



Watch Therefore and Be Prepared

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 25:1-13

July 7, 2013

Pastor Eddie Strickland

-Read Mt 24:45-25:13

Intro:

-The main application point for the last two Sundays has been to ask ourselves the question--- Am I ready for the return of Christ? Now we may think that we are done with that application point but Jesus does not stop. No, He continues on in Chapter 25 with 3 more parables that will continue to teach His disciples the necessity of continual readiness for His return. His warnings will be intensified and drill down close to home. And the emphasis that Jesus continues to place on watchfulness, we know that He considers it important and so should we beloved.

-Instead of speaking of people who are obviously saved or lost such as those that perished in the flood or the wicked servant of chapter 24 that we just read about, Jesus now seems to speak of people who look like believers and even think they are saved but who will not be ready when He comes. Hence, we see the importance of paying attention to what Jesus is teaching us. Yes, it may be repetitive but Jesus knows how important our readiness is. He knows that it will determine eternal destinies and so we better continue to pay attention. That goes for all of us as we will see Jesus drill down into the church and tell us that even in the visible church there are those who are prepared and there are those who think they are prepared but are not.

-And Jesus' teaching in chapter 25 with these 3 parables has a theme that runs through each story. In each of these parables we find some things in common.

1 – Each reveals that the return of the Lord will be sudden and unexpected. In the parable of the ten virgins that we will look at today, He comes at midnight when the virgins are asleep. In the parable of the talents the master returns after a long time and when least expected. And in

the parable of the sheep and goats it is uncertain when the Son of Man will come in His glory but it is certain. Jesus' point is that even though His disciples want to know when He would come and the age would end---that was not something that they would be privy to and couldn't know for no one knows except the Father.

2 – In each parable the Lord's return results in an unalterable division between 2 groups of people. We saw that last week as we looked at the prepared and the unprepared. Two will be working in the field and at the grinding mill and one will be taken and one will be left. That teaching continues throughout chapter 25 and results in judgment of the unprepared. It's interesting that the root meaning of the word judgment is division. A day of judgment is coming---that is certain and it will result in a marked division.

3 – In each parable of chapter 25, the people who are lost are utterly surprised at their rejection by Christ. Their rejection of Him, even if self-deceived, results in His rejection of them and they are shocked. This is a weighty thought. These parables are not about people who have no use for Christ but they think they are saved and on their way to heaven but their destiny is hell. No wonder Jesus is continuing to tell us to keep watch and be ready.

-So we are going to dig into the parable of the ten virgins today and here's how we are going to do it. We are just going to go through it and make comments and then we are going to look at how all the virgins were alike and different and then we are going to look at the lessons we can learn and then we will talk about how to be prepared. So let's dig in.

1 – The Parable of the Ten Virgins (1-13)

-Before we dig in I think it will be helpful to take a look at some of the wedding customs that were practiced in that day. I think this will help us better understand what's taking place here. And, we are not going to get bogged down in the details about the wedding either as that is not the point Jesus is trying to make which is why we don't have all the details. Things that could distract our attention like the bride's identity or where did the virgins sleep etc etc are not the emphasis of the story so don't get lost in them.

Wedding Customs:

-Weddings were very important events and everything would be set aside for this. A Jewish marriage consisted of three parts. The first was the engagement and was often arranged by the fathers of the bride and groom and the couple had little direct involvement. The second part was the betrothal and ceremony and during this stage the bride and groom were considered married. If the groom died the bride was considered a widow and vice versa. The only way the relationship could be broken was by formal divorce so it was binding. At the end of the betrothal period the wedding feast would be held and it was in the feast that the entire community would become involved. This festivity could last a week and it began with the groom and his groomsmen coming to the bride's house where her bridesmaids were waiting with her for the groom to arrive. Then together the bride and the groom and their attendants would then parade through the streets, usually back to the groom's house, proclaiming that the wedding feast was about to begin. The procession was generally begun at night and lamps or torches were used by the wedding party to illumine their way and to attract attention to the festivity. This was a big deal and no one really expected any punctuality so there could be delays.

