

Matthew 25:1-13 // Ready To Go

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 25, which can be found on page 994 of the Church Bibles.! That's page 994, Matthew chapter 25, beginning at verse 1.

! The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.

The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out, Here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out. No, they replied, There may not be enough for both us and you.

Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves. But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived.

[1 : 18] The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later, the others also came. Lord, Lord, they said, Open the door for us.

But he replied, Truly I tell you, I don't know you. Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. Thanks be to God for his word.

Well, thanks, Jack, for reading. It's a great day to be thinking about an even better day to come after an afternoon in the sun together.

Let me add my welcome to Josh's, if we've not met before. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the ministry trainees here at the church. Be a great help for us all if you can keep your Bibles open at page 994 as we look at God's word together.

As we turn to do so, let's come before him and seek his help in prayer together. Heavenly Father, thank you that in your great wisdom, you've told us everything that we need to know as we await the return of the Lord Jesus to bring about the new creation.

[2 : 26] So as we look just now at your word together, we seek your help. Give us humble minds and open hearts to receive your word this evening. We ask that through your spirit, you'd be working powerfully in all of us, shaping us to be more like your son, in whose name we pray.

Amen. I wonder, how well do you wait for big news when you don't know when it's going to come? About a year after Emily and I got married, we applied for a visa for Emily to come into the country. I had been living out in Alaska, where she's from, with her. And my visa had eventually come to an end. And we applied to the home office for Emily to get her visa to come over and live here.

But at that point, they were overwhelmed with applications from Ukrainian refugees. And so they said, well, it will probably be around six months, but it could be sooner. It could be later.

Depends on a variety of factors. We knew at some point we'd get an email containing a letter that somewhere amidst lots of FAF and verbal lawyer language would tell us, can Emily come over?

[3 : 39] But we just had to wait those six months. And as it got closer, we knew it could be any moment I could turn my phone on and see that that email is there. But we knew that really, we just had to wait.

And we may as well prepare for life in the UK. Trusting that it will come at some point. So let's get ready. And we prepared. I got a flat in Glasgow for us. We looked into furniture, because it was unfurnished.

And a blow-up mattress and a fold-up table and chair got old really quickly. And then we looked at, well, can we get Emily's teaching qualification over? All things to get prepared so that when Emily got over, well, we could just hit the ground running and get going with life in the UK.

And something of that is really the thrust of Matthew chapter 25 that we're going to spend the next three weeks in together. Jesus is coming back, and we don't know when.

So we need to wait well and prepare for when he suddenly comes. We're jumping in to Jesus' extended teaching to his disciples for this three-week series.

[4 : 47] And so let's get our bearings. His disciples ask a question back in chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. So turn back there with me. They're in Jerusalem, and starting at verse 1, it says, As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately.

Tell us, they said, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age? That's the key question. How will we know when you're going to return, and what will be the sign?

At the end of chapter 4, he's answered the when emphatically with, You don't know. Only the Father knows. But he goes on with some parables for his followers to understand.

And we start with a parable of the ten virgins this evening. There are points within your service sheet, if you'll find that helpful for you, to show you where we're going this evening.

And in our first point, we'll consider the parable's main thrust, and then we'll look at two implications that Jesus makes through it to his followers. Well, firstly then, point one, the wedding won't wait.

[6 : 18] Jesus says, verse 1, At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. The point at which Jesus returns and this age ends, the kingdom of heaven, that is the church on earth, will be like ten virgins who've set out to meet the bridegroom.

And we're not asked to guess who's who. We're not left to wonder that. Back in chapter 9, verse 15 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus declared himself to be the bridegroom, with his disciples as his guests. Jesus is the bridegroom, and all those who follow him, the ten virgins. In our wedding, the virgins here would perform a role similar to bridesmaids today.

Virgins because at that point they would all have been young, unmarried women. But these ten virgins are not all the same. Verse 2, Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

The foolish one took their lamps, but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in their jars along with their lamps. Five of them took what they needed to be ready for when the bridegroom came.

[7 : 41] Five of them left without. Now, lamps that they had were likely big torches with oil-soaked rags wrapped around them. And so you needed to top them up with oil to keep them burning for very long at all.

