

Being Watchful

Matthew 25:1-13

Central Idea: In these last days, we must live always prepared to meet Christ!

Introduction

I'm the kind of person to always want to be given a heads up and some time to be prepared for things. I have found that I am much better at whatever I'm doing if I have a guide to go by or time to figure out at least some basic ideas before I do something. As a bachelor, I am grateful for the instructions that come on the backs of boxes of food. Without that, it would be a guessing game for me, and peanut butter and jelly would be a lot more common in the parsonage when I burned things. There's a certain comfort that comes with preparedness.

But there's also a great deal of responsibility, accountability and discipline that come with being prepared in advance for something. Take this morning's message, for instance. Every week that I get up here and preach, if I did not at least have a clue where we were headed this morning, the sermon would ramble between points and no one would get much out of it at all! Instead, I start around Tuesday beginning to get an idea of the passages, the subject matter and the outline of what God has for us each Sunday. I lay it out and then I study it. And then I record what I'm seeing and hearing from God on the matter. Then I come in here and give the best of my studies to you, led by God's Spirit in both preparation and delivery. To make something great, you need to prepare!

So also, we are taught by Jesus and just about every writer of the New Testament that we live in a time of preparation for Christ's return. We are waiting for that day when He comes back for His own. It is an exciting time to be alive, but if we live in such a way that we are unprepared, we will be just as surprised as the unbelievers who are not waiting for Christ to return. Jesus teaches us about being ready in this morning's parable from Matthew 25, a key chapter about the end times.

Text – Matthew 25:1-13

¹ “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to

the dealers and buy for yourselves.’¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

I. Being ready for Jesus starts with our discipline and wisdom (vv. 1-6).

A. We must be wise in the choices we make.

- i. Jesus starts out this parable as a continuation of His teaching on the end times and what we should expect. Matthew chapters 24-25 give some of the primary teaching on the end times in the New Testament.
- ii. This parable is designed to be further emphasis on the readiness of those who are living to please Christ in the end times. When the end comes, these are the ones who will be watching, ready and waiting.
- iii. So Jesus illustrates the importance of being ready, of preparing for the return of Christ with another parable that shows the rewards of patience and preparation over the consequences of being unprepared.
- iv. The parable centers around the foil of the typical wedding procession that was so common to the Israelites in Jesus’ time that no one recorded the happenings of a Jewish wedding in His day.
- v. There was no need to write down all that happened, because everyone already knew. It would be tantamount to writing down how to turn the knob on a door or the process of walking down a flight of stairs today. These things are intuitive, and writing instructions would be more part of a comedy bit than a helpful exercise.
- vi. Needless to say, we have gained a wealth of information from several original first-century sources to piece together the different parts of a wedding, and each wedding started with the bridegroom building a house for his new family, agreeing over the dowry price for his bride, proceeding to go get her from her parents’ place, taking her to the place where the wedding would take place, and the sometimes seven day feast of celebration after the wedding.
- vii. These ten virgins, as they are commonly called, are most likely part of the bride’s party, what we would refer to today as bridesmaids. They would help the bride in all of the preparations. It is most likely that they were unmarried young women, hence Matthew’s term for a virgin.
- viii. Part of their job was to wait for the bridegroom to come after building the house and haggling over the bride price, and then meet him as her envoy in the midst usually of the night, and then take him with lighted torches to her place to get her, and then with lighted torches take them to their

destination for the wedding. They would also have a part to play in the wedding celebrations.