-As far as the bridesmaids or attendants, married women were not allowed to be attendants of the bride but girls of marryable age. They helped the bride get dressed and acted as her attendants. And when the bridegroom came they would have been part of the procession to his home for the feast and they would be responsible for having their torches prepared so that they could light the way for all in the wedding party.

So with that being said, let's dig into the parable---read it again and make comments along the way.

The Parable Story:

-“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.” (Matthew 25:1, ESV)

-First of all consider the conjunction that Matthew uses---he starts this parable off with then. That word carries the meaning of a point of time that is subsequent from another point of time and Jesus is using it here to connect this parable with the previous teaching in chapter 24 concerning His return. And Jesus, with this verse, puts us into the context clearly of a wedding so our wedding customs will help us understand what Jesus is going to teach us.

-Now in mentioning the kingdom of heaven here Jesus will compare the preparedness for entering His presence in heaven to the preparedness of a certain 10 virgins who served as bridesmaids at a wedding. Why? Because we can understand that. Remember---Jesus is not trying to confuse His disciples but He really wants them to understand and He wants us to understand. His heart is for His disciples and that means that if you really are one of His children then His heart is FOR YOU!

-In using the word virgins, don't get caught up in the sexual sense of the word. The point here is not that these girls were sexually pure but just the fact that they were girls of age to be married. Remember the custom, married women at that time were not bridesmaids. I don't know why but that was just the custom. Remember, this is a parable so don't demand to know all the details.

-So entrance into the kingdom of heaven is like these bridesmaids that took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Remember, it was the responsibility of the bridesmaids to carry lamps or torches and go and meet the bridegroom and to provide light for the procession of the entire wedding party to the marriage feast. So the capability of their torches to burn for a while and provide that light was important. Let's keep going.

-“Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.” (Matthew 25:2–4, ESV)

-Here we see once again that the coming of the Son of Man will cause a division and there will be a distinct, marked difference between people as they will be classified as a member of only two groups of people that exist. Here we see that 5 were foolish (unprepared) and 5 were wise. Don't get caught up in taking the even division of 5 in each group to try and determine

how many people are going to be saved in relation to how many will be lost and experience judgment. The point is that there are two groups here.

-And what's the difference between the two groups? Their preparedness for the coming of the bridegroom. The five foolish took their lamps but took no oil with them. The five wise not only took their lamps but took flasks of oil with them so that they would be prepared.

-These lamps or torches on a pole were made up of rags that were soaked in oil and put on fire to burn and provide light. But the oil would not burn for extended periods of time, especially the time needed for a wedding procession and celebration through the streets, so one would need to be prepared with extra oil so that they could fulfill the task of providing light for the procession and to identify the wedding party. Now these bridesmaids would have known this and yet, five of them just discard what they know and are not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. Now, we would want to make excuses for them and say that they didn't know that the bridegroom was going to be delayed so they couldn't help it. We like to make excuses especially for ourselves but the negligence of these 5 foolish girls can't be judged as some unfortunate oversight that can be blamed on the delay of the bridegroom but it must be judged as inexcusable and punishable carelessness.

-Now, contrast the wise against the foolish and see the difference. The wise girls reasoned that there was no way of knowing when the bridegroom would come because, remember, punctuality was not really expected. The bridegroom just might be late so they took extra oil in flasks so they would be prepared to provide light for the procession. They were wise and so they were prepared.

-And the bridegroom was delayed. Look at verse 5.

-“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.” (Matthew 25:5, ESV)

-No one knew when the bridegroom would arrive. It may just be when no one expects him too. Anyway, the bridegroom was delayed and they all became sleepy and they all went to sleep.

