

- Notice v. 14: *Many are called, but few are chosen*.
- the "MANY" are believers
- all believers are being called to prepare for the wedding festivities and to become the bride of Jesus
- but few are chosen because so few are willing to pay the price of discipleship
- That is a sobering thought.
- Let us now review one more parable, found in Matt. 25, the parable of the talents

Matt. 25:14 For *the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.*

- **Matt. 25:15** And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.
- Again, Jesus uses a metaphor to illustrate His point.
- In this case, He likens Himself to a master or lord who is about to travel a far distance and will be gone for some time.
- He entrusts to His servants a great responsibility.
- Before getting too far, I need to point out that all three are called *servants*, even though one fails in his responsibility.
- Some commentators suggest the third servant is, in reality, a non-servant, merely a professing servant.
- They need this third servant to be cast into Hell in order to interpret this parable according to their theological system.
- But that is reading into the passage.

The third man is called a *servant* like the other two servants.

- The words of Jesus should settle the matter for us.
- To servant number one, the master gives five talents, a unit of money.
- To servant number two, he gives two talents, and to servant number three, he gives one talent.
- The implication is they are to use their resources responsibly during the master's absence.
- The Master is obviously Jesus, who is gone away during this church age, but will one day hold His saints accountable (at the Judgment Seat) for their actions while He is gone.
- When the master returns, He requires an accounting of His servants.

Matt. 25:19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

- **Matt. 25:20** So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them."
- **Matt. 25:21** His lord said to him, "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."
- **Matt. 25:22** He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them."
- Servant number one now has ten talents.
- Servant number two has four talents.

In both cases, they have been responsible in their use of the Master's resources, and now have twice as much to show for their labors.

The Master is pleased! He says this to each of them, individually:

- **Matt. 25:23** His lord said to him, "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."
- This has nothing at all to do with salvation or Heaven.
- It has to do with kingdom inheritance, and Jesus makes that clear at the start of the parable.
- For their faithfulness, these two servants become inheritors of the city of reward.
- The Master makes them *ruler over many things*.
- Because they have lived faithfully and responsibly in their small realm of influence on Earth, Jesus rewards them with big responsibilities in the world to come.
- What a glorious prospect!
- But then we see the unfaithful servant.

Matt. 25:24 Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

- **Matt. 25:25** And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*."
- **Matt. 25:26** But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.
- **Matt. 25:27** So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.
- **Matt. 25:28** So take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents."

- **Matt. 25:29** For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.
- The unfaithful servant makes excuses for himself and actually blames the Master for his own irresponsible, unfaithful behavior.
- He returns nothing to the Master.
- He hides the talent that had been entrusted to Him.
- As a result, his portion is taken away and given to the faithful servant.
- This is the equivalent of being put out of the banqueting hall, bound hand and foot.

His second punishment is found in the last verse of the parable:

- **Matt. 25:30** And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- Once again we encounter outer darkness, but it is not Hell as is so frequently misinterpreted by traditionalists
- It is the darkness outside.
- It is exclusion from inheriting the heavenly city of reward.
- The unfaithful servant is left outside the castle of the king, so to speak.
- And you will be too, dear Christian, if you do not live faithfully and obediently to Jesus, using the resources He has given to you

Incidentally, it is important to mention that the parable of the pounds in Luke 19:12-27 is very similar to this parable, with a couple of key exceptions.

- In the parable of the pounds, there are ten servants.
- Ten, again, is the number of completion which, we believe, is a reference to the entire church.

- Each servant receives one pound.
- Why do they all receive the same amount?
- I believe the parable of the pounds is referring to the equal *provision* that all saints have in Christ.
- We all have the Holy Spirit; we all have Christ living within.
- He will determine one day, as part of our reward or punishment, the extent to which we appropriated His provision in this life.
- Those who did will be rewarded to some degree.
- Those who did not will be recompensed accordingly.
- Their pound will be taken and given to others.

In contrast, in the parable of the talents each person receives a different amount.

- I believe that demonstrates the different talents, abilities, circumstances, and opportunities in every Christian's life.
- We are all so different from one another in that respect.
- Thus, Jesus will judge us — not compared to others — but according to His expectations for us.
- Remember, He handsomely rewards both the servant who doubles his five talents and the servant who doubles his two talents.
- The point is that we all have the provision of Christ in our spirit — His righteousness living within us.
- So we have within the enabling power to obey and be faithful, if we will depend on Christ.
- **Rom. 8:4** that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Nevertheless, we all have different talents, abilities and opportunities for service.

- We were all saved at a different stage of life.
- So Jesus, the perfect Judge, determines according to both — our equal provision and our individual situation, which is God-given and customized to every individual.
- The all-important question of this study is this:
- At the Judgment Seat, will your reward be, *Well done, good and faithful servant,*
- or *Bind him hand and foot and take him away and thrust him into the darkness outside?*
- In conclusion, we can now see that outer darkness is the negative counterpart to the positive city of reward.

If the city of reward is the heavenly realm of the kingdom, outer darkness is likely the earthly realm.

- If the city of reward is inside the castle, so to speak, then outer darkness is outside the castle.
- If the city of reward is bright because of Jesus and all the glorified saints that are glowing there in some degree, then outer darkness is dark, relatively speaking, for the saints there are not glowing and Jesus Himself is not manifestly present.
- In my opinion, outer darkness is not a description of Hell, as is commonly taught.
- It is a description of the earthly realm of the Messianic kingdom.
- Many saints will be there, both Jews and Gentiles, and they will be ashamed, for having missed the opportunity to rule and reign with Jesus.

Some are troubled by the concept of outer darkness.

- They view it as a sort of “Christian purgatory.”
- However, there are major differences between the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory and the biblical doctrine of outer darkness

- I will explain the differences

Outer Darkness	Purgatory
For those believers whose works are evil and not worthy of reward	For those whose works aren't good enough to get them to Heaven
Purpose: punitive reward	Purpose: purging of sins
Results in: conscious regret and loss of some freedoms	Results in: suffering that may include flames
a realm of Christ's kingdom outside the New Jerusalem, likely on Earth	Place: intermediate state between Heaven and Hell, possibly in the earth
Goal: deter present misbehavior	Goal: graduation to Heaven
An end in itself	A means to an end

Clearly, purgatory is based on the erroneous doctrine of works salvation and so must be rejected by believers as unbiblical.

- It is undoubtedly a perversion of the truth of Judgment Seat fire (1 Cor. 3:13-15; Matt. 3:11) and outer darkness.
- However, it is incumbent on the student of the Scriptures not to “throw out the baby with the bath water.”
- To reject a biblical understanding of outer darkness because some have perverted it would be a tragedy indeed.
- Better to teach the doctrine as taught in the Scriptures.
- Outer darkness has nothing to do with the gift of eternal life.

- It is the negative reward that eternally secure believers will receive if they do not progress in sanctification according to God's will.
- Unlike purgatory, outer darkness is not a period of purging for the expiation of (atonement for) one's sins, the intent being a promotion to Heaven.
- The doctrine of purgatory is works-salvation extended beyond this life, as if to give a second chance to those who weren't good enough during their Earth life.
- We condemn such thinking as unbiblical.
- On the contrary, outer darkness is punitive as opposed to purging.
- The believer in outer darkness will be outside the brightness of Christ's ruling realm, albeit in a world much grander than the present.
- The prospect of dwelling in the darkness outside should be a sufficient warning to believers to focus on the eternal rather than the temporal.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS