

## Be on the Alert

By Don Green



**Bible Verse:** Matthew 25:1-13  
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Well, if you've been with us over the past few weeks, you know that we've been embarking on a lengthy study of the 10 Commandments from Exodus 20, and I look forward to continuing that in the weeks to come. For today, we're going to take a pause from that study so as to have a message to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table. We like to do that. We like to focus on Christ and to give time and to give our minds opportunity to dwell deeply on the things of Christ before we come to the Table. We think that's biblical. We think that's important because Scripture tells us not to come to the table in an unworthy manner, and so rather than rushing into it at the end of an unrelated message or hurrying through it in some way that is just making it nothing more than, you know, a checked box in our lives, we like to step back, consider God's word, consider Christ, and then take the elements after that, and so that's what we're going to do this morning.

It's in the nature of Communion that you look back. It's the nature of Communion as we hold the elements in our hands, the bread representing the body of Christ, the cup representing his shed blood for us, it's in the nature that we're looking back, we're remembering Christ and that's fitting. That is what we are supposed to do. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me. Look back and remember what I did for you as I bore your sins in My body on the tree. Look back and remember that. Be humbled by what I have done. Be grateful for what I have done and grow in your love for Me." And so there is a necessary important element of remembering and looking back as we celebrate Communion.

But there's also an element that Scripture points us to, that there is also an element of looking forward that is a part of celebrating Communion. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 11, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." And so we're not simply standing at a point in time only looking back when we celebrate the Lord's Table, there's also an element of recognition that we are looking forward to a time when Christ comes again, and we are refreshing our hearts in our Lord, we are participating in Communion with him and with each other now but we are also looking forward recognizing that the way the world is now is not the way that it will always be. We are looking forward to a supernatural intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ in world history in which he will bring all things to judgment and bring all things to accomplish the purposes which the Father set into motion before time began.

Jesus even at the Last Supper with his disciples said this to give us a sense of that future anticipation; it's not simply commemoration but also anticipation that we engage in at the Table. Jesus told his disciples at the Last Supper, he said, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." Even as he was establishing the ordinance of Communion, he himself was looking forward to that future day when all of the ones that have loved him, all of the ones that he has saved, would gather together and we would drink of the fruit of the vine with him fresh in the kingdom of God. What a glorious day that's going to be.

So we remember but we also anticipate. We look back but we also look forward. And this future return of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to biblical Christianity. The world will not always continue as it now is, and though mockers may say, as Peter mentions in one of his letters, you know, "Where is the promise of His coming because things just continue the same as they do day-to-day?" God has showed us in his word and part of our faith is a recognition that this world is temporary, it is transient, it is passing, and that the ultimate goal of history is going to be recognized at the return of Christ. And we understand that and so we look forward to that, our Lord will return to establish his kingdom. He will return visibly. He will return and establish his kingdom here on earth and we're looking forward to that. Jesus said, "Look for that coming day when I drink it new." We're told that at Communion we are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes, and so there is this great sense of wonder, this great sense of anticipation that true biblical faith holds as it looks to the return of Christ.

Now we look back, we look forward, but that leaves us with the moment, the season of life, the moment of time, that window of life that we have right now in between the time of Christ's death and the time of Christ's return. Here we are living on earth and the question is what are we to do with these things? How does this affect life? How does biblical thinking about the return of Christ affect biblical life today? We're meant to make these connections.

One of the things that over the years I've come to truly be concerned about and even, I'll just use the word that's in my mind, to despise about a lot of prophetic teaching is that it is simply concerned with trying to name dates on when Christ is supposedly going to return when Scripture makes it clear that no one knows the date or time, and so that's all dismissed as foolishness, but also just the idea of preparing charts and trying to chart out everything that's going to happen when Christ returns and the sequence of events and all of that, and there's a place, a time and place for that but so often, beloved, so often in a matter that is a direct threat to the well-being of your soul, those discussions take place without any sense of application to what it means today, without any sense of the ethical imperatives that that lays upon us. How then, if these things are true, how then shall we live today? And Scripture is abundantly clear that that's the way that we are to think.

Look at 2 Peter 3 with me. This is all still by way of introduction. 2 Peter 3. God forbid that there would be anyone under the sound of my voice that takes a merely academic interest in future events and trying to develop charts and things like that without any

consideration of what it means for his personal life and his personal holiness. God, grant us deliverance from that unbiblical mindset that has frozen so many into an ungodly life, those that embraced those future events living ungodly lives. It's unthinkable.

2 Peter 3:10 warns us against this and tells us how instead we are to respond when Peter says, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the climate and its works will be burned up." You've got a biblical look at what real climate change will be like in that passage and it won't be the kind of thing that people are fussing about in our day and age. It'll be supernatural and it will be final.

Verse 11, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." These future events, Peter says, are coming therefore there is a way for you to live in response. You are to consider these things. You are to live in holy conduct. You are to live in godliness. You are to be found in peace, spotless and blameless, pursuing sanctification, pursuing a holiness of life, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ and you confess these things.

So these things have a profound impact on the way that we think about the purpose and the way in which we are to live. Do you even think about this? Have you ever thought about the consequences of that? The fact that the earth is going to be destroyed and Christ is going to return means that there's a way in which we hold this life loosely realizing that it's all passing and transient. The very environment in which we live is passing away, to say nothing about the fact that our lives themselves are transient and passing away. Well, this has great consequences, then, in terms of what we set our affections on and what we give our time and our resources and our love to.

And Jesus taught a parable to impress the importance of this upon us, to impress that view of life upon us and it's found in Matthew 25 and that will be our text for today. Matthew 25. I invite you to turn there with me. Matthew 25. It comes in the midst of a text in chapters 24 and 25 that are known as the Olivet Discourse dealing with future things to come and Jesus taught his disciples a parable to help them understand how they should think and live in response to the reality of his Second Coming. In verse 1 of chapter 25 it says this, we're going to read through verse 13.

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout,

'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

Now if you're not familiar with the background of this parable, the cultural matters that gave context to what Jesus would say, this might sound like a little bit of a strange parable, but when you look at the background, it all becomes clear, it all becomes very obvious what Jesus is saying, and as with any of the parables, Jesus is teaching one primary point. There is one main point that is to be derived from the parables and we're not supposed to fuss and look for great meaning in every single detail of what a parable says. The main point of this parable, the main point of what Jesus is teaching here is that he is telling us what to do in light of his future return. Christ is coming, what does that mean for today? What does that mean for the way that you use your life and the way that you use your time?

So Jesus is teaching his disciples what to do in light of his return, and the answer, simply speaking, the answer that we're going to see is this: there is a spiritual urgency to the matter. It is urgent spiritually for you to take these things to heart and to do something in response. It is urgent for you to prepare now for what will surely happen then. You must prepare now while you have opportunity. You must prepare now while you have breath in your lungs. You must prepare now and take spiritual matters seriously. You must respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live in a life that's bringing forth fruit of repentance to prepare yourself for that coming day. If you foolishly disregard the warning and you foolishly go about your life and foolishly give yourself over to the things of this world and loving the things of this world with no regard for the things of Christ, something bad is going to happen. Christ is going to return at a time when you don't expect it and then it's going to be too late. And when Christ returns and you're unready at that time, perhaps it's as simple as when the day of your death unexpectedly comes, if you are not ready to meet Christ, oh, the horror of the loss! The horror of the loss! It's unspeakable! So what a wise person does in light of the certainty of these truths is, is that they prepare while they have time for that great coming day.

Well, that's where Jesus is going here. Let's consider the background of the context of the parable and a little bit of cultural background and then all of these things will be opened up to your understanding as the Holy Spirit helps us in this hour. Back in Matthew 24:3, turn back there with me, back in Matthew 24:3, and we're doing a rapid review here, the disciples of Christ had earlier asked him about the sign of his coming. They were interested in future events. It's not that interest in future events is bad, it's good to know these things, the book of Revelation promises a blessing on those who read and consider

its approach to future matters, and so the disciples are interested. Verse 3, "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" That is a very crucial verse to understand what follows in the remainder of the Olivet Discourse. The passage is framed by the question that the disciples asked, "Help us understand things about the future and about Your Second Coming. Help us to understand that." So in what follows in the rest of chapter 24 and in chapter 25, Jesus is answering their question. He is explaining to them things about his Second Coming.