-Now, we immediately read this verse and think that all of them falling asleep was bad. How could they do that? But Jesus speaks no word of rebuke for sleeping like He did to the disciples in the garden. Actually, sleeping was probably a good thing. Think about it. When the bridegroom does show up then there are going to be many activities that take place and there may not be much time for rest when that starts so why not get some rest now and be prepared to fulfill their responsibilities when the bridegroom does show up. That's smart thinking. It also may point out that the coming of the bridegroom is unknown and even though prepared (at least the 5 that were wise that we would try and fault here), other things still must go on in light of the coming of the bridegroom of which rest is one of them.

-And we see that the bridegroom does come when unexpected.

-“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’” (Matthew 25:6, ESV)

-The bridegroom comes when unexpected, when people should be sleeping. Now, I know many of you are night owls and midnight is just when the night starts. That's when many of you might start reading or studying and you wouldn't understand why any one could go to bed earlier than that---say like 9 when I go to bed. But the Greek meaning behind this word means in the middle of or in the midst of the time between sunset and sunrise. So this doesn't necessarily mean that the bridegroom came at 12 o'clock but he came in the midst of the night when people were not necessarily expecting him---kinda like a THIEF in the night. Sounds familiar doesn't it.

-Anyway, someone saw the bridegroom approaching and there was a cry and a command to come out and meet him.

-And here is where the difference in the two groups of girls starts to become tangibly apparent.

-“Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 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.’” (Matthew 25:7–9, ESV)

-So the bridegroom appears and all wake up and trim their lamps and immediately the foolish girls lamps burn out. Doesn’t take long for their lack of preparation to reveal itself. But there is no immediate panic because in the foolish girls minds they will just ask to borrow some oil from the wise. The thought of them losing their place in the procession because of the lack of being prepared does not enter their minds. We will just have some of the wise girls oil transferred to our lamps but what they find out is that preparedness can’t be transferred.

-They ask for some oil but get an unexpected answer from the wise. The wise tell them to go to the dealers and buy for yourselves because if we give you some of ours there will not be enough for all of us. Now again, we could look at the response of the wise and say to ourselves that they are being really selfish and that they should share and have these other girls interests at heart. Don’t think that and miss the point that Jesus is making here. The point of the wise girls response was not that they were selfish and calloused but that they were helpless to provide oil for their foolish friends. Their own oil was not enough to share with anyone else and that it was necessary that each buy her own. Think about it. If they shared and the amount of oil was not enough then the entire wedding party would be left in the dark during the procession to the feast. This was not a calloused response but one that is characteristic of the wise as they think about the welfare of the whole in their preparedness.

-Evidently you could buy oil in the middle of the night or either have to get the seller out of bed but in any case the foolish girls are off to try and rectify their being unprepared.

-“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. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’” (Matthew 25:10–11, ESV)

-So the foolish are out looking for some oil and then they return expecting to be received as the others. We don't know if they found oil or not but that is not the point. What we see is that because of their being unprepared they are excluded from the marriage feast and the door is shut with no possibility of entrance. We see that those who were ready and prepared went in with the bridegroom and enjoyed communion with him at the wedding feast but the door was shut in the foolish girls face and that was a shock to them---they didn't expect that.

-They came to the shut door and wanted in. Lord, Lord open to us they said. Lord Lord speaks of devotion and perceived knowledge of the bridegroom and their being shut out makes not sense to them. They can't understand it.

-Now don't get bogged down in the details here either. In the context of a wedding in the earthly sense these girls would probably be let in to the feast, right. But this is where we really see Jesus applying this to His coming in a real way and in a serious way. In an earthly wedding, the bridegroom would not be attending the door anyway, he would be enjoying his bride and the wedding guests and someone else would be attending the door to judge who was allowed in or invited. But here we see that Jesus, the bridegroom, will be the judge of who comes into His presence or not and here is where we see that there are no second chances. The prepared go in but the unprepared are eternally shut out even if they thought they would be included.

-We will cover verses 12 and 13 in a moment because that will be our application but before we do that I want us to look at the two groups of girls for a minute and then look at the lessons we need to learn from this parable.

