



Matthew 25:1-30
Jesus is Coming, Be Vigilant and Diligent

Summary: Jesus encourages Christians to be spiritually vigilant and diligent until His unscheduled return.

As we jump into the Scriptures this morning, Matthew is telling us about the final week of Jesus' life. Jesus has told His disciples that the entire Temple complex, the heart of Jewish worship is going to be destroyed because they have rejected Him and the kingdom God sent Him to announce. The disciples are stunned by this and ask the question we looked at last week:

Matt 24:3 ... "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Now, in Chapter 25, Jesus is still in the middle of answering that question – He's telling the disciples what life will be like between the time of His death and the time of His return to judge the earth.

If you weren't here last week I encourage you to download the podcast or watch the service and see what you missed, but at the very least, it is important that you understand why Jesus is saying the things we read here – you need to know, He is answering this question about when the final judgment will come and what will be the indicators.

So, keep that in mind, and read with me as Jesus paints a picture of the future by telling a story. He says

Matthew 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. 3 Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

Weddings in the ancient world were different than what we experience today. The first step was an agreement between the family of the bride and groom that this man and woman could marry. At this point you might say they were promised to one another.

Then, when both sides thought the time was right, there was a betrothal, something even more formal than our engagement – the couple was formally announced and it took an official act to dissolve their relationship even though they weren't living together. During this time the man would be preparing a place for the new couple to live, and she would be making preparations as well.

When all of that was done, it was time for the wedding itself. The man would go to his bride's home, often in the evening, because for the Jews the day starts at sundown instead of sunrise, and they would have a wedding ceremony to start the new day and their new life together. Then, they would parade through the city to their new home where there would be a celebration that might last a whole week.

The girls in this parable are like bridesmaids. They got the news that the wedding is going to happen today, and so they've come out for the parade to celebrate along the way. But, like many weddings, things are getting off to a late start – eventually the excitement fades, and they fall asleep.

6 “And at midnight a cry was *heard*: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

You can imagine the chaos here, right? Let me smooth my dress, wipe off the drool, rearrange my hair, and get my lamp ready to go again. But suddenly there's a crisis:

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, ‘*No*, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’

We learn that some had prepared and some had not.

All of them knew the wedding was going to happen. All of them brought lamps. But only some thought far enough ahead to bring extra oil. And when those who did not plan well ask to share, they're told, “I'm sorry, but I can't. I'm not trying to be mean, but there's simply not enough to go around – I didn't plan on bringing enough for you AND me.” So those who were unprepared had to take remedial action and that, as we're about to see, has consequences.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

11 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ 12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

They show up, but it's too little too late; they've missed the opportunity, and the point of the story is to make you feel the disappointment, the despair, the shock, and to understand that whether you like it or not, there were consequences, the door would not be opened, there would be no excuses, no extension of the deadline, no bending of the rules. It's a harsh, final, judgment.

You can picture the girls standing there, holding their lamps, holding their oil, a little sweaty from running across town and back, dresses wrinkled, hair still a little out of place, staring at each other in disbelief outside a closed door with that “what do we do now?” look on their face.

And then Jesus tells us the point of the story:

13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Here’s the point Jesus is making, the whole reason He told the story: *you don’t know exactly when the end will be, so live every day as if it were your last.* Be ready – be wise, not foolish – live each day in light of eternity.

Now, you know what this is like – to live today in light of the future – just think about those times when you know a test is coming or a project is due. We all know we should prepare in advance – we should plan to study a little bit each day, get a little bit of work done, make incremental progress - we should make choices today in light of what we know is coming. You know you should be able to walk into the examination confident, prepared, trusting in your preparation.

But the reality is, we often procrastinate and put things off and then to try to cram at the last minute and you know what kind of result that produces, you know what kind of stress that produces. You know what the future holds, you know what you should do, but you keep finding distractions, reasons, excuses, to put off the things you should be doing to prepare.

Some people live every day preparing for the unknown. Think of paramedics and firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency room doctors, nurses, and techs – or the Coast Guard who motto is *Semper Paratus* – always ready. These men and women know a call is going to come, they just don’t know when. And so, they live prepared for the call. They train, they study, they pre-stage their equipment and gear so it’s ready and they know just where to find it. They live every day in light of something they know will happen, they just don’t know when.



That is the point Jesus makes. That is the life He wants us to live – always ready. So, I have to ask: is there any evidence in your life that you expect the call to come – that you expect to face Jesus – either through my own death or His return - and are you prepared for it?

