

## Are You Ready?

Matthew 25:1-13

This is the story of a Jewish marriage celebration and those not ready for it. In verse 1, the first word is “then.” It’s a linking word and keeps us in connection with chapter 24 and the concerns of the disciples who wanted to know, “*When will you return?*” “*What are the signs of your coming?*” “*How will the world end?*” Jesus answers their questions with statements about deception and destruction and desolation ... wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, the Antichrist ... and now, He’s talking about a delay.

The parable of Jesus teaches us there is an end to this world. Jesus is going to return one day. So Jesus then tells four parables.

He told the parable of The Fig Tree, and we understand that the rebirth of the nation of Israel is a sign that Israel’s winter season is coming to an end, and the blooming tree signifies the rebirth and a coming summer season. He told the parable of The Thief. He calls for us to take necessary precautions. Don’t be caught off guard. Don’t be taken by surprise. He told the parable of The Faithful and Wise Servant, which is a call for God’s people to be found busy in the fields of ministry as we look toward the coming of the Lord of the harvest. We should live in light of His coming and be faithful, fruitful, fervent, and with an ambition for true holiness.

Now, he tells the parable of The Ten Virgins ... and this parable is about how we should look for the coming of the Lord ... what our attitude should be as we labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

In Mathew 25:6, the Bible says, “***At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’***” Matthew 25:6

The word “*midnight*” means “*in the middle of the night.*” Midnight is the final hour of the day. It’s the darkest point of the night. We are clicking and ticking closer and closer to the midnight hour in America. If we don’t have revival in America, if Jesus doesn’t come, we are headed for absolute disintegration. We are almost at the midnight hour. Time is running out. The Bible says that, in the midnight hour, there was a cry made, “Behold, the bridegroom comes. Go out to meet him!” Jesus is coming. The message of the parable is at the “midnight cry” you have to be ready for the coming of The Bridegroom.

The message of the parable is that in between the time the bridegroom leaves and returns, there are people who are in a constant state of readiness and other people who simply ignore the matter of being ready for the Lord’s coming. This parable is telling us that there will be people who are awake and people who are asleep. There are going to be people who are living toward the coming of the bridegroom who are going to be ready when He comes, and there are people who want to be ready, but they will not be ready. They are those who once made some sort of preparation, but in the meantime, they’ve lost their fire. They lost their enthusiasm and their light, and they lose the chance to go when The Bridegroom comes.

Jesus is telling us that He’s got a concern for those who are living at the end. Not only will there be earthquakes and rumors of wars and the rise of the Antichrist, but the end will be marked by a slumbering church and sleepy saints. The warning of Christ in this parable says that as the end comes upon us—as we move toward the coming of our Master—we can’t grow weary in well doing. We can’t be taken in by things that would cause us to be slumbering in the dark when Jesus comes.

- The Groom and His Coming

The parable is set in the context of a Jewish wedding. Jewish weddings are a lot different from what we’re used to. The Middle-Eastern wedding ceremony is not centered around the bride, it’s centered around the groom. The story is about ten bridesmaids – whom the Bible calls virgins. They are unmarried wedding attendants.

One man said these “virgins” are like a choir ... they are holy voices of worship who gather to meet the groom. The Lord Jesus doesn’t want us to think of the bride as a single person, but as a holy choir, a company of people who are to meet the groom together as one, as one voice.

The parents arranged most weddings, and when they had come to terms, there was an engagement period. That engagement was every bit as sacred as our marriage vows. There was a pledge of fidelity and devotion. They had to remain faithful to one another. Later on, they would be wed by exchanging vows before witnesses.

After the ceremony, the groom established himself in a trade and prepared a home. Finally, often months later, the wedding feast was held. The wedding feast could last for a week, and the whole community was involved. It began when the groom led his groomsmen through the city to the bride’s father’s house where she waited with her bridesmaids. It was a huge parade toward the feast. Because it took place in the evening, torches and lamps were used ... when the feast was over, the best man put the bride’s hand into the groom’s hand ... they lived happily ever after.