2 – The Ten Virgins---How they are different AND how they are alike

-How these girls are different is easy to see---we have already talked about it. How they are different is the main point of Jesus teaching. Five of them are foolish and unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom and five of them are wise and they are prepared for the appearing of the bridegroom.

-But what we may not see so easily is how these girls are so much alike. Remember that I said that Jesus was going to drill down into the professing church. We see this in how much they are alike so let's look at the ways. And I am not going to spend much time in explaining these likenesses as they are so self-explanatory. And know that in this parable Jesus is the bridegroom and that in the church both groups exist and are waiting for the appearance of Christ.

1 – Both groups had been invited to the marriage feast. And in the church both groups exist and have heard the gospel.

2 – Both groups had responded to that invitation in a positive way. That positive response is demonstrated in their waiting for the bridegroom's appearance.

3 – Both groups had some affection for the bridegroom. Even the foolish girls were not indifferent to the bridegroom! Remember, there are different soils that the seed falls on and some receive it with joy before they fall away.

4 – Both groups confessed the bridegroom as their Lord and were devoted to him. Remember they called him Lord, Lord which shows not only that they consider him their Lord but are devoted to him. The visible church has many that do the same thing.

-““Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV)

5 – Both have joined the fellowship of those waiting for the bridegroom. There are many in the church that think they are prepared just because of their association with the people of God in the church purchased by the blood of Christ.

6 – Both believed in and in some sense were waiting for the appearing of the bridegroom. Even those foolish in the church that are not prepared but think they are, are waiting for the appearing of Christ only to find out that they will be excluded and cast out into a real hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

7 – Both have lamps that look good. The foolish are committed to the bridegroom religiously, intellectually, socially, and even emotionally but not in their heart. The outward appearance looks godly but the reality of their heart is death and a lack of intimate knowledge of the bridegroom.

8 – Both groups believe that they will be included in the marriage feast and in the presence of the bridegroom. But again here is where we see a distinction and separation of two groups of people---those who are really prepared and those who are not.

-I don't know about you but the way these 2 groups of girls are alike is scary to me. No wonder Jesus wants his disciples to be prepared.

-So what lessons do we need to learn from this teaching?

3 – Lessons to be learned

-Again, these are self-explanatory

1 – The coming of the Lord will be at a time when He is least expected and without warning. That may be at the end of time or your death whichever comes first. Are you ready? Our next breath is only by the grace of God.

2 – On that day there will be a distinction made and a separation that occurs. There are only two groups of people---those prepared and those that are not. Which are you in?

3 - On that day it will be too late for the unprepared. Just as in the parable we saw the door shut in the face of the unprepared and they were eternally shut out it will be the same at the second coming of Christ. Those who are unprepared will be shut out with no second chances and no hope of salvation.

4 – You must be ready for that day. You must be prepared. Lost opportunities to be prepared cannot be regained. Repent and believe in the gospel today.

5 – Preparedness is not transferrable. The wise had oil and the foolish did not but each must have their own. Holiness, beloved, is not transferrable from one to another---you must have your own and it is found only in personal knowledge of Christ. There are no excuses for being unprepared---inexcusable carelessness will be judged.

-We know these lessons in our mind but what are we to do to make sure they are in our hearts. This is where the last two verses of Jesus teaching can help us.

4 – Application:

“But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:12–13, ESV)

1 – We must know Christ intimately and personally!

-Remember the Matthew 7 passage we read earlier, Jesus said the same thing to those asking for entrance based on their works and what they did. Thinking that we will be acceptable before God because of what we do instead of what Christ has done is a false gospel and is evidenced by Jesus telling them "I don't know you and I never knew you." So how must we know Christ and thus be ready?

