

★ ~ **We will be worshipping with communion next week. This is a reminder to get your "bread" and "wine" ready before tuning in to the live feed.**

Gospel of Matthew 25:1~20

Unprepared!



When I was a boy I had many interests. Most of my interest, however centered around a boyish attraction to seasonal sports. At that time in our culture there were **three** seasonal sports – baseball in the spring and summer – a short break – then in August, my attention began to turn to football, which lasted until the beginning of November. Then, although the professional season continued on into January, I had already transitioned into the basketball season. I was proficient at all the sports, excelling most at pitching in baseball (which I absolutely loved), and showing flashes that I could be something more at that, than I was at the other sports. But it never happened. Why? I remember there were young men who I considered lesser athletes than myself who excelled at one or another of these sports and to my surprise, had surpassed me in their skill level. Then I figured out that the ones that surpassed me were athletically focused. Most of them had started out as three-sport athletes, but the ones that really excelled had at some point focused on their favorite sport and dropped the other two. That meant that year-round they continued to practice and play, and go to seminars and camps devoted to kids that wanted to excel at that particular sport! As a result, as you might expect, they got better and better at one sport, while I continued to do well enough to be reasonably competitive at 3 sports! I was ***having the time of my life playing*** sports. I was not ***working*** at it. I did it because I purely enjoyed it. Plus, there was being part of the comradery of the team, and learning important life principles through the **mental toughness** and **physical discipline** that sports required,.. **but I was not focused**. I had no end game, like earning a scholarship, or even going pro. I was just enjoying that part of my life, trying to build my self-confidence, trying to build an identity I could be proud of and my family could be proud of, trying to increase my physical strength, speed, endurance, and of course, if I'm honest, I was trying to impress the girls (there is always that with the young, isn't there)! I was 18 my senior year, and within a year later, by age 19, my hard work paid off. As a college freshman, involved in sports, I impressed a pretty girl named Karen, we fell in love, and I was married at 20. And... gave up organized sports. Until I discovered church softball a few years later!



I have to say that from what I have seen, most Christians approach following Christ in the way I approached sports as a teen. We have our fingers in all sorts of activities and interests, of which the Christian life and being a part of the church is just one. We are definitely interested when we are engaged, but like all our involvements, pastimes, and hobbies, Jesus has to wait to take His turn! We enter ***part way into*** the life of God (the Christian life) because we like it, ***but not all the way in*** because we like other things too. Jesus is wonderful, but the practice of Christianity for us is more like the sweetener in our coffee. The sweetener is an additive to a cup of coffee. It makes it taste better to us. We put in an amount we prefer. In the same way, we choose the amount of Jesus we add to our lives according to our preference! But that is not what Christ intended for His followers.

Well, let's talk about this wedding. I'll come back to this. All Jewish weddings took place on a Tuesday, the third day of the week (**Jn. 2:1**), so this one would have been no exception. .

The Jews didn't have names for the days of the week except to number them – day one; Sunday, day two; Monday, and so on until day seven, or, “Sabbath”. That one had a name. By the day of the big wedding ceremony, the couple have been married for an entire year already, but have been separated each in their respective father's homes. It was basically an engagement period but much more binding. To break an engagement required a ***divorce***, and that could only happen if someone was unfaithful. So this is a story about ***the wise and the foolish bridesmaids***.



So finally the big day arrives! Weddings were an event for the whole village, truly ***community event!*** At sunset, the groom and his attendants would leave his father's house and begin walking through the streets and lanes of the town toward the home of his bride. It was a noisy, boisterous procession, and they would be attracting attention and would be being joined by more and more townspeople on the way!

This particular parable begins with the typical preparations for the wedding ceremony. As the young ladies had made their individual preparations for their part in the ceremony, they would have had two basic needs to concentrate on. They needed to look perfect, of course - their clothes and hair just right, ***AND***, they each needed to bring an oil lamp, for ceremonial purposes. It would be dark by the time the groom's procession reached the bride's home, and their lit lamps would stand out in the dark in a very pretty way. So, the ten young women, virgin attendants of the bride, are waiting outside the gate of the home, awaiting the arrival of the noisy procession at which point they will join it and enter into the house to partake in a brief ceremony and a wedding feast.