These are the signs of our Lord’s coming. Our Father has made a contract, and those terms were established on the cross. There on the cross, justice met with grace, and mercy with truth. The contract was made, and the ring of the Holy Spirit was given. We’ve been living in the engagement period.

We’re waiting while He goes to build a home, a bridal suite, the place for someone who is saving herself for her beloved, and she can make it into a home. We will feast at The Marriage Supper of the Lamb when the groom comes to take us to His house to be with Him forever.

- He describes the Church at the end.

The striking image here is how God’s people will be characterized in the last days. There are those who had, at some point, been ready. They started out with a right kind of commitment. They started out with an allegiance to holy things and lived a pure lifestyle.

The bridesmaids had with them “lamps.” The Greek term is Lampas, which referred to torches wrapped with oil-soaked clothes. They were to light the way for the wedding procession and to identify the members of the party as participants. These lamps are much like how modern bridesmaids wear special dresses. If you had no torch, you were a wedding crasher, and you’d be asked to leave. Since the party could last for hours and hours, and sometimes for days, The chances were that they’d run out of what kept the fire going. The difference between them was that some of them had the abundance of oil, and some of them didn’t. That oil indicates whether or not we have what it takes to go with the bridegroom.

Outwardly they looked ready, but something was wrong! All ten looked the same on the outside. They dressed like bridesmaids and looked like bridesmaids. They had lamps, they had the clothes like they were in a wedding party. Yet something was very wrong.

The warning of Christ: It’s possible to have every outward indication that you’re part of the bridal company, and yet be left out in the end! What was on the inside finally showed up.

What it’s going to take is people who have the oil reserve to make it through the midnight hours.

This parable tells us that the end will be marked by:

### **1. The Last Days Will Be Marked By MISGUIDED BELIEVERS.**

*“The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.” Matthew 24:3*

They had used their oil on something else and had not refilled it. The way they lived made them unprepared. There is shocking apathy here. The wedding was at night. The bridegroom would return at night, and with all the conditions indicating that they would need oil, they had not prepared. We are living in days of apathy. We have economic uncertainty, war, nuclear threats, moral breakdowns, and people live as if none of it moves them. Because they were unconcerned, they were unprepared. They took their torch, but they didn't bring any oil. They had the instrument of light, but they had nothing to keep it burning.

The last days will be demanding days. You will need a reserve beyond what you possess now. Jesus said in Matthew 7, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he 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 perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”* Matthew 7:21-23

It is possible to look good on the outside and to call on the name of Jesus, but still live like the world, with no conscience about how you live and act like the world. It is amazing what we can get comfortable with in our day.

They were misguided. They thought that all they needed was an outer shell, but it was the resource of oil that would make the difference. It was never a pressing concern to store up for the long night. It was never a priority to put something into their lives that would see them through the long wait. They would need something to get them through the long wait. It's the story of too many Christians who just don't have a reserve to draw on.

We are living in days where people don't have enough oil in their lives to keep their lamp burning when things get dark. There are some people who just don't prepare for life. They have no interest in being prayed up. They have nothing of the Bible dwelling in them richly. They're not rooted and grounded. They have no oil because they simply think that they won't need it. It is not just about being ready for the return. It is about having enough for the dark night.

I'm telling you that it makes a difference in the lives of people, people who have had to go through tough things, and when the night fell and they were waiting on the Lord to show up, they had enough oil to see them through the midnight hour.

The dark times come for everyone. They lost their way because they had no oil to get them through the night!

The sure return. He said He was coming, and one of these days, exactly what He told us about will happen.

This is the story of people who came up short at the end.

Ever heard anyone say, “I'm a little short.” This is short in the worst possible way.

It makes a difference when you have had to go through some things. When the night falls, when you are waiting on the Lord to show up, you must have enough oil to see you through the midnight hour.

It makes a difference when you have enough oil to see you through the midnight hour.