So look at chapter 24, verse 30. Actually go to verse 27. We'll start there and we just want to see the emphasis that is woven throughout chapter 24 to see what the emphasis that Jesus is giving to it. So in chapter 24, verse 27, he tells them, "just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be." Verse 30, "then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." Verse 42, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." Verse 44, "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will." So, my friends, they asked him a question about his coming and you can see by the subsequent repetition in Jesus' words that followed, he is emphasizing to them the coming of Christ, his coming return, his future return.

So what you find as you read it and as we saw even there in verse 44, "the Son of man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will," here's what we find and here's a place where those of you who are not in Christ and you are not Christians, God's word is showing you the profound place of utter vulnerability that you are in. The coming of Christ will be unexpected. It will be sudden. And what's going to happen at that time is Christ will separate believers unto his presence and unbelievers will be separated unto judgment. There will be a great division taken between humanity and, my friends, it will not be based on the modern preoccupation with black and white and other matters of skin color. It is going, the separation is going to take place based on whether someone is in Christ or outside of Christ, whether someone is a Christian or is not, and that is going to be the determining factor and there will be people of all kinds of skin colors in both groups. Skin color is not the primary issue that we have to face, we have to face the reality, the thing that we most need to deal with is that there is a coming appointment of appearing before Christ in judgment.

Scripture makes this abundantly clear. It says in Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." And so whether you die and face Christ in judgment or whether you're living at the time of his return and face him in judgment, either way there is a coming appointment with Christ that you must take into effect. You know, and I'm reminded of the preacher that said, "I preach as a dying man to dying men." You know, we're all mortal here. We're all passing away. And we should not presume upon the fact that we're going to have another opportunity to hear truth and be able to respond to it. It's that urgent. We can't presume on these things. I've spent a good bit of time this past week speaking with people who are on the doorway of death, and so

these things are fresh and urgent upon my mind and they should be on yours as well. The coming of Christ and that judgment, beloved, is going to be a cataclysmic event for us all. The whole earth is going to burn up, Peter says.

So there is this sense of sobriety that comes upon us. Well then, what does that mean for me? What does that mean for my soul? What should you know and what should you do? What does this parable teach us? Well, we're going to break it into two principles here this morning and the first one is this, is that Christ is certainly coming. Christ is certainly coming and the parable that Jesus is teaching here in chapter 25, he is referring to what at the time would have been a very familiar marriage custom among the Jews. Jewish marriages, at that time, were arranged by the family and couples had actually very little say in whom they would marry. They certainly couldn't count on it. You know, the idea is you get married and love comes after. We kind of flip that script, or at least try to. But Jewish marriages were arranged by the family and there was a lot that went into the wedding. It was a big event that took 12 months of preparation in order for it to take place. So after the arrangements had been made, there was a formal period of about 12 months that led up to the actual wedding called the betrothal period, and this was more binding to the couple and to the families, this was more binding than the engagement periods that we're used to in our days. We need to kind of set aside what we think about engagement and weddings and stand on different ground here.

So a lot of things happened in that intervening 12 months. The groom, the future groom, would prepare the home that he and his bride would one day live in. The bride during that 12 months would be preparing her wedding clothes and making preparation for the gallant affair. The bride's family would be preparing the wedding feast and the wedding festivities. So once the marriage had been arranged, there was a lot of anticipation and expectation that was going into it, a lot of work going into making it the special time that it would be. When the wedding itself came, it was an elaborate affair. The bride and groom were like a queen and a king in their attire and in the royalty, so to speak, metaphorically speaking. The royal projection that was made of a couple to emphasize how important this moment was, how sacred the institution of marriage was, and what a profound moment it was for the couple to be embarking upon a new life together. So there's all of this going together to make it really really special and, you know, sometimes we lose that. You know, people get so casual about weddings and about marriage that the event loses some of its significance because it's treated with such a casual attitude and so forth. Not in their day. In their day, this was a big deal.