- ix. The torches that they would use, or the lamps that appear in some translations, were most likely long sticks of wood with a bowl of oil at the top and an oil-drenched wick or cloth that would make the light burn brighter.
- x. Some scholars suggest based off of cultural weddings even today that these wicks would not last more than about 20 minutes. This means that it would be wise to bring extra oil and rags for the fuel if it were to go out.
- xi. That means that it was a matter of preparation for the event on the part of the ten virgins, not the fact that the bridegroom takes longer than expected. The fault is not on the bridegroom for being “late,” but on the five virgins who did not think ahead and make the wise decision of being prepared for their torches to continually glow.
- xii. **Application:** We make decisions every day in our lives. Those decisions can be godly decisions that make us more efficient and effective in God’s kingdom, or they can set us back from being prepared for Him and the appointments He presents to us. When we don’t know beforehand how to share the gospel or prepare ourselves to pray for someone to minister to them, we are choosing to be foolish. Plan your life in such a way that you are ready and expectant to minister to someone as you go throughout your day!

B. We must be prepared in advance for Jesus’ arrival.

- i. Five of the ten virgins did not exercise wisdom in being prepared for their torches to go out. They did not bring any extra oil to keep them burning throughout the whole procession.
- ii. Wisdom is a key to doing things and making choices that God is pleased with in our lives. As we live for Him, it is paramount that God is pleased with us.
- iii. Wisdom teaches the practical ways that we actively pursue God until He returns. One of the ways to be ready is to take stock of our lives and to always be listening and obeying the Holy Spirit, growing in godliness.
- iv. Another way is to reach out to others and help them. The five wise virgins are not very helpful to the unwise ones, but it is because helping them would mean no lit torches instead of a diminished amount. While we can offer wisdom to others, it is up to them to use it!
- v. Another way that we can prepare is to live a flawless and sinless lifestyle that honors God and others. We can be an example of what God is wanting to come back for in His people.

- vi. We can also prepare by looking at the signs of the end times that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24, looking at the seasons and evaluating the times. We must maintain a healthy notice of them without becoming overly distracted by these things.
- vii. Five of the ten virgins did the wise thing, thinking ahead about the possibility of not having enough fuel for their torches, and packing extra fuel and rags. This preparation allows them to maintain their station in waiting for the bridegroom.
- viii. Today, some Christians are so distracted in their living for God and in the different potholes along the road that they are not ready for His return at all. Perhaps they are actively living in sin or neglecting to speak of Christ and spread the gospel. Perhaps they are not serving Christ by serving those in need. Don't forget that we must be not doing certain things and doing other things to be ready and prepared!
- ix. While the bridegroom is delayed, the virgins end up falling asleep. While this can be seen as negative in certain biblical accounts, such as the disciples sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane when they are asked by Jesus to pray, here, there seems to be no problem with it.
- x. The virgins are as prepared as they can be and are waiting on the late bridegroom. Considering that they will be an integral part to the rest of the procession, this might also be seen as a wise action to take.
- xi. We are called, however, to be awake and alert in these end times, to always be watchful of the devil's schemes and to be working for God's kingdom before the time comes in which it is too late!
- xii. **Application:** Let us be prepared and wise in this interim time between the promises and their fulfillment in Christ. As we wait on Christ to return, let us live in ways that bring Him glory and cause others to want to meet Jesus. Let us watch the times to know when He draws closer. Let us do all that we can to be prepared for that day so that we are not surprised by it! What do you need to give more attention to in the waiting process so that you are ready for Christ?

II. Being ready for Jesus ends with our faithfulness and preparation (vv. 7-13).

- A. We must use this time wisely while we are still here.
 - i. The five foolish virgins should have been prepared for two problems that they could encounter. The first is that their torches would not have lasted for the whole procession without extra oil and rags.
 - ii. But the second is that they should have been prepared for the bridegroom taking longer and running late. Unlike in our American culture, most of the world does not abide by strict time schedules.

