

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, March 8- Friday, March 12

Monday, March 8- This week we'll read Matthew 24 and 25. These chapters are the fullest report of what Jesus told his disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. Verses 1-3 set the stage. To the disciples, it seemed clear that the ruin of the great Temple could only happen at the end of the age. About 40 years later, the Roman army smashed Jerusalem and the Temple. It was an awful time—but the world didn't end. Some of Jesus' words applied mainly to Jerusalem's fall, while others reached to the end of the age. Note which parts of Jesus' teaching seem more local, and which more cosmic. The majesty of the Temple would prove unreliable, Jesus said. Tallying "signs," or hunting around for a new Messiah, would let you down. "Stand firm to the end," he said. What does it mean for you to stand firm in your faith, even in difficult times? In whom does your hope for the future center?

Tuesday, March 9 - Many Christians through the centuries have tried to predict the date of Jesus' return. Yet in this section, Jesus told his followers that only his heavenly Father knows the time of his return. "Even I don't know," he said (verse 36). "Don't worry so much about getting ready. Just BE ready, always." What do you think it means to "be ready" for Jesus return? Does your answer bring anxiety, or peace and hope? If anxiety, spend prayer time asking for a deeper sense of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. Ask God to fill you with trust each day, and a growing desire to live into God's priorities. *The Message* renders Jesus' picture of the ideal servant in verses 45-46 as "someone the Master can drop in on unannounced and always find him doing his job." How does worrying about future events hinder such a stance? How can living "in the present" bring you more in line with what Jesus wants?

Wednesday, March 10 - The three parables in Matthew 25 emphasize what Jesus taught in chapter 24. First, he tells of a normal wedding of his day (quite unlike ours!) to make it clear that we must be ready to welcome the Lord at all times. Patience is a character quality God's servants need (Galatians 5:22, James 5:7-9). What spiritual lesson(s) do you learn from looking at the difference between the "wise" and the "foolish" characters in this story? With which group do you identify more? How are you deepening your personal bond with Jesus so that you know him, and he knows you? Sometimes the details in Jesus' parables trouble some readers. For example, you might find the bridegroom in this story too abrupt, and wonder if Jesus means that God is like that. But parables were meant to teach one main point. How does Jesus sum up the point of this parable in verse 13?

Thursday, March 11 - A "talent" was a lot of money—up to 20 years of a typical worker's wages. The master asks his servants to use the means he's given them to advance his aims while he's away. When he returns, he asks them to account, not for the total they bring, but for their willingness to overcome fear and make a good effort. What resources has God placed in your life? How are you using those resources to serve the Kingdom of God and bless others? Are there any resources you have "buried in a hole in the ground," so to speak? If so, how can you begin to use them actively for God's purposes? In Matthew 24:3 the disciples asked "WHEN will this happen?" How did Jesus use these stories to show that "when" is not the critical question? What qualities do the faithful servants show that allows them to be unconcerned with exactly when the master will return?

Friday, March 12 - Jesus caps his teaching about the end of the age with this startling view of the final judgment. Some of his hearers must have thought, "He can't mean the judgment will turn on how we treated the dregs of society?" But Jesus' word picture here fits perfectly with his choice of the greatest commandments. When did you

recently see someone in need—a family member, neighbor, co-worker or even a casual contact—and act to fill that need? When have you been unwilling to respond to a need you could have met? Ask God to make you more aware of the needs around you, and more willing to respond. In this parable, the accepted and those who are turned away are surprised. In other places (e.g. 1 John 5:13) the Bible says we can know we have eternal life. Do you serve others to earn a reward, including the good opinion of others? Or do you serve as an outflow of Jesus' saving love in your life?