So the wedding takes place and as we enter into the custom that Jesus is alluding to in verse 25, here's what happened. After the wedding, after the wedding occurred, there would be a procession. Kind of think about it like a little bit of a parade that would occur in the village at the end of the day. The bridegroom and his groomsmen would go to the bride's house, they separated for briefly after the service and made whatever preparations they made. The groom would then take his attendants, go to the bride's house, the bride's house meaning her house with her parents. He would go to the bride's house, meet her, pick her up, and then they would proceed to go to their new home, and this was a huge village event. This was a great celebration taking place and so there would be a

procession from the bride's old house as her groom took her to the new house where the feast and the festivities and the celebration would take place. You must understand this was a huge community deal and celebration.

So this procession would occur toward the end of the day as darkness is starting to descend upon the day, and what would happen is, as they were making this progression from her house to their new combined house, is that the people of the village would have like torches, it's described as lamps here but think about them as torches, torches that would light the procession and give light to the way. So there was a practical function of the light helping people see where they were going, joined with the celebration of joining in the celebration of this couple having just been married and making their way to their new home. And so everybody wanted to participate in this event but you needed to have a lighted torch, you needed to have your lamp lit in order to enter into the festivities at the bridegroom's new home. So everyone would proceed to the bridegroom's house for the festivities and the celebrations, but let me just repeat and emphasize only those with a burning lamp could march in the procession and share in the festivities.

Now when it's such a big deal and there's just this great event taking place, what should you do? Well, you want to be ready. You want to make sure that your lamp is ready. You want to make sure that you've got oil to fuel the lamp so that it can burn and that you can participate in the way that's expected and required of you. To not do that is of the most foolish consequence. It was crucial to have your lamp prepared or you would miss it all. You would be excluded. You would be outside looking in. Now what this parable Jesus teaches is it's focusing on the preparation of the virgins, those young ladies who would be a part of the procession going on, who knew that this was coming. And one of the other aspects, I suppose that I should say, is that it was not uncommon for the bride and groom to be delayed in making the procession so that they never knew precisely what time they were going to come. They knew that they were going to come but sometimes the time wasn't exactly what they expected, sometimes it was delayed, and so you had to be ready for whenever it was even if there was a time of delay.

So now with that background, let's go back and review the first five verses here. Let's read them again. "The kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins." In other words, Jesus is making a comparison between his Second Coming and what it is like at a wedding procession. He's making a comparison, going from something familiar – watch this, this is very important – in order to teach, he is bringing them to something that is familiar to draw a principle out that will apply in spiritual matters that are unfamiliar. You reason from the familiar to the unfamiliar so that the mind can absorb the comparison and see the obvious implications of it.

So he says in chapter 25, "the kingdom of heaven will be comparable, it will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them," unthinkably stupid. The word there for "foolish" means "stupid." I'm not speaking out of turn for you homeschool moms. Verse 4, "but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got

drowsy and began to sleep." And so there's a contrast that is being made here. Jesus is teaching by comparison and by contrast, and he is contrasting the foolish virgins with the prudent ones.

The word "foolish" comes from a word that we get our English word "moron" from. The Greek word "moros" is the word that we get our English word "moron." These five virgins are behaving like morons. They're being utterly ridiculous in their lack of preparation. The word can mean "dull," as I said earlier. It can mean someone who is sluggardly in their thinking. They're stupid. This is just inexcusable neglect in light of a certain event that is coming. This is foolish contrasted with the prudent one which is describing someone who has practical wisdom. There's common sense involved in the way that they are responding to the events of the day. They say, "There's this procession coming. I want to be a part of it. For me to be a part of it, I have to have a burning lamp. If I want my lamp to burn, I have to have oil. That means I'm going to make sure I've got the oil now beforehand so that I'm ready when the time comes." Just common sense. This is exactly what the foolish ones refused to do.

So there's a contrast based on common sense. Obviously, obviously, you should be ready for that big event and take the time that you have now to prepare for it. But the foolish virgins didn't do that. They did not do that. The bridegroom was coming, the only question was when he would come. In like manner, Christ is coming, the only question is when you will meet him. Will it be really soon on your drive home tonight? Will it be a few years from now? Will it be trembling from your deathbed? Will it be when Christ visibly appears? We don't know but it is going to happen. You will stand before Christ, my friend, and what is going to happen to you then?