We see in verse 5 that the bridegroom is a long time in coming, perhaps longer than the foolish ones thought or presumed that he would be. And all of the virgins fall asleep, both wise and foolish. At midnight, the bridegroom nears and the call goes out, It's time he's here. Let's get this show on the road. Trim your lamps, soak them in oil, light them, and let go.

All done to make sure their lamps stay ablaze and they can partake in the procession to the wedding banquet. But it's at this point that the foolish realize their error.

Verse 8, the foolish one said to the wise, Give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out. They're not going to be able to partake. But the wise say, No, we can't.

[8 : 51] The foolish have failed to prepare, and now it's too late. And so verse 10, they scarp off, seeking to find the local oil merchant, anybody who can help them.

But when they're gone, the bridegroom arrives. And well, at that point, the wedding won't wait. The banquet kicks off, the door is shut, the chance is gone, and that door will not be opened again. Even in verse 11, when they cry, Lord, Lord, they said, Open the door for us. But he replied, Truly, I tell you, I don't know you.

I find that to be a devastating exchange between Jesus and people who thought that they were in. He says, I don't know you.

There was never a seat saved for you at my table because you never committed to coming. And the wedding won't wait for you to be prepared. You didn't commit to come.

[9 : 56] You're not ready when I was here. And there was no seat at the table for you. There is an open invite to all who want to come to his great, lavish banquet wedding.

All are welcome. And all that he asks is that people are prepared. And when he returns, the wedding won't wait for people who have failed to prepare.

And there's a couple of striking things about this parable before we turn to more direct application. Firstly, both the wise and the foolish virgins fall asleep in verse 5.

I would have expected the foolish certainly to fall asleep. But wouldn't you have thought that the wise would have coffee, Red Bull, chocolate, wherever they would have needed it, to stay awake for the bridegroom to come.

But that's not how Jesus tells this parable. The wise also sleep. Jesus emphasizes that no one will know when Jesus returns.

[10:58] He's promised that he will return. But not even the wise who are faithfully waiting will know. It will be a surprise for all. Because if the wise knew that he would return at midnight, they would have kept themselves awake.

They would have elbowed each other, prodded each other, whatever was needed to wait up. No one will see it coming. And there's lots of stuff online, on YouTube, on social media, wherever you get it, that claims that people have figured out when Jesus will return.

That they've cracked the code, they've spotted what's going on. But it's all rubbish, it's all nonsense. Jesus is exceptionally clear that nobody will know. It will be a surprise to everybody.

Jesus' return will be a surprise, and the wedding won't wait for those found unprepared. The refusal to share oil with the foolish is also striking, don't you think?

We're not used to parables where Jesus seems to command somebody for refusing to share with those in need. If the oil is what they need to get into the banquet, then what kind of Christian says, no, you can't have it?

[12:14] It's striking to us. But of course, this isn't the only teaching in Matthew's gospel. He says much more about that. So we're not constructing much on that. Here, it's clear that at the point that Jesus returns, if you're not ready, it's too late.

There's nothing that the wise virgins, there's nothing that Christians who are ready can do to help the foolish. However well that you have prepared, however well the wise prepared, they cannot smuggle in the foolish.

It's a personal matter. When Jesus returns, the wedding won't wait, and the bouncers will be on their game. There will be no fools snuck in.

There will be no wedding crashers. The wedding won't wait. So our second point, so don't be caught unprepared. Jesus paints for us in no uncertain terms the danger of being caught unprepared when he returns.

It's all over. You don't want to be among the foolish virgins who set off with the wise to await the arrival of the bridegroom without taking everything that you need for the journey, for the wait.

[13:32] They clearly presumed at some point they could get ready later, or that they wouldn't have to, that he would be there straight away. And we see thinking along the same lines today, don't we?

I'll consider the big questions in life later. Just now is a time for having fun, and later on in life, well, I'll maybe turn and get ready if that's what I feel like doing.

Choosing to kick the can down the road instead of getting prepared now. And yet when the foolish virgins stir to the news that the bridegroom is here, and they realize that they can't ride the coattails of the wise into the banquet, well, they set off on what proves to be a fatal quest to find more oil.

By the time they've sorted themselves out, the opportunity has gone, the door has been shut. And even when they bang on the door in verse 11 and say, Lord, Lord, open the door for us, they're too late.

The wedding won't wait. And so don't be caught unprepared. The point at which Christ returns, the opportunity to sort out your life and fully commit to him, will be gone.