Before we move on, let me speak for a minute to the more mature Christians among us, because this parable might raise some questions for you that others might not ask, like who does each group represent? Are the wise virgins Christians, and the foolish virgins unbelievers? Or, since they were all originally planning to attend the wedding, do they all represent people in the church, but only the wise ones are saved, the foolish girls were ones who either never were saved or lost their salvation some how? And, is that even possible, to lose your salvation?

Christian, that's not the point of the story – you're asking questions it wasn't meant to answer.

Typically, a parable just makes one point – you can't press all the details, trying to milk meaning out of everything – and in this case, the point is very clear: Jesus says, [13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.](#)

The destiny of other people is not the focus here. You Bible scholars might remember that at the end of John's gospel Jesus takes Peter aside and explains what will happen to Peter in the coming days and years, and Peter asks 'Well, what about John, what's going to happen to him?' And Jesus says, 'don't worry about John. What if I want him to live until I return? What's that to you? Just focus on yourself Peter.'

The same thing is true here – don't worry about who the virgins without oil are, focus on the main point: *are you ready*, are you watching, are you living today in light of eternity, because you don't know when you will face Jesus – either through your own death or His return - be ready for the call. It's coming, you just don't know when.

So, Jesus calls to us be ready, and now He's going to tell us a story of what readiness looks like.

[Matthew 25:14](#) "For *the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*

One of the big trendy subjects in business today is talent management. It's the latest step in a series of attempts by management to emphasize the value of workers – to make them feel better by talking about them in fancy terms – so, we went from having a personnel section, to a Human Resources section, to a Human Capital section, and now everyone is buzzing about talent management and how to recruit, retain and develop the most talented people.

So, did you know, that the root of this word, talented, comes from the passage of Scripture we just read? Etymology is the study of the history of words – where do they come from, how do their meanings change over time? And if you look up the origin, or the etymology, of the word talented, the dictionaries point back to this passage – Matthew 25.

Originally, a talent was just a Roman unit of weight – today we have pounds, ounces, kilograms. A talent is equivalent to about 75lbs or roughly 34kg. It could have been a talent of copper, a talent of silver, or a talent of gold. We don't really know because the Bible doesn't really name the material. The point is, it was a lot – 75 pounds of any precious metal has some serious value and the man entrusts his assets in varying amounts to his servants. Merging his understanding with our own modern views, we could say he entrusted the talents to them based on his perception of how talented they were. So what happens next? Well,

Matthew 25:16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'

23 His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.'

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Allow me to make a few observations.

First, notice that faithfulness is rewarded over value. Both of the profitable servants heard the same commendation: '*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.*'

It doesn't matter whether you see yourself as possessing average talent, above average talent, or below average talent – the point is: how are you using it? Are you trying? God looks at the heart, at your motives and intent, before looking at your results.

We could say it this way: God is more concerned about the process than the product. He's glad the one with five talents made five talents of profit, but *He's just as glad* the one with two also doubled their share and the pattern shows us He would have been just as pleased if the servant with a single talent doubled it. *It's all about the effort, the intent, the goal.*

And that leads me to the second thing I love about this parable – the man gave his servants

varying amounts of talent [each according to his own ability](#). I love that. I come back to that over and over again. It's a helpful lens for me to see the world and the people in it. Listen carefully to what I'm about to say, this has nothing to do with external demographics, it's all about internal factors – who you are, how you're wired.

We all have equal worth, all humans are created in the image of God, and we want to create equality in terms of opportunity and access, but we're not all equal in terms of ability. There are people who do things I just can't do. You can't do anything you want in life. If you're 5' 2" you're not going to be a starting quarterback in the NFL, it doesn't matter how much you want it. You don't have the height.

We all know this, we sense it, we feel it deep down inside. We know when somebody is just gifted in an area where we are not. And, you know it among your peers – pilots know when another pilot is just naturally better than they are. Accountants know when someone is naturally better than they are. Students know when someone is naturally smarter than they are. You just know. I see it in youth sports – you can tell at age 5 who has drive and aggression and who's just out having fun. You can tell at that early age: this person is going to excel in competitive environments and others aren't, and that's OK.

When I see obvious differences in ability, aptitude, and accomplishment in life, I remember this passage – I remember that some people are just naturally more gifted than others; they have greater abilities than others. And that means some people are going to get what you might think are “better” opportunities. And that's OK. Because, in the eyes of God, all that really matters is: how did you do with what you were given?