So in this parable, we see a group of young ladies who prepared beforehand, and we see a group that did not, and then suddenly things changed. While they're waiting, verse 5, we saw, "the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep." There's no moral culpability in the fact that they got drowsy. It had been a long day, the night was getting long. It's not about what they were doing at that moment in fighting off understandable sleep, it was all about the preparation made beforehand. That is the point that is being made. Understandably everyone got drowsy during the wait. The emphasis in the parable is the prior approach to preparation that Jesus is teaching.

So understand this, my friends, the bridegroom's return is certain, the bridegroom's return is certain but the timing is not. The fact of his return is established, when it will happen is uncertain and unknown. And the bridegroom's return in that way pictures the return of Christ, my friends. Jesus Christ is coming again. He will return. The angel told the disciples that in Acts 1, "He'll come in the same way that He went up." You see him going up visibly, he's going to return visibly, the only question is when.

And do you know what? Dropping the metaphors of the parable, Jesus spoke on this very explicitly in the gospel of John. Turn there with me. John 14. Jesus said this, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place



for you." Now look at verse 3, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." He says, "I will come again. I'm going away to prepare a place but My absence is temporary. I will come back for My own and you will have a place with Me."

So Christ is certainly coming again. The Bible is clear on this. Jesus was clear and explicit about this. And now the question then becomes in light of that, what does that mean for you today? What does that mean for you today? It brings us to our second point this morning, is that you use your lifetime to prepare. You use your life to prepare. And in the middle of their sleep, going back to Matthew 25, in the middle of their drowsy sleep, the inevitable shout occurs and shatters the slumber with the immediate reality that the time is now. The time has come.

Verse 6, "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'" The time for preparation is over at this point. Events are happening on the timetable of the bridegroom now and his actions are determining everything else, and there's not time to do anything but respond with the preparation that you have at the moment. So the bridegroom was present and they had to go out immediately to meet him. Now at that point, the prior preparation or lack of preparation made all the difference in the world.

Look at verse 7, "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'" Now for hours, if not days, there had been all kinds of time to prepare and they were dilatory, they did not care, they did not act upon the information that they had, and the moment came and now there wasn't time to get ready to join the procession. The prudent virgins, they lit their lamps and they went out to meet him, and they were part of the celebration, they were part of the custom, and they shared in the joy of the celebration just like those who repent and put their faith in Christ now are going to join in the celebration that will accompany his return and his ultimate reign in glory. Great, marvelous things to be a part of.

And the prudent virgins, they had no reason to give away their oil. There was no reason for them in the custom of the day to share their oil. If they give away their oil, everybody's lamp is going to go out. It's just impossible what the foolish virgins were asking them to do in that moment. Their lack of preparation was morally culpable. They knew and refused to act.

The modern attitude for this kind of situation is expressed in the phrase that many of you have probably heard. Lack of preparation on your part doesn't constitute an emergency on my part. The fact that you haven't done what you could have done to prepare doesn't mean that I have to immediately respond to your difficulty and situation that you knew was coming and failed to act upon. You've got responsibility here, in other words. And sometimes there are going to be consequences if you don't act upon it, and what Jesus is showing here in this parable is that the consequences are vast. They're vast.

So the foolish virgins had the same opportunity beforehand but they did not act upon it, and in verse 10 you see the foolish virgins going away desperately hoping against hope to get some oil in time to join, but it's too late. Verse 10, "while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut." What's just happened here? They had had the shout, "The bridegroom's coming! He's on his way! Here he is!" The foolish virgins are having to go out and try to find oil at midnight, hoping that 7-Eleven has something for them that they could use. I don't know. There was nothing. While they were away, the bridegroom came, those who were prepared were welcomed, joined the parade and entered into the festivities, and then, boom, the door shut. The door is closed. The opportunity for admittance was over at that point. There weren't other guests to be added later on.

