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Message: Get Ready

**Transcribed Message
August 26, 2018
Matthew 25:1-33**

Good morning. I want to start off by sharing with you guys a story from God's Word. One time, Jesus's disciples came to Him and they said to Him, "Lord, how are we going to know when the end of the age is coming? How will we know? What will the signs be that You're going to return to us?" Jesus shared with them many things. He talked to them for a while and after a time He shared this parable with them. He said the kingdom of heaven is going to be like ten virgins who take their lamps and they go to meet the bridegroom. There are five of the virgins who were foolish and five of them who were wise. The foolish ones brought their lamps but they didn't bring any extra oil with them. The wise ones brought casks of oil with them so that they would be prepared for a wait. The bridegroom was delayed for some time. They all grew tired and after a time they all fell asleep. But at midnight, a loud call rang out that said the bridegroom is here. Come to meet him, and they all woke up quickly and trimmed their lamps. The foolish virgins went to the wise ones and said, "Give us some of your oil because our lamps are about to go out." The wise ones said, "There's not enough oil for all of us. Therefore, go quickly go to the dealers and get more oil and return." So the foolish ones did this, but as they did the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding feast and the doors were closed. After a while, the foolish virgins got back. When they got back, they saw that the door was closed and they knocked on the door. They said "Lord, Lord, let us in!", but the bridegroom replied to them, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." And then Jesus told His disciples to be watching therefore because no one knows the day or the hour. This is the story from God's Word.

Now if you're in his community group or you're with us in the young adult ministry, you can definitely tell I went to the Zac Nile school of Bible storying. I think it's a really helpful way to learn God's Word and to experience God's Word. I think that

talking about a parable this morning really lends itself to that format. I'm really excited about sharing this passage with you guys this morning. I think it's a fantastic parable. There is so much for all of us in this passage.

Right at the top before we get going I want to lay some groundwork before we get into it so that we can get more out of it when we look at the body of the text. I want to give you a little bit of background. First, I want to talk about parables. We're in a parable this morning and that's a little bit different than going through Paul's letters or going through the gospels. Every different genre that we look at in Scripture there is going to be some different things we want to know. So with this parable in specific this is a structure that Jesus uses often, not in every parable but in many of them. It is called the simple three-point parable. It's simple because there's one main point. That main point is that we need to get ready.

Then it's a three-point parable because there are three main characters. We're going to learn a little bit from each of them and they're all going to point to that one main point. Usually in the structure when there is a three-point there is one authority figure. A lot of times it will be a king or a father or a master of some kind. In this case it's the bridegroom.

Then we have two contrasting subordinates, two characters beneath them who were usually opposites. Think about the prodigal son and his brother. Think about the two debtors. In this case we've got foolish virgins and wise virgins. So we have the three main characters. We can look at each of them. We can learn something from each of them. And it's all going to point to this one big point. So that's just a word on the structure of this parable in the story that we're going to look at.

Next we need to know a little bit about this historical context. I say a little bit because this can be somewhere we can go down that rabbit trail forever because it's really interesting. It's interesting to know all the little things about what's going on there, but I don't think that we all need too much, but we need something. It wouldn't work for me to just tell you that it's about a wedding. You know weddings. I don't know about you guys but at my wedding we didn't go to Lisa's parents' house and make all the agreements. There weren't tiki torches that we carried to my house for a big party afterwards. That's not how it worked for my wedding. We need to understand what's

going on in this first century Jewish context. What's going on with this wedding? What are the virgins all about? Where do their lamps come into play? Here's the basics. That was the way their weddings were structured. They would go to the bride's house. They would work out some of the technicalities. They'd figure out the dowry, those kinds of things. So there would be this service that happens at the bride's house.

Then the virgins are basically bridesmaids to the bridegroom. They're there to serve the bridegroom. A big role that they play is this procession that goes from the bride's house to the groom's house. At the groom's house, there's a huge feast, a huge party. It is the main event of the wedding. Their role is to be there for that procession. It is a big part of their job. In these weddings, the bridegroom is the star of the show. He is the really important character. So with that context and knowing sort of what the parable is, we can look back at our story and we can understand it a little bit better.