If you're a two-talent person, don't beat yourself up about not keeping up with the five talent people. Seek improvement, try to grow, try to improve, but understand that God is not going to judge you by setting your accomplishments down right next to that girl's. God is always, always, always, more concerned about your motive, your intent, your effort. What were you trying to accomplish and why?

And so listen, if you're in a position of leadership, keep this mind – don't expect five talent returns out of every one of your kids or your team members or your employees. Ask yourself – are they performing at the level of their ability? And, do you have the right expectations *for them*? Do you have them in the right position working on the right things?

Notice that the servant with one talent isn't belittled for incompetence; he's condemned because his outlook was rotten and he didn't even try. He had a wrong view of the master, and therefore he made the wrong decision. He basically said he was afraid and intimidated so he did nothing. Jesus says that's actually just an excuse for being lazy and wicked. And that's the basis for his judgment. JC Ryle noted, he wasn't “a murderer, or a thief, or even a waster of the Lord's money. But he did *nothing* and that was his ruin.”¹

¹ JC Ryle, *Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospel*

That leads me to another observation here, and that is: everything the servants had came from the master. Each of them was given a share of the master's wealth, an allotment of his funds, and given the chance to do something with it. This would be a totally different story if they were expected to raise their own capital and then be judged on how they performed. But they were given talents – of money in this case, and it was allocated on the basis of the ability they had been given by the God who made them.

The same thing is true with us. Again, we're all equal in worth: male, female, young or old, single or married, red, yellow, black or white or some mix of it all. But we're also different, *and we were made that way*. Some of us are more intellectual, others more emotional. Some of us are extroverts, some introverts. Some love creating, others love doing. And in all that diversity of interest there's also diversity of ability. And *God is the reason for that* – we're all custom made, we're not mass-produced, or made from a box.

God has wired you a certain way, given you certain traits, abilities and interests. How are you using them? One day you will stand before Him and He'll ask what have you done with what I gave you? What have you done with your health, your opportunities, your relationships? How have you impacted the world around you? Do you have anything you can point to and say, I used my God-given talents, my ability to do this?

Now, I want to be very, very, clear here – this is not an issue of salvation – that is not the point of this parable – this isn't a story of Jesus being so happy with how productive some people were that He let them into heaven, and other people who didn't have much to show for their lives were condemned.

Salvation, and specifically earning or losing salvation, is not the focus here. The only way to gain salvation is to receive it, from God, through Christ. When it comes to salvation the issue is not how much work you can do for God, it's how much He has already done for you and whether or not you will receive it.

The issue here, as with the parable of the virgins and their lamps, is: how are you living in light of His return? What are you doing with what God has given you? Does eternity even enter into your thinking? Are you living actively, or passively?

And, remember, there is a supernatural factor at work here now too. God has given all people unique talents and abilities, but some of those are spiritually supercharged, magnified, or supplemented with Spiritual Gifts as well when you are born-again. In places like Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12 and others, the Bible tells us that God gives His people supernatural giftings to be able to do the work He is calling us to do.

The apostle Peter was one of the disciples who asked Jesus the question back in Matthew 24 that we find Him answering this morning. He heard Jesus explain all of these things – so, listen to what He had to say to some of the first churches a few years later.

1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. 8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for *“love will cover a multitude of sins.”* 9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. 10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Christian, brother, sister, members of the City Gates Church – God has given us talents, abilities, to minister to one another. You might have one talent, two, or five, the question is not how much do you have, but how are you using it?

God made the earth and everything in it, and then He handed it over to Adam and Eve to manage and maintain. They blew it. Now He is building a global, eternal kingdom, and He’s handing it over to us to build, expand, and serve. Are we doing it?

Not because we have to, but because we can. Because we get to. Because we get to *know* that our lives have eternal purpose and meaning no matter how small or insignificant, no matter how incompetent or unimportant we may *feel* compared to others. *We know* we’re serving the King and we’re giving Him our best. And one day, we’ll join Him with our lamps and oil ready, and enter His banquet. One day, we’ll show Him all that we’ve accomplished and done with the talents He gave us, and we’ll enter into His joy forever.

All that will happen because of how we live today. So, are you living in such a way that God is glorified, are you ready to give a report about what you’ve done for Him with what He’s given to you?

It’s a good question for all of us to consider, and re-consider as life goes on.

Let’s pray.