So the bridegroom had his circle of celebration with him and who wasn't with him when he entered in, when he came, had no celebration. The ones who were with him, in the language of Jesus, these are the ones who were part of the kingdom and they entered into the joy of their Master. What a blessing to be there. What a blessing to know now that you'll be a part of the kingdom then without fear of being shut out and excluded. But the foolish virgins, well, they eventually arrived, as you see in verses 11 and 12, "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.'" Let us in, in other words. We're here now. We're ready now. But there is a devastating rejection to take place there in verse 12. "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'" You cannot come in. It is too late for you. Your squandered opportunity that you knew was coming, your squandered opportunity has led to immeasurable loss to you now. The door was closed. Admission is refused and the foolish virgins are simply left to bear the consequences of their own lack of preparation, their own silliness, their own foolishness, their own stupidity. Their own stupidity led them to the consequences that they were now facing. They were missing the feast that they could have attended if only they had taken the simple preparation that others did in response to the event that they knew was coming. There is no excuse for that. There is no excuse of that.

Their rejection is devastating. Their rejection is final and their rejection is complete, and those hearing the story in the first century when Jesus taught it would have said, "Yeah, that's right." They would have understood the custom. They would have understood you prepare for an event like that, and there is no excuse. It's utter foolishness if you don't. There's no excuse. There's no – watch, watch, watch, watch – there is no misplaced sympathy for people who refuse to prepare. The foolish virgins are not a sympathetic figure here. "Oh, it's so sad that they don't get to go in." No, this is one of judgment. This is one of accountability. "There is no excuse for what you have done and now you will bear dire consequences as a result." No false sympathy, not the flimsy reaction that would mark our culture today to a story like this. They deserved to be excluded. They didn't take it seriously.

So you have the joy of the prudent ladies at the feast sharing in the celebration, you have the shock and rejection of those who are outside it, and now the story of the parable Jesus

has told, the parable, it's over now and he simply makes the point, he simply makes the point what is it that he wants us to learn from this parable that he just taught. Verse 13, "Be on the alert then," the word "then" indicating this is what you are to draw from what you just heard, this is the conclusion that I have led you to, "You be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." You must be ready. You must be on the alert. You must prepare for the coming, for my Second Coming. Remember, that's what he's been teaching about throughout everything leading up to this parable. "My coming. My coming. My coming. My coming. Because I'm coming, you need to be ready. You need to be on the alert."

So Jesus makes it clear, "In light of My coming, you have a responsibility to prepare and to be alert." He may return unexpectedly. You may meet him in death. You may meet him in the skies. Whatever the case, the circumstances don't matter of what it will be like, what matters is that you be wise and get ready. Are you ready? Do you know Christ? Is there any sort of anticipation in your heart? Is there any sense of responsibility to prepare your life, prepare your soul for that coming reality?

How should we respond to the inevitable return of Christ? Listen, I don't want to overstate things but in light of the certainty of the coming of Christ, the most important thing in your life is to prepare for that ultimate reality. Everything else is passing. Everything else is transient. If Christ waits 100 years, we're all going to be forgotten by people who are living 100 years from now, and so this little vapor of time that we have here can't possibly be about what, you know, the ultimate legacy is we leave behind here on earth because that's all going to be forgotten. Most of us have no idea who our ancestors were 100-150 years ago. If we know them, they're just a name on a ledger. And that's going to be us eventually. So what is it if it's not a lasting legacy that we leave here on earth, then what are we to do? We're to be ready. Use your life to prepare. Meditate on Scripture. Pray to your Lord. And if you don't know Christ, understand that the preeminent responsibility that you have in light of his coming is to repent of your sin and to turn to him by faith to save you, to deliver you, to bring you into his kingdom so that you will be safe in his hands when he does return. Nothing else matters. Nothing else matters in comparison to that because, my friend, if you're not ready when Christ comes, it will be devastating.

Turn over to Matthew 7. Jesus taught this early on in the gospel of Matthew also and he makes the same kind of contrast that we saw in Matthew 25. Matthew 7:21. Christ has now come. Verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you,'" the same words as in Matthew 25. "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." Verse 24, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock." The prudent virgins, the wise builder prepared for the storm of judgment that would come having

turned to Christ truly. Verse 26, however, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell and great was its fall." In the original language it reads like a thunderclap. It fell, boom! In a moment it was gone.