The reason that the virgins wanted the extra oil was for their lamps so their lamps wouldn't go out until it's time to go to the feast. What we see in this one is that it took a long time at the bride's house. The bridegroom gets delayed for quite a while, for longer than they were expecting. That's why everyone falls asleep. And then of course we see that the foolish virgins don't have enough oil. They asked for some oil from the wise ones. They said you've got to go run to Walmart real quick and get some. When they get to the party, the doors are closed.

And like I said, I think that the main point of this is very clear and that is that we need to have a sense of urgency. We have to get ready because the bridegroom is coming and nobody knows when. So in chapter 24, Jesus has been talking about this same thing. He has shared a couple of stories already. The point of the stories He has shared up to this point is that the Son of Man is coming quickly. In those, the character, the Son of Man, comes before anyone expects. It's really quick and sudden and that was the point of those stories. In this one we see the opposite. We see that it is a delay. That's the main part. He takes longer than expected and because of that delay it leads to some complacency. It's helpful for us to see what He has been talking about. He's going to come quickly. And now He's saying it might be a while. And if it's going to be a while, you've got to be ready to wait and you've got to be ready to leap in to action. It's

going to take a while and then it will be sudden. That's the gist of our parable. That's the main idea.

I think that there is a ton that we can learn from it and like I said I think that we can learn from every character. The most helpful way for us to investigate this parable to take a look at each of the main characters or groups of characters and see what we can learn from them. So that's what we're going to do. We're going to start off with the group that I think we can learn the most from and that is the foolish virgins. They're going to teach us that you have to get ready for yourself. While I was getting ready for this sermon, one of my friends shared a story that I thought was a perfect picture of their experience in this parable. My friend talked about how when she was younger her mom would regularly go shopping on Saturdays. When she was going shopping, she would give them a list of chores and say these things have to be done before I get home. It was very clear that the expectation was the chores need to be done when I get home otherwise there's going to be consequences. She said without fail that mom leaves and now they get right to work on the chores. No, they never did that. Kids don't do that. They would play games. They would watch TV. They would eat cereal. They wouldn't get to the chores. Then she talked about the terrifying feeling when you see mom's car pulling into the driveway and the chores aren't done. There's a frantic frenzy to get as much done as they could before she walked in the door. She said to this day she can still remember that fear. Every time she hears the garage door open, her heart rate increases a little bit.

I think that's a good picture of what the foolish virgins experienced in this story. They are not prepared for the long wait. They don't have enough oil and ultimately they get left out of the party. I think that the original audience is just like today. I think that the eternal implications of that were clear to that original audience just like today. There might be some questions from the story, but we're not asking what does that mean. I think it's quite clear. If we had to characterize the foolish virgins and use the word that is used a lot today, I think we'd call them hypocrites to an extent. They agreed to be a part of this marriage ceremony. They agreed to be a part of the bridegroom's help. They were in the wedding party and they were there to serve the bridegroom, but they weren't ready to invest their time. They weren't ready to wait. They were ready for a quick

ceremony and then get straight to the party. So there's definitely this issue there, this hypocrisy.

There's also some entitlement issues. They demanded the oil from the wise virgins. They didn't bring their own. They said give me yours. And when they get back and the door is closed, they knock on the door. They're fully expecting someone to let them in even though they didn't do their part, even though they weren't ready. It's really easy for us to look at some of the bad guys in the Gospels and point fingers and say man, I don't want to be like them. I don't want to be like the Pharisees. I'm not like the foolish virgins. This week I kind of fell into this trap. While I was preparing the sermon, the whole time I was preparing it I was sort of putting myself in the sandals of the wise virgins. Yeah, that's me. I've got my oil. I'm a pastor. I'm good to go. The more I looked at it, the more I thought about it, the more I was specifically preparing this part, it hit me. If I look at the last week of my life, at the last seven days and I think of how much of that was spent with urgency for Christ, how much of that was spent being ready, I didn't see the urgency. I thought that if Christ had come back then, He would've caught me sleeping. I saw some of that hypocrisy in myself. I want you to be careful not to just nod about the foolish virgins and miss that that is us sometimes.