-Spurgeon Quote---"A great change has to be wrought in you, far beyond any power of yours to accomplish, ere you can go in with Christ to the marriage. You must, first of all, be renewed in your nature, or you will not be ready. You must be washed from your sins, or you will not be ready. You must be justified in Christ's righteousness, and you must put on his wedding dress, or else you will not be ready. You must be reconciled to God, you must be made like to God, or you will not be ready. Or, to come to the parable before us, you must have a lamp and that lamp must be fed with heavenly oil, and it must continue to burn brightly, or else you will not be ready. No child of darkness can go into that place of light. You must be brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, or else you will never be ready to go in with Christ to the marriage, and to be forever with him."

-To be ready and to know Christ is to have a heart that is changed by Him. It is to be a new creation with new desires. It is to love Christ for what He has done in your place. It is to know Him in a personal way. -The word know in Scripture when Jesus uses it to speak of knowledge of Him speaks to an intimacy that is to be as close as that between a husband and a wife.

-Evidences of knowing Christ this way.

-We will have a desire to know him---We will be like Paul when he said, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." My Lord--that's personal. And when it's personal with Christ we won't even think about what has been given up but what we have gained. We will not have a balance sheet mentality but we will be content in Christ alone. Do you desire to know Him intimately?

-We will see God as our Father not judge because of what Christ has done on the cross in our place and desire to commune with Him in prayer, study of His word and worship. Prayer and meeting Him in the pages of His word and worship of Him is personal. It's a matter of the heart. Is that your desire? If not then I dare say that you don't have much knowledge of Him. The Holy Creator God is our Father---that's personal.

-“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” (Romans 8:15–16, ESV)

-Think about this---we have been adopted by God and are members of His family and we call Him Father because we are His sons and daughters. That's personal. What love is it that we should be called sons of God?

-And when it's personal, our relationship with Him will be real all the time and not just on Sundays and Wednesdays and we will have the desire to serve Him because we love Christ and we will desire to pour ourselves out as a living sacrifice because of His sacrifice for us in our place---Romans 12:1-2. Living means that we now have life and sacrifice means death on the altar. Because we know and love Christ we will continually die to self and pour ourselves out for the kingdom of God and others. Is that your desire?

-We will trust Him. Greek word for judgment is krisis from which we get our English word crisis. The day of judgment will certainly be a crisis moment. And if we want to think about how we will respond on that day then we need to look at how we respond to crisis moments now in this life. Do we trust Him now? Do we draw near to Him? If we know Him personally then we will trust Him and draw near.

-We will abide in Him because we love Him.

-“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the

world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:13–19, ESV)

-Do you know the love of God?

-Are you abiding in Him---is that your desire?

-Do you know Christ like this? Those of you who don't you can. Repent and believe in the gospel and surrender yourself to Christ and will never cast you out. You can't save yourselves and you don't know when the end is coming. So don't play games and listen to yourself. Cry out to God today, right now, to open your ears to hear, your eyes to see and your heart to believe. Cry out to God for His grace and mercy to give you faith to believe and surrender to His Lordship. Respond to the gospel---do it!

-For those of us who know Christ, we can know that He and the Father loves us! That's an amazing thought really. The God of this universe loves us! Zephaniah says that He rejoices over us with gladness and exults over us with loud singing and that He will gather us for the festival. Ever meditate on how much God in Christ loves us. We should because we know it. It has been flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

-“and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5, ESV)

-Beloved, if you are in Christ God LOVES you! And there is nothing, and I mean nothing---not even us, that can separate us from the love of Christ!

-“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39, ESV)

-Beloved, do you know that Christ loves you like this? Walk in that love and that knowledge of Him. Abide in Him in that love. I pray that we will be strengthened in our inner being by His Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts and then being rooted and grounded in love we can begin to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of His love for us. And that we will know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

-Beloved, when we know Christ like this, we will have no problem obeying the last verse of this parable.

2 – We must watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour!

-When we love Christ, we will watch because we will have a desire to see Him face to face. This is personal---is this your desire?

-And once again, the question comes. Are you ready? What if it were today?

Pray

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2013

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.