This parable tells us:

## **2. The Last Days Will Also Be Marked By MATURE BELIEVERS.**

*“The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.”* Matthew 24:4

Those who carried their oil with them wanted to have enough for the night. They wanted to be ready with their oil. They didn't want to come up short because they wanted to get it right. We've got to understand that, in order for them to keep oil ready, that's one more vessel that they've got to tend to over the long wait. That's one more responsibility, and it takes effort. That's one more thing to think about and work around, but if that's what it takes to get it right in the darkness of the midnight, they'd do it!

They were willing to do whatever it took to be ready when the bridegroom came. That's the sign of a mature believer. If they've got to be inconvenienced, they'll do it to make things right. If they've got to be overloaded, if they've got to do one more thing, listen to one more word of counsel, pray one more prayer, forgive one more time, hear things out once more, they'll do it. It may make the road a little harder to travel, but if I'm going to be ready when the Bridegroom comes, I'm willing to do that one more thing.

People are fragile, and they can't take one more thing. The mature Christian just wants to know, "What do I have to do? What do I have to carry? What do I need to adjust or change?"

- The CRISIS at the End

Verse 5 says, "*The Bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.*" Matthew 25:5

It's a prophetic statement about the crisis at the end of time. People will be anticipating Jesus, but they'll be spiritually asleep at the end. They'll be asleep and not even know it! Have you ever done that? Isn't it a scary feeling? To have drifted into a state of unconsciousness because the temptation to rest just seemed to overwhelm you, and you'd wake up with a jump and a fright and wonder, "Have I missed my turn?"

Jesus saw a time at the end when the crisis would be that people would spiritually drift off to sleep. They dozed off. They became inactive. Their spiritual life and fellowship with the Lord became so stagnant that they were dying inside. People do things when they're asleep that they wouldn't do if they were awake! When you're asleep, you make sounds that you wouldn't dare make when you're awake. In fact, you dream of things that wouldn't even cross your mind when you're awake.

People are doing things they wouldn't normally do at a wedding because they're asleep. They woke up and thought, "I can't believe I did that." They're doing things and going places and tolerating stuff that they'd never tolerate IF THEY WERE AWAKE. When we start making excuses for ungodly behavior. When we look over things that we know are wrong, it's a sign that we're spiritually asleep, and we'd never do those things if we were awake.

I just want you to notice that people don't usually sleep at a wedding celebration. This isn't the normal way of doing things. There's usually rejoicing.

*"Then 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.'"* Matthew 25:8

Jesus is trying to say that there are some things that can't be borrowed from anybody else. This is one of them. There are some things you can borrow from somebody else. Mama is a Christian? Mama goes to church every Sunday. That won't save you. Daddy is a deacon in the church. That won't save you. You have some good friends who are Christians and go to church every Sunday. That won't save you. Everybody has to come to Jesus for themselves. You have to be saved for yourself. You have to get the oil personally. Do you have the oil? Do you have Jesus in your heart?

*"While they went to buy the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage and the door was shut."* Matthew 25:10

The door was shut, is at the same time one of the gladdest statements in the Bible and yet one of the saddest statements in the Bible. For those who were saved, they were prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they went in with the Lord, and the door was shut. That means they were shut in.

How wonderful it will be when Jesus takes us into heaven, and we are shut in safe and secure in heaven with Jesus forever. No more pain, no more sorrow, no more death, no more heartache. That's all gone. We're shut in with Jesus Christ forever. What a blessing that's going to be.

But at the same time, it's the saddest statement in the whole Bible because those who are unprepared were shut out. It means the door of opportunity is closed. It's too late.

*"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.'" Matthew 25:11-12*

You may know all the right words. You have the language of a Christian, but you don't live the life of a Christian. If your life has never been changed, then the Bible teaches very plainly that nothing has ever happened to you. If you knocked on the door of heaven and Jesus came to the door, what would you say to Jesus, and what would Jesus say to you?

*"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some people count slackness, but is long-suffering to us not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9*