The big problem I think that they had is that they weren't ready for themselves. They always expected someone else to bail them out and that is just not how it works in this life. You can't live on someone else's faith. Carlon can stand here and preach the Gospel to us. He can preach God's Word, but Carlon can't believe the Gospel for us. You can go to Ron's office and he can give you good godly counsel but he can't live your life for you. Zac can challenge us to investigate our Bible, to love our Bible but he's not going to love our Bibles for us. Caitlin's done a great job as the outreach director giving us opportunities to live this kingdom minded life, but she can't live that life for us. Just like the foolish bridesmaids, the unprepared in this life are going to reach a point beyond return.

If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, if you've been coming to church your whole life and you never quite bought it, or if someone invited you and you came to visit today, or maybe you've always just assumed you're Christian, when you really think about you've never really made your faith your own. I want you to learn from

the foolish virgins. They weren't prepared and like we said they reached a point where it was too late. I would say don't. Don't wait. Turn to Jesus today. If you're a Christian this morning, don't miss your own hypocrisy. Don't do what I did and assume you're in this place but your life doesn't at all point to that. That's what we can learn from the foolish virgins.

Next let's look at the wise ones. I'm going to use bridesmaid, women in this. All those terms are interchangeable here. The wise bridesmaids are going to teach us to get ready despite others and despite everything else is going on. The wise bridesmaids are the counterpoint to the foolish ones, but they are the same in every single way except for that one very critical way. They are ready. They've got the extra oil.

Here's kind of a good spot to mention this idea of oil. In some of the parables that Jesus teaches, there's a spiritual significance in every little part. Jesus tells us that significance. In some of the parables, we really want to look at those main characters and we don't want to get too hung up on the little details. Don't get too hung up on the oil. Don't try make the oil means something that it doesn't necessarily mean. If we want the oil to be the Gospel, why didn't the wise virgins share the Gospel? If we want the oil to be the Holy Spirit, why isn't there enough Holy Spirit to go around? Don't get hung up on the little details. Don't get hung up on the oil.

I think the more important idea is the idea of readiness in this parable. What does ready look like? A picture that I really like to think of is from the award-winning and very awesome Broadway musical *Hamilton*. It's the story of Alexander Hamilton, one of the founders of our nation. A big theme in the musical is how Hamilton is nonstop. He is always at work. There is this frenetic energy about him and there is a song that says why do you write like you're running out of time? Write day and night like you're running out of time. He was always at work. The reason he was always at work was because he was founding a nation. They were setting all this new ground. His character is characterized by this urgency and this hard work. I think that's what's in view here.

If you're a Christian, what is that being ready? I think it's being a disciple. a great place to look at that is Matthew 4:19. Jesus says, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." If you're a disciple, you need to follow Christ. He also said that I'm going make you fishers of men. He is transforming us into something. If you're a disciple, you follow

Christ and are being transformed by Christ. Furthermore, if you're a disciple you're on mission for Christ. We're fishers of men. So what is being ready? It's being a disciple. It's following Christ. It's being transformed by Christ. It's being on mission for Christ.

Another great place to look that we've looked at as a church body recently is Matthew 5:27 in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus teaches us how to live the Christian life. I think that's being ready. Living out the Sermon on the Mount. Finding ways to live the Gospel like we talked about just this morning. I think it's living with urgency as though the Bridegroom might come today. But it's also having enough gas in the tank in case He waits for another 30 or 40 years. You have to live this life despite the distractions and the way the people around you are living.

I don't know first century wedding prep and how it worked. I'm not sure exactly how they did it, but I've been in some weddings in the 21st century and the bridesmaids all get together and they'll get ready together. They spend the whole morning getting ready together and that is a big part of it. I can just imagine what it was like when they are getting ready for this wedding and the wise virgins said I've got my cask of oil. The foolish ones would be saying, "What are you doing with that? That is not the right accessory for my outfit. I'm not going to smell like olive oil all night. I'm not going to bring extra oil. He's going to go in there. It will be 15 minutes and then we're going to go to the feast. We really don't need this extra oil." The wise bridesmaids had to make that decision despite what was going on around them. Again, that's conjecture, but they had to make that decision to bring the extra oil. Today the world is not going to encourage you to live your life for Christ. That's not what we're going to hear from the people around us in the world. There may be some people that even pity us. Some people are going to say that we're crazy, or that our faith is a crutch of some kind. We need to love those people. We need to be patient with those people. We need to share the Gospel with those people. But we also have to live this ready life despite everything that's going on around us and despite what the people are saying.