Everything collapsed just like that condo tower in Miami Beach a few weeks ago. When they weren't expecting it, the whole building came down on them. Well, there is a picture of your life without Christ. There is a picture of your life when Christ comes and you've neglected him, you've ignored him, you've mocked him, you've been too busy for him, and it turns out that the reason that you manifested all of those attitudes was because you were never saved to begin with. You thought you were, "Lord, Lord." Jesus says, "I never knew you. There was no place for Me in your life." And then suddenly the rumble occurs and the condo comes down and collapses into the sand and, my friend, I ask you what's going to happen to you then?

You can kind of picture it this way, the outcome of this. Picture those foolish virgins knocking on the door, "Let us in! We've got our oil now! Now we're ready! Now we see that you've come!" And the answer from inside says, "No. I don't know you. It's too late." And the words of that reverberating. Well, put yourself in the shoes of those foolish virgins recognizing that this is a picture of judgment. The recognition dawns on you that you are being excluded from the kingdom. Christ does not recognize you. He does not accept you. He does not welcome you. And you're at the door, so to speak, I'm speaking metaphorically here, you're at the door of heaven and no one's opening from the other side and it dawns on you that this is an unchangeable reality, and your shoulders kind of droop and your head kind of bows down. But that's not the end. Beloved, that's not the end. You turn to walk away and you realize that there's another angel waiting for you to usher you into a place that you do not want to go, and to usher you into judgment against your wishes. Not only are you being left out, you're being taken someplace you don't want to go and you're not going to have any control over it. Judgment has come. You've been rejected and now someone has come and you're being carried away into eternal judgment where hell is real, hell is painful, and hell is eternal. Oh, oh, the horror of being unprepared.

My friends, those of you who truly know Christ by faith, you're secure. Christ knows his own. Christ will gladly bring us into his kingdom. He would never turn away one that was truly his. But the pretenders, the indifferent ones, even the ignorant ones, left to a fate that is very difficult to contemplate. My friend, it doesn't have to be that way for you. You're here, you have time, and Christ freely invites you to come to him for salvation now. Today. He'll receive you this moment if you'll truly turn to him. This is your moment, in other words, to prepare for the inevitable realities that we've been talking about here. You've been given yet another opportunity by a gracious God, and the consequences of what you do with that opportunity have been laid out to you clearly. There is no excuse. Your blood will be on your own hands if you continue to reject Christ in this way. I don't want you to be turned away and so in the name of Christ, on the

authority of Christ, on the authority of his word, I offer Christ to you yet again. He comes and invites you to come to himself now for salvation. There's still time for you.

For those of us that are in Christ, sometimes it feels to me when these eternal realities are extra clear from God's word, sometimes I have the sense, do you know what it's like when you just miss a really bad car wreck? You slam on the brakes just in time and the car goes in front of you through the intersection and, "Oh, boy, that could've been me. That would have been horrific." But you realize, "Oh, I'm safe. I'm okay. Phew, thank God." Beloved, for those of us that are in Christ that took Communion Table today, is our thank God moment to realize that God in his grace came to us in his amazing grace, came to us, brought the gospel to us, the Spirit worked in our hearts and brought Christ to us, and that our future, our admission is safe and secure by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We look to the future and realize that we have security in Christ, we come to the Table with a great sense of gratitude. This Table reminds us that Jesus Christ made provision for us at the cross. Christ made provision for us. He died for our sins. He took our filthy garment, put it on himself, and dressed us with his wedding garb of spotless white righteousness so that we would be prepared at the time of his return. The bread reminds us of his body, the cup of his shed blood, and we invite every one of you who is a truly repentant believer in Jesus Christ to share in this Table of celebration with gratitude that your future is secure.

For those that don't want this, those that don't want Christ, more particularly, we ask you to let the elements pass. If you're living in sin, if you know you're in rebellion, please let the elements pass. Please don't make your judgment worse by pretending to have a part in something that you really don't care about. But for those of you that do, this is our time of rejoicing. This is our time of gratitude. This is our time to remember how wonderful our Lord has been.

Please bow with me in prayer.

*Father, what can we say? Thank You for the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the pierced body, the flowing blood, paying the price of our redemption. And in light of the Table, in light of the assurance of salvation that's in our hearts by the testimony of Your Holy Spirit, we can simply say, "Okay, Lord, please come. Amen. Please come, Lord Jesus. But bless us now as we celebrate this remembrance of Your life, death, burial and resurrection." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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