[14:50] Only those who are prepared will join in the wedding. And he will return suddenly without warning. So now's not the time for do it later.

Now's not the time for I'll kick it down the road. Now's the time to say, I'll do it now. Don't risk there being no place for you at that table because you didn't RSVP before he came.

The invite is for all, but you must accept it and say, I'll be there, I'll be prepared. And we tragically see here that it's very easy for the unprepared foolish virgin to fit in with the rest to look the part.

The great distinction becomes apparent after the bridegroom has returned. In verse one, they all set out to meet the bridegroom together. And yet the words of the foolish virgins in verse 11 echo previous teaching from Jesus.

Let's turn and look at that. If you could turn to chapter seven, verse 21, you'll find that on page 972. This is just towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

[16:03] It's page 972, flicking around to keep us all awake on a warm summer evening. Reading from verse 21, Jesus speaking says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. I never knew you. Or in verse 12 of chapter five, truly I tell you, I don't know you.

Words of the Lord Jesus to some who will call out to him on that last day. It's easy to fit in and to look the part and yet be the fool that on the last day is found to be totally unprepared.

You can spend time with Christians, you can serve in church, you can be at camp and conference every year, you can give money to church projects and still be the fool who presumes that they can get with Jesus and get prepared for Christ's return later.

[17:32] It's a humbling and sober thought that many in the church on earth will be found to be totally unprepared and spiritually dead on the day that Christ returns.

It's my prayer and I hope it's your prayer too that there will be nobody here tonight or wider in the St. Silas Church family who will be found to be unprepared.

Back to chapter 25, there's lots of potential reasons for the foolishness of the virgins. Perhaps they thought that he wouldn't be that long and what they had would keep them going.

Perhaps they thought that they could just get themselves prepared while when he was there.

Maybe they didn't want to put the money up front to buy the oil they needed. Maybe they had something else they wanted.

Maybe they weren't 100% sure that he was going to show. Or maybe it was just sheer laziness. All plausible. Perhaps each virgin had a different reason but at the end of the day, Jesus groups them all together as fools.

[18:47] So let's think a little more about what it is to be prepared. The clear distinction in the parable is that only the wise take the oil for their lamps. And so the natural question arises what is the oil?

What is it that we need to be prepared? We need to be careful not to overread into the parable. But at the same time, if we know that the oil is what makes someone ready to enter the banquet, then we know that it must be something.

Jesus is trying to tell us something. In verse 12, Jesus rejects some on the basis that he doesn't know them. Implying then that if they had a personal relationship with Christ, if he did know them, then they would have been ready and they would have been welcomed in to the banquet.

Let me suggest then that the oil is somewhat akin to having a personal, deep, meaningful relationship with the Lord Jesus. where you truly know him and he truly knows you.

A meaningful relationship, one where he is invited into all of your life, where you take his words and his commands seriously, beyond the intellectual and into the heartfelt devotion.

[20:06] We often like to think that one day I'll get around to it. You can look at an older, godly man or woman in the church and think, one day, I'll be like that.

But not take any action to get there. One day, I'll spend time in God's word each day. One day, I'll have more time and then I'll seriously commit to Christ's people.

One day, when we have kids, I'm sure we'll pray as a family. One day, it will be easier to boot my sin to death, perhaps when I'm older. The problem being, we easily trick ourselves into thinking it will be easier later while doing absolutely nothing just now.

The way to grow, the way to be like the people, our role models that we want to be like, is to take action today, to delay no longer, to invest in a personal, meaningful relationship with Christ.

It's one that we invest where we boot our time, energy, cost, to listening and obeying him. The point at which Christ the bridegroom returns, only those with a meaningful personal relationship with the Lord Jesus will be brought into his presence.

[21:26] You do not want to be cut off from the author of life and light. When he suddenly returns, the wedding won't wait. So don't be caught unprepared.

Just like the wise virgins can't share their oil with the foolish, you can't enter the banquet based on somebody else's personal relationship. No matter how much someone might want to, a parent can't bring their child in based on their own.

Each of us need our own. Perhaps you've been delaying investing in our relationship with Christ, thinking that you'll get round to it one day. Perhaps there's something in your life you just don't want to invest in that.

Well, please don't delay. There is no better way, there is no better day than today to get prepared. The wedding won't wait, so don't be caught unprepared.