We've got to be like a fireman that is able to hurry up and wait. Train and train and train. Be prepared. Be able to leap into action in a moment's notice. But from what I understand, there's more waiting involved than actual firefighting, than actual crises. That's what we have to be ready to do. We have to be fully prepared. We also have to

be prepared to wait. So again here when we look at the wise virgins, we can learn Christians live this ready life. If you believe in Jesus, then live your life as if heaven was real. Live your life as if you want to be a part of that wedding feast. If you're not a Christian, I'm glad you're here today. This is where we want you to be. You need to hear that nobody can believe for you.

I was listening this week to a podcast. Justin Forsett was on there. He's a former NFL running back. They were asking him about his faith and what it was like being in college and being a big star but also taking his faith seriously. They asked if that was difficult for him. He said that wasn't that difficult for him because he knew who he was in Christ. I thought this was interesting when he said this next thing. He said that most people say when kids go to college, they lose their faith. But the truth of the matter is that when kids go to college, they don't lose their faith. They lose their parents' faith. I think he's right. Nobody can believe for you. There will be a point where we have to give an account for our lives and mom and dad aren't going to be there. Carlon is not going to be there. You're not going to have your community group leader vouching for you saying this was their attendance. This is going to be on us. No one is able to do that for you. Hear this message clearly.

Finally, I want us to look at the bridegroom. What can we learn from the bridegroom in this story? We've learned about getting ready. We've learned about getting ready for ourselves despite everything going on around us. The next thing we want to see is that we're getting ready for a person. That person is Jesus Christ. It's easy for us to get really busy and do all kinds of things but we need to fix our eyes on Jesus, on the Bridegroom. The bridegroom is the main character of the story. He is not in it a whole lot but he's the catalyst of everything that happens. All of the big action of the story is because of the bridegroom. He is the star of the show. We learn from the parable that he takes a little while. He delays. We can learn that from this parable. Jesus is coming and He's waited 2000 years already, so there's been some delay. But when it comes, it will be sudden and we're going to want to be ready.

Now the delay in the story says that he takes a while and because of that, all ten virgins fall asleep. I'm not pointing fingers. We've got one or two sleepers in the crowd today and that's ok. I'm not about to tell you to elbow them and wake them up because

you remember the wise ones and the foolish ones both fell asleep and maybe they're the wise ones and they know what's going on. Sometimes church can be a sleepy place and that can be a little bit of a problem. I think that the big question that we have to ask ourselves is can we wake up with urgency? Can we trim the wick and leap into action? Can we make disciples and push back the darkness in our communities? I ask that because I think that in this parable, the stakes are very, very high. The wise virgins get to go in with the bridegroom and they get to go to the wedding feast and enjoy the presence of our Lord. But the foolish bridesmaids get left out in the cold, in the darkness. They knock on the door but it doesn't open. They call out and ask to be let in. They hear a very, very chilling reply similar to something we heard from Zac's sermon a couple of weeks ago. The bridegroom says truly I say to you, I do not know you. And this group associated with the bridegroom were a part of his wedding party but they didn't take him seriously. They weren't prepared to wait for him. They weren't prepared for his sudden arrival. So you have to be ready, to have your gaze fixed on Jesus.

Jared Wilson wrote an article recently and I thought that was really helpful. Maybe the best part of the article was the title. The title was "Danger: Doing Jesus-y Stuff Without Knowing Jesus". It talked about how we can really work hard, and I'm calling for us to work really hard, but to work really hard with Christ in mind. He said that we can work really hard and then we can look to the things that we do and say that we're good to go because of our hard work. We can say that's what is going to save us – all the things that we did for Jesus. He says we have to look at the work that Jesus did. That's the only work that's going to save. So if you're a Christian, your heart has to belong to Jesus. You can't fall prey to the danger of doing Jesus-y stuff without knowing Jesus.

