

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On May 1, 2012, we received the following inquiry:

“It's something I do not understand, read Matthew 24:49. What does it mean to beat his fellow slaves? and what it means to eat and drink with the drinkers?”

To the author, thank you for this inquiry and the opportunity to discuss this very important scriptural reference. There has been so many misunderstandings and misstatements about what this scripture means. We feel honored to defend the teaching of Jesus Christ in this matter.

The scripture you refer to says:

“and should start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards” – *Matthew 24:49*

It is part of a discourse by Jesus where he responds to a question from this disciples:

“Tell us, When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?” – *Matthew 24:3*

In response, Jesus tells them many things to look for and warned them to keep on the watch because the “Son of man” would arrive at a time when they are not expecting him. (*Matthew 24:4-44*)

Then, Jesus used a parable about not tiring out, which includes the scriptural reference you are concerned with. As a preliminary matter, please understand that this **is not** a prophesy. It is a parable. It **is not** a statement about what **will** occur in the future. It is **an example of two different attitudes** that might arise as we wait for the master’s return. Here is the first attitude:

“Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to you, He will appoint him over all his belongings.” – *Matthew 24:45-47*

And here is the second attitude:

“But if ever that evil slave should say in his heart, ‘My master is delaying,’ and should start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave

will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and will punish him with the greatest severity and will assign him his part with the hypocrites. There is where [his] weeping and the gnashing of [his] teeth will be.” – *Matthew 24:48-51*

In the parallel scripture in Luke, we learn that the apostle Peter asked a question that is not contained in Matthew’s account:

“Then Peter said: “**Lord, are you saying this illustration to us or also to all?**” And the Lord said: “Who really is the faithful steward, the discreet one, whom his master will appoint over his body of attendants to keep giving them their measure of food supplies at the proper time?” – *Luke 12:41-42*

And in the parallel scripture in Mark, we learn the answer:

“**But what I say to you I say to all, Keep on the watch.**” – *Mark 13:37*

So we learn from this parable that it is possible that some of Jesus’ disciples would be faithfully at work caring for the household; and that some, **who began faithful**, could grow impatient and instead of caring for the household, would began beating them into submission.

It reminds us of the illustration of a babysitter who was entrusted with caring for a child. The sitter did well at first, but as the night grew on and the parents were delayed, the sitter grew tired and impatient for the parent’s return. When the child became restless and started crying, instead of checking for a wet diaper, providing food or drink, cuddling the child, or seeking some way to comfort the child, the sitter began yelling and eventually beating the child in an effort to ‘shut him up.’ To the sitter, he had worked all night and done enough. It was time for the parents to come home and care for their own child. All he could see to do was to use physical force to beat the child to submission.

In Jesus’ parable, the once faithful slave went so far as to “eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards.” This was not a case of sharing a meal with sinners in an effort to preach the good news as Jesus often did; but of ‘partying’ and having a sharing with persons who had no intention of repenting – **confirmed** drunkards.

Thus, we believe the message of the parable is: Don’t grow tired of doing the work Jesus set out for us to do. Don’t turn our backs and become involved in matters that detract and distract from the Kingdom message. Don’t reject the sincere cries for help from our brothers. Don’t fail to provide comfort to one another. And don’t become impatient with one another.

Overall, the parable is telling us to continuing providing spiritual food to one another at the proper time (*Matthew 24:45*) which is the uplifting message of the Kingdom **as Jesus' taught it** – the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The admonition is not for just a few of us. 'What he says, he says to us all.' (*Mark 13:37*)

“Elaia Luchnia”