And our third point, but keep watch for his surprise arrival. The only comment that Jesus gives on this parable is found in verse 13.

[22 : 42] Look at it with me. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour. We've thought about the warning Jesus' parable contains to be prepared, but let's pivot to the call to action he gives his disciples.

And it's a call against complacency. It's a call to not forget that we don't know the day or the hour that he will return. And so to keep watch, keep keeping watch, always.

2,000 years after Jesus spoke these words, we're still awaiting his return. We still need to keep watch. Now, we may not be quite as arrogant to say something like we don't think he's coming back or I know when he's coming back.

But if we're being honest, we can sometimes live with a firm expectation that if he's coming back, I really don't think it will happen within my lifetime.

we might not say it, but the things we do in our lives are thinking subtly betrays it. And so then what is it to continually keep watch for Christ's return?

[23 : 59] I think one way that we're invited to think about it in Jesus' parable is this. It's to live in such a way that if Jesus was to return right now, we'd go straight out to meet him without a second thought.

We wouldn't turn back and finish what we were doing. We wouldn't try to sort out other people. We would just go, Christ is here and I'm ready to go out and meet the bridegroom.

Like the wise virgins, when it's announced he's here, you've got nothing left to do other than to trim and light your lamp things that can't be done until he is here.

That is true wisdom. You've been invited to be at the greatest wedding banquet that the world has ever seen with world-ending consequences.

A wedding that we don't deserve to be at and yet a wedding that we've been invited to. Not just invited to but given a place of honor at.

[24 : 58] And all the groom asks is that you come prepared for his arrival so that you're ready to go. There are many good things in this world, things and people we enjoy and love as we should.

And they're good gifts from God for us. But while we wait, we mustn't let our preparedness be compromised by them for our watchfulness to be turned away from Christ.

If Christ's return was to happen right now, would you go out to meet him with joy in your heart and without a second thought for anything this world can offer?

Or would you more likely turn around and think, I wish I got to do that. I'm not quite ready to be done with this world yet. Perhaps it would be from a love for people to come to know Christ.

Perhaps it would be that you've got things to do, things that you want to accomplish. And many of us find ourselves in that boat at various points in our life. Finding our watchful eyes just being taken, just being drawn off from awaiting Christ and onto some worldly concern.

[26 : 19] Again, these are all good things to be concerned about or to enjoy. But we mustn't let that take our eyes away from keeping watch for Christ's return.

Perhaps another way of gauging this in our life is to ask, can I pray for Christ to return with a sincere heart? Or is there something that just holds me back ever so slightly?

Something that wants me to say, I pray that you would return, but if you could just wait for this to happen, that would be great. I could just wait until I've traveled the world. You could just wait until all my friends have become Christian.

You could just wait until I've gone to do this thing. If we find ourselves in that boat, we need to remind ourselves of just how glorious the new creation that this wedding banquet ushers in will be.

That will renew our watchfulness for the coming of our Lord. So let's take a moment to do that together. You don't need to turn, but Revelation chapter 19.

[27 : 28] John hears a great multitude shouting, and this is what they shout. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen bright and clean was given to her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. Then the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And he added, these are the true words of God. The coming wedding banquet of Christ to his people, to you and I, will usher in a new creation with no pain, where our battle with sin is over, where we're given freedom from our earthly sinful desires and we get to dwell with God, given new clothes, enjoying the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Each, truths, and so many more that deserve hours of contemplation. We invest in our personal relationship with Christ now, not later, knowing we invest in such a great banquet and such a good new creation to come, that if you feel yourself getting apathetic, if you feel yourself distracted from watching for Christ's return, take yourself back to God's promises, take yourself back to God's word, and remind yourself just how good it will be.

Friends, the wedding won't wait, so don't be caught unprepared, but keep watch for his return. And let's do that together.

[29 : 21] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we marvel at just how good that great wedding banquet will be when your son returns. And so we ask that you would keep us all fully prepared and watching for his return, that each one of us here and our wider church family will be found ready and going out to meet him upon his arrival.

for any who are ill prepared among us, please, Lord, give them that deep personal relationship with Christ. And for those of us who are distracted or weary of keeping watch, renew our anticipation for and focus on that great coming day.

And so we pray with sincere hearts, come Lord Jesus, come. Amen. Well, Thank you.