- iii. Beyond this, bridegrooms tended to be late in most weddings in Jesus' day. This is one of the reasons He uses this as an example of not knowing when exactly He will come back.
 - iv. These five foolish virgins overlook both of these facts of weddings, and for that reason they are foolish. They had plenty of time to prepare before they were waiting on the procession, and now that it is here, it is too late.
 - v. **Illustration:** I am a big preparation person. I don't like to do things, especially important things, off the cuff. I like to practice because it makes me feel more confident in what I'm about to do. Some people are great at spontaneous, but that just makes me nervous. Because of this, I tend to be super prepared. I don't believe that you can be over-prepared, and yet I am quite guilty in some cases of under-thinking an issue or over-thinking an issue. But at least I tried to prepare for what was coming.
 - vi. We must make the effort to prepare for the return of Christ, using wisdom and godly practices. This means that we live in such a way that Jesus will be pleased when He returns. It means we are excited about His return. It means we want Him to return. It means we're not too cozy with this world.
 - vii. **Application:** What are some things in your life that you need to gain wisdom about? Most of us have at least one area that we haven't completely given over to God, in which we struggle to be completely obedient. If Jesus came back today and took stock of your life, what would you be ashamed about before Him? That is most likely an area that you should seek wisdom on from God and those you can trust!
- B. We must pay attention to the warnings of His coming.
- i. These women fall asleep during their waiting period. But, then there is a cry, a call, that the bridegroom has been spotted, that he is on his way, and they wake up and trim their torches and get them lit up ready to go.
 - ii. There are certain things that Jesus pre-warned us would be taking place when He returns. These can be found especially in Matthew 24-25, but not exclusively there.
 - iii. Part of our expectant waiting, and our preparation, is to be observant of these things. We must be careful to not make them so much of a distraction that we get our eyes off of living a godly life and being a good witness of Jesus to the world.
 - iv. Some people discount Christianity in general because they are so focused on the signs of the end that they try to figure it out, give it a date, or do some other foolish thing that Scripture tells us not to do.

- v. We need to be careful to not become the weathermen of Christianity who tell everyone exactly what the details of the weather are going to be before they happen. Then when time passes, we are found to be woefully wrong!
- vi. The way I deal with preparing and observing is to make notes in my own mind about the intensity of these events that Jesus mentioned and to monitor them. I don't tell everyone I meet that because there was a giant earthquake, Jesus is coming back in x amount of years or something.
- vii. But I try to pay attention to them, take notice, and in those moments, I can be found to be pondering the possibility of Christ's return. I don't believe we should live in fear, so that when one of these signs happens we repent and get saved all over again, etc. I think we should simply have an eye on them.
- viii. The worst part about this parable is that the five virgins who are unprepared miss out on the procession and the festival. I don't ever want to miss what God is doing in my life, in our church or in this world!
- ix. Just the thought of missing out on God's works in my day saddens me. I want to be ready because I don't want to miss out! I don't want to live on someone else's oil. I want to be there in person, not out trying with some last-ditch effort to fix what cannot be fixed.
- x. **Application:** The best way to be ready for an event's unknown timing is to be prepared always. When the event happens, you're ready. If you don't live always ready for Christ's return, you may be surprised to find that He came and you weren't there! This parable teaches us that if we prepare, when Jesus comes, we will be with Him. But it also challenges us to not take for granted that we'll be there if we aren't wise and prepared. Prepare well with your heart turned toward Christ, your mind thinking on His teachings and your hands doing His works so that when He comes, He will recognize you as one of His own!

Conclusion

No one should live a life of fear that they are not going to make it. But at the same time, we must not coast through our walk with God. At every turn, we need to be prepared, wise and actively pursuing Jesus with our everything. This is how you prepare. No one wants to be late to the party. Use this time wisely by being ready yourself, living the God-glorifying lifestyle of a believer, and also by reaching out to others, so that you might make the most of every opportunity. The time gets shorter and shorter with every passing moment. We will be ready if we keep Jesus in the forefront of our minds and actions!

Action Points

- What are some things in your life that you have not surrendered to God? Is there an area of your life where Jesus would not be pleased if He returned right now?
- We do not need to live in fear of missing Christ's return. Those who believe in Christ will not miss it at all! Keep an open eye on the events of the world and watch to see how God is fulfilling all things!
- Jesus gave us warning signs that we can use to monitor the intensity of His return. These are not signs to know precisely when He is coming back, but to realize what seasons in which He might return.