Again, if you're not a Christian, don't find yourself outside that door. Jesus says to look out because nobody knows the day or the hour. That's the point of the story. We don't know when He is coming back, but we're closer to it today than we were yesterday. I think there needs to be some urgency. What I would encourage you to do is to turn from your sin and turn to Jesus. He's the only way out of your brokenness. That's because Jesus came down into our brokenness and He lived on this earth. He lived among us and He lived a perfect life. I was reading a book this week and it was talking

about how Jesus never sinned. It said that He never even wasted time, He never argued with His parents. He just led the perfect life for us, and then He died as a sacrifice for all of our sins. When I say all of our sins, I don't mean just the sins of the people of His day. No, I'm talking about us too. Then He rose from the dead and He's alive for us today. If you don't know Jesus, I can tell you, you can try to get out of your brokenness in a lot of different way. You can try and get all the education in the world. You can learn things. You can get a really good job and try to work your way out of it. You can try relationships and turn to someone else and see if they can fix you. But I'm here to tell you that the only way to get out of that cold night and into that party is by knowing the Bridegroom and being known by Him, by being one of His.

As we're winding down, I want to talk about one more way to be ready. This can go in a slightly different direction but it's something I thought about a lot this week and something that's been on my heart that I wanted to share with you. I hope the sermon makes you want to read your Bible a little bit more. I challenge you guys this week to be like the Bereans in Acts 17. Just look at your Bible and see if what I told you today was the truth. Just double check me in God's Word and see if what I said was true. I want to challenge you guys.

We talked about a parable today. We learned about parables. Parables are a great place to start, so go find another parable, a parable you've always liked or one that you're interested in, maybe one that you've never studied. See if you can find the main characters of the parable. See if you can figure out what Jesus is trying to teach us, then how He's trying to do that through the different characters and the different parts of the story. I think that parables are great because they are very instructive. They're very practical and they ultimately teach us about the Kingdom of God. That can be helpful for us.

I just hope that your weekly Bible intake doesn't consist of listening to someone up here tell you what the Bible says. I want you to enjoy it for yourself. I think if we're going to know God, love people, and live the Gospel, we're not going to know God apart from His Word. So, I hope that you love your Bible and spend some time in your Bible.

Now if I could boil this whole sermon down to one word, I think that word would be urgency. I think that's what Jesus is trying to teach us. We have to have urgency. We

can tell because in the last line, Jesus says for us to watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour. So we need to be urgent. If you have conflict in your life with someone, you need to work to resolve it sooner rather than later. If you've got a friend or family member or co-worker who you've felt a burden to share the gospel with, don't wait. Make those arrangements today. Catch up with them this week and share the truth with them. If you've been saying for years that you'll be a Christian someday, you'll start coming to church someday, you'll take your faith serious someday, don't wait. One of the great things about this story is that the door is not shut yet, but one day it will be.

Finally, I want to do a little bit of diagnostics. I want you to ask yourself some hard-hitting questions. Think about in light of this parable, how are you living today? Does your life look like a disciple? When was the last time you shared the gospel? Do people scratch their heads when they look at the way that you choose to spend your time? Or does it make perfect sense to your neighbors and the people around you? That was something that really convicted me.

Finally, are you trying to live on someone else's faith? You've got to get ready for yourself despite what others are doing. You need to remember this is not some abstract getting ready or getting ready for something, but getting ready for someone. And that someone is Jesus.

Let's pray. Father God, we love You and we thank You for your Word. Lord, we pray that we would learn from this story and from the wise virgins. We pray that we would be ready, that we would examine our lives frequently and look at the way that we're living. We pray that we would live that ready life for You, that we would be disciples that are sold out for You, that are making disciples and enjoying Your Word. We pray that we would learn from the foolish virgins. We pray that we would not depend on someone else for our faith, that we would not look anywhere else but that You would help us to have a personal relationship with You. And Father, I pray we would learn from the bridegroom, that you'd help us look to Christ and to keep our eyes fixed on Him. We look forward to that celebration and being in the presence of our Lord. I pray that you would help us in that looking forward, to motivate us, to be a catalyst for us to

look at the way we're living and live in a way that's ready, that's excited for Your coming. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.