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The Gospel of Matthew

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

May 17, 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:1-13

Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:18-30

This morning we come to the 25th chapter of Matthew which is the second chapter of what is known as the Olivet Discourse. It consists of two parables: The Ten Virgins, and The Talents, and then a description of the Final Judgment in terms of the sheep and the goats. All of these are intended to encourage Christ's faithful people and warn those who are Christians in name only.

As we begin, I wanted to share an example of the kind of thing Christ was warning us about back in chapter 24 – namely, false teachers who claim that they know the specifics about the timing of Christ's return. You will remember that Jesus warns us that no one knows the day or hour of His return.

In fact, His Second Coming will be characterized by its *unexpected* nature:

Matthew 24:44 ESV Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

At the same time, He tells us that we can recognize that we are in the last days, the final era of human history. Many antichrists have gone out. Christ's people are persecuted. Just as when we see a tree leafing out we know that summer is near, so we are to live each day now with the expectation of His coming at any moment. But of the exact day or hour? No one knows, and that reveals that such people like this guy are false teachers and not to be listened to:

- Is this corona virus a sign of the end of the world? (He says that this sermon was intended to prepare people for the Second Coming, Inform people about the New World Order, and to warn people about microchips).
- Covid 19 Revealed

What did Jesus say about this final era of the church age? He said there would be wars, persecution, apostasy, false prophets. It is the great tribulation. And there has always been disease. So when some preacher stands up and starts expounding on how he “knows” the meaning of a viral outbreak, or that the end of the world is imminent for certain because a pandemic has taken place, you can know that he is a false teacher. We are not to concern ourselves with these kinds of things. Rather, we are to be certain that we are living faithfully to the Lord, being about the work He has given us to do and realizing that He could return at any moment. Virus or no virus.

Alright, let’s move on into chapter 25 then. Follow along as I read the parable of the Ten Virgins:

Matthew 25:1-13 ESV “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. (2) Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. (3) For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, (4) but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

(5) As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. (6) But at midnight there was a

cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

(7) Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. (8) And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ (9) But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’

(10) 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. (11) Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ (12) But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

(13) Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

As we have been learning, one of the first questions we need to ask when studying the New Testament is: *Is there an Old Testament background to this passage?* (I have mentioned before how helpful G.K. Beale’s book, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament is in this regard). Here is what Beale notes:

God is already depicted as a bridegroom, as in the parable of the ten bridesmaids, in OT texts such as:

Isaiah 54:4-6 ESV “Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. (5) For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. (6) For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.

Hosea 2:19-20 ESV And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. (20) I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

And the New Testament contains many similar descriptions of the Lord as the Bridegroom:

Matthew 9:15 ESV And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them,

and then they will fast.

John 3:29 ESV The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

2 Corinthians 11:2 ESV For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

Revelation 19:7 ESV Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

Revelation 21:1-3 ESV Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

So it is not surprising that Jesus uses this bridegroom and bride imagery here in Matthew 25.

Now obviously there is a lot of cultural imagery here that we are not familiar with in our own culture. Weddings are not carried out in our society as they were in Jesus' day in Israel. Let's call on William Hendriksen to help us out here:

As is clear from a comparison of 25:13 with 24:42, 44, there is a close connection between this parable and the immediately preceding one [the faithful and unfaithful servants]. Both emphasize the need of being prepared at all times for the coming of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. As the ten "virgins" of the parable were under obligation to be well-prepared to meet the bridegroom, so all those who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior should be ready to receive him when at his glorious return he ushers in "the kingdom of heaven."

Exactly how the going out to meet the bridegroom fits into the entire picture of a typical Jewish wedding is not explained in the text. One might ask for example, 'who are these girls? Bridesmaids? Daughters and friends and neighbors of the bride? Is their

intention to meet the bridegroom when the latter, having taken his bride from her parental home, is conveying her to and is now approaching his own home where the festivities are to be held? Where are these young ladies when they here the shout, 'Here comes the bridegroom! Go out to meet him!' Somewhere out in the open, along the road, where they had been sleeping? At the home of the bride? Or of the groom? Or of some friend?

...The fact that Scripture does not answer these questions would seem to indicate that they are not of supreme importance. By spending too much time on them one is apt to forget the main lesson:

Preparedness is essential, for the time is coming when getting ready will no longer be possible, the door will be shut.

I will simply state my own position. It is evening. The guests, the bride, and the ten girls – call them bridesmaids if you wish – have all gathered at the home of the groom. Everything is ready – except that the bridegroom has not yet arrived!

Why there were exactly 10 girls we do not know. This may have been customary, or "ten" may simply be a

round figure....We are definitely told, however, that these young ladies have taken their lamps, probably meaning: devices equipped with oil receptacles and wicks, and in characteristic procession-style held aloft (like torches) by means of wooden poles.

The bridesmaids are divided into two groups....The ten are alike in ever so many respects. All intend to meet the bridegroom and to escort him to the place where the festivities are to be held. All have lamps. All are expecting the bridegroom to come before another day has arrived, but none of them knows at what hour he is coming. All are looking forward to taking part in the marriage feast. When the bridegroom lingers, all these ten girls fall asleep, a sleep from which all are suddenly aroused.

But though the ten resemble each other in so many outward points, their dissimilarity is even more striking. It is basic. It is what really counts: five were foolish, five sensible. The foolishness of the first group consisted in the fact that they were totally unprepared to meet the bridegroom, for though they had taken lamps, *they had taken no oil*. They had lamps, but no oil. They were careless, not forward-looking, guilty of inexcusable and senseless neglect, shortsighted, thoughtless. The sensible

girls, on the contrary, were equipped with a generous supply of oil. They were fully prepared.

