



NG Study Guide: Matt. 24:45-51 "Kingdom Workers" [7.9.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: It was days before the Passover (and the cross). As Jesus sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He spoke about the signs of: His return, God's Judgment, and His reign. He then shared parables to encourage His followers to be ready and remain faithful until His return. This parable contrasts two servants. One is faithful and the other is unfaithful. We will discover together the benefits of being faithful, and the danger of being unfaithful.

A. Why faithful service to Jesus makes me happy [45-47]

⁴⁵ "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷ Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

Jesus asks, who is a faithful and wise servant [45]? The term "servant" refers to a steward. A steward is entrusted with resources and is expected to responsibly perform their duties. All resources – time, talent, and treasure are entrusted to man by God. You cannot reasonably explain origins apart from a Creator. Furthermore, if you try to take personal credit, apart from God, for your diligence, creativity, intelligence, etc. you are faced with the predicament that all those abilities are ultimately gifts from

God. "Every good and perfect gift is from the Father ... [Ja. 1:7]. For example, if you are hard-working, God gave you that ability. The recognition of this reality and responsibility towards God is critical to your faithful discharge of your duties to God. Faithfulness is one of the chief characteristics of true believers or followers of Jesus, "It is required among stewards that they be found faithful" [1Cor. 4:2]. Thus, more important than brilliance, charisma, or a brief display of passion (like fireworks) is the trait of enduring faithfulness. Faithfulness speaks of steadfast allegiance, and loyal performance of duties. Faithfulness is being where you're supposed to be, when you're supposed to be there, doing what you're supposed to do, with a God-honoring attitude. A good servant is faithful and wise [45]. Jesus links faithfulness and goodness [Mt. 25:21,23]. A servant shows his true character by how he behaves while the master is away. The servant is called to use the resources entrusted by the master to care for others [45]. Christ's disciples are called to be diligent while the master is away. The servant who is faithful to do what his master has charged him to do is "blessed" *makarios* or happy [46]. Faithful servants know that God will reward them with greater kingdom opportunities, and greater honor in God's kingdom [47] which is fantastic. Nevertheless, the faithful servant rejoices because he knows that he has eternal life, and His Master, Jesus, loves His servants, and has graciously given them eternal life. The faithful follower knows and believes his master will return and wants to be found doing his or her kingdom work. "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" [1Jn. 2:28].

I want to be a faithful servant of Jesus. I serve God by serving others. I need to serve my wife, our sons, our church, our community/neighbors (friends and people that God brings within my sphere of influence where I live work, study and play). For me, my career and calling have merged, but I know what is like to represent Christ in the marketplace and serve Him there too. I continue to discover that it is challenging and difficult. There are times I want to give up. But, I want to be more like Jesus (I confess that I have so much more to learn) and I know that drifting from Him will never produce the desired results. Every year that He delays, is another year of challenges: the world system, my flesh, and the enemy of men's souls. And it is never easy to advance God's kingdom in a culture that opposes or is indifferent to the gospel. Yet, serving Jesus brings me satisfaction like nothing else. And assures me that I'm His. So, I choose to abide or stay close to Jesus and serve Him by serving others even when it is difficult. And I'm comforted in my shortcomings that He is faithful, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" [2Tim. 2:13].

Q1. How does faithful service to God reflect and represent Jesus to others?

Q2. How is faithful service to God generally related to serving and caring for people made in His image?

B. Why I'm concerned for those who don't seek to faithfully serve Jesus [48-50]

"⁴⁸ But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards,⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of,⁵¹ and will cut

him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The faithful and wise servant is contrast with unfaithful or evil servant [48]. The unfaithfulness is not regarded as simple laziness, flakiness, or apathy, but is characterized as evil or wicked [Matt. 25:26]. The unfaithful act as if the Lord is certainly not returning anytime soon [48]. That attitude produces apathy resulting in actions that are a problem. Instead of caring for others they mistreat them [49]. Apathy towards God produces indifference towards people made in the image of God. Apathy towards God is evidenced by living for the flesh. When God's Spirit is not giving life then the flesh dominates so that our lives reflect the attitudes and actions of those who don't know Christ. And as promised, Christ will come, but the unfaithful are unprepared for His return [50].

"People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated." D.A. Carson

Here is the biggest reason for concern, the punishment reveals that these people were not really saved. Thus, they experience eternal punishment [51, 25:46]. The reality is that the Christian life is lived as a community of people in relationship worshiping God, and caring for one another and the community around them where God has placed them. When someone never creates meaningful community to serve others different than themselves, or withdraws from meaningful community than there is a looming issue – are they really saved? Our thought should never be how far can I go from Christ and still go to heaven, but how close can I remain that I can enjoy Him and the assurance of eternal life. By being faithful to Christ we can know that we are His, and enjoy all the blessings that flow from using our gifts to serve Him by serving others.

Q3 How can Christ's delay in returning make it more difficult to be faithful?

Q4. Describe how you are seeking to be faithful to God in various areas of your life: (personal, marriage, family, career, calling [serving at church or a para-church ministry], and community). Note some of the challenges, and some of the blessings of the experience(s).

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Look for an opportunity to serve God by serving a neighbor where you live, work, study, or play.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity** to get to know one another better.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.