Preparedness is essential, for the time is coming when getting ready will no longer be possible, the door will be shut.

We can just make a note on the response of the five wise girls to the foolish when requested to share their oil:

Matthew 25:8-9 ESV And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' (9) But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'

This is not a cruel, selfish response. It is just reality. There is not enough oil to share – sharing is impossible. Each must have their own supply. If they shared, all 10 lamps would burn out before their procession reached its destination.

And then look again at the pathetic end of the foolish when the bridegroom comes:

Matthew 25:10-12 ESV 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. (11) Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' (12) But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

I cannot do a better job than Hendriksen in summarizing the main points of this parable, so listen to him again and then we will make a few more applications: [New Testament Commentary]

1. All who profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are alike in many respects; especially in this, that all are on their way to meet the Bridegroom,
2. The resemblances however are superficial. There is an essential difference. By no means all who read the Bible, attend or even belong to a church, sing the songs of salvation, make public profession of faith, even preach in Christ's name, are going to share in the blessings of Christ's return.
3. A long span of time will elapse between the first and second coming.
4. The return of the Lord will be sudden, visible, and audible.
5. *Preparedness is not transferable from one person to another.*

6. For those who are not ready...there is no 'second chance.'
7. Watchfulness at all times is required.

Let's elaborate on a few of these points.

First, *Christ may come to us at any moment.* In fact, this is how He has come to everyone who has already passed out of this life. The days of our lives are known only to the Lord. He may choose to call us into His presence at any moment. We must be prepared. We must have our lamps filled with oil. One of these Lord's days is going to be the last that I meet with you or you with me, in this present life. There will be no time to prepare when He calls us home. So whether He calls us into His presence through physical death, or He comes again and gathers us all up to Himself, we must be ready. When the trumpet sounds, the Bridegroom is here and it is too late to go get oil.

Second, *you must be born again.* That was the fundamental difference between the wise and the foolish virgins. Five knew the Lord. Five did not. All appeared outwardly to belong to Him, but only half did. If the oil in this parable represents the Holy Spirit, which it very well may, then the foolish five's hearts were void of the Spirit.

They were like the people Paul warned Timothy about who would increase in number and characterize religion in the last days:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 ESV But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.** Avoid such people.

We are to avoid hypocrites. We are to do our best to prevent them from creeping into our church. The five foolish virgins had an *appearance of godliness*. But in reality, they lacked the basic essential. They are a picture of the false professor, the “eminent holy church member,” who in reality does not know the Lord. Such people *can be identified*. They walk in sin. They love the world. They do not love Christ’s people. They are not born again. They are the kind Jesus is going to describe for us later in this chapter – the goats.

Third, *preparedness is not transferable*. Hendriksen made this observation and it is crucial that we think carefully about it. *No one can give us oil from their supply*. Even if we were raised in the most godly, genuine Christian family, the oil of our parents is not transferable to us. As much as they love their children, as much as they desire their children to know the Lord and make it safely into His kingdom, *they cannot give us the oil of salvation*. Each one only has enough for themselves.

Romans 9:1-3 ESV I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— (2) that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. (3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

But of course, Paul knew that was impossible. They must repent and believe each one for themselves.

Fourth, *how are we to be prepared?* How do we know we are prepared to meet Him? Well:

2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not

realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Romans 8:12-14 ESV So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Is your life characterized by a love of this world? Do you love and embrace the philosophies and worldview of this fallen world? Do you see a battle within yourself between the Spirit of God and your sinful flesh? Do you love God's people? These are the kind of questions to ask yourself. Is religion just a list of things to do in order to keep you out of hell? Or are your works proceeding from a heart that knows the Lord and loves His people?

[An honest, careful following of the current study we are doing mid-week of First John will go a long way in helping you know if you are among the wise or the foolish crowd.]

This then is the kingdom of heaven, which is the main theme of Matthew. What the kingdom is like now, in this present world. There are weeds and

wheat growing alongside one another. All profess to belong to Christ, but on that Day which may arrive at any second, the great final separation will be accomplished. We end with this statement from Matthew Henry:

Those of the same profession and denomination among men, may yet be of characters vastly different in the sight of God. Sincere Christians are the *wise virgins*, and hypocrites the *foolish ones*, as in another parable they are represented by wise and foolish builders.

Note, Those are wise or foolish indeed, that are wise or foolish in the affairs of their souls. True religion is true wisdom; sin is folly, but especially the sin of hypocrisy, for those are the greatest fools, who are *wise in their own conceit*, and those the worst of sinners, who *pretend themselves to be just men*.

The hypocrites act under the influence of external inducements, but are void of spiritual life; like a tradesman, that sets up without an inventory, or the seed on the stony ground, that lacked root.

They have no prospect of, nor make provision for, what is to come. They took lamps for a present show, but not oil for after use. This thoughtlessness is the ruin of many professors; all their

care is to recommend themselves to their neighbors, whom they now converse with, not to approve themselves to Christ, whom they must hereafter appear before; as if anything will serve them, provided it will but serve for the present. Tell them of things not seen as yet, and you are like Lot to his sons-in-law, as one that mocked. They do not provide for hereafter, as the ant does, nor *lay up for the time to come*,

Grace is the *oil* which we must have in this *vessel*; in the tabernacle there was constant provision made of *oil for the light*, Exo 35:14. Our light must shine before men in good works, but this cannot be, or will not last for long, unless there be a fixed active principle in the heart, of faith in Christ, and love to God and our brethren, from which we must act in everything we do in religion, with an eye to what is before us.