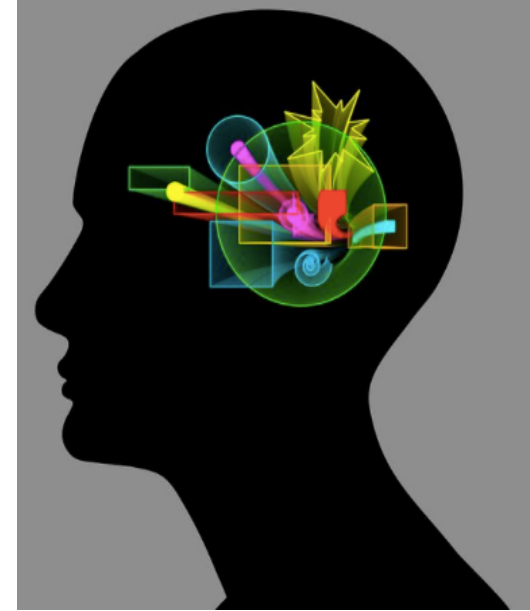
But the parables of Jesus always have a catch in them. In this plot-twist, a crisis begins to develop as the groom, for some unknown reason, is late! The minutes and then the hours go by with excruciating slowness! As it grows dark, the girls light their lamps. Time itself is slowing down for the virgins waiting at the gate and they are talking among themselves – speculating! Grooms were never late, except for one reason that anyone could think of, and that would be that he knew or suspected the bride being guilty of *unfaithfulness, perhaps even wanting a divorce!* But the groom is definitely delayed, and it is long past sundown and there is no sign of him and his procession. The girls tire and so they sit down - backs propped up by a tree, a rock, a wall perhaps. And, they all fall asleep! They awaken close to midnight because in the still of the night, when all normal people are sound asleep in their beds - they can faintly hear the groom's procession in the distance. Hurriedly the girls go to light their lamps, and five of them find to their horror that although they brought lamps, they forgot to bring oil! Now,.. Understand that oil lamps in that time and place were open on top, so they could not be easily transported with oil in them. I would think that the lamp had to be carried with the oil level in it quite low so it would not slosh out and get on their wedding garments. So the fuel for their lamps had to be transported in another jar – a clay jar that had the ability to be “stoppered” or sealed. Glass was invented by then, but only the very rich possessed anything made of it. So clay or even stone was the jar material of the day. The five “*wise*” girls *had NOT* forgotten to bring a jar of oil with them, and hearing the procession off in the distance they quickly began busying themselves with pouring their oil jars into their lamps. But to the five girls that discovered to their horror that they had forgotten the oil for their lamps - this was a disaster of the first magnitude for them! They begged the other girls to share their oil, but those girls did not know how long the procession would take. It was part of the celebration! It could take a long time yet and they might need all of their oil! So, no, they would not share. But if it took that long, the girls that forgot their oil might have time to go scrounge some up. So off they went in a frenzy of hurry and worry! But unfortunately for them, the the procession did not delay. They came straight on. So, while the five girls were trying to get back to the gate with oil in their lamps, the groom and his entourage arrived at the gate! They picked up the five attendants with their lamps lit and with a swirl they all continued on inside, through the courtyard and into the house, and the gate was shut behind them! When the other five attendants showed up, they were locked out and could not get in! They must have pounded on the gate and yelled at the top of their voices, but they could not be heard over the noise of the celebration. They were just out of luck.



The focus of this parable is on the bridesmaids that forgot their oil. Jesus labels them as “the five foolish virgins”! They certainly were forgetful, but why exactly were they foolish? Because as important as this event was in their lives, they were not paying attention! Whatever they had allowed to distract them was not worth it!

Of course this whole story of the unreadiness of the 5 out of 10 bridesmaid, is a metaphor for the unreadiness of half his church at His return. Jesus had just spoken of His return to earth to gather the people of His church to Himself in chapter 24, saying that no one knew the day or the hour of it, not even Him, but only God the Father. If you remember, I called it the best kept secret in the universe, a secret even kept within the Godhead itself, that, as far as we know, keeps no other secrets! Why it is such a secret, we cannot know - until we get to heaven and ask God personally. I can speculate that it is a warfare tactic in the war between the spiritual realms. But no more than that. But Christ is encouraging His followers to be ready *and to stay ready* – to not be caught unprepared for that great day, a day unlike any other day besides the days of creation themselves. difference is that this will be an undoing of creation! It will be a time of instability and fear, when everything is changing – radically! And not for the better! There have been many periods in history like it. But this time will far surpass those times for it will be the end of days – well, the end of days as we know them now!

*We have caught a glimpse in the last five weeks of how quickly the whole earth can change! We really had no concept of that before this happened. Our bubble of “normalcy” seemed unshakably solid – permanent, in fact! But there is nothing permanent on earth, or even solid enough to withstand a good shaking. Think or how quickly the stock market can tank as investors panic at a rumor or a prediction. What if the hatred and anger seething underneath the surface in our nation exploded into civil war – basically a cultural war! That would change EVERYTHING! Or what about what we call “natural disaster”. What if a flareup from the sun came too close to this planet?! Even if it just took out our satellites! That would change everything in a BIG hurry! We’d have to use paper maps again! What if a meteor hit our planet – anywhere?! Or even if a big one hit the moon! What if Yellowstone exploded like a massive volcano as the experts say it will one day taking out most of the United States?! Or a massive volcanic explosion *anywhere* on the planet? That could really change our lives in a hurry! And these doomsday scenarios seem to most Christians as more likely than Christ’s return! Jesus was right, my friends! We do not live in the right mindset. We are not ready! We are too distracted to be ready!



So what would the message of Jesus be to us today? I think it would be to wake up and trim our lamps! We should be hearing the procession! It well on its way and will be hear shortly! I think Jesus would implore us to have the wisdom to know in these days what to focus upon in a world completely dominated by a blur of other “important” things! He would say that for his true followers, HE is central to our lives. He is asking us to get really good at one thing – following Him! He is reminding us that he could come at any time! *I am a deer hunter. I have always provided for my family in this way. I have been reasonably successful over the years. It is not often we don’t have venison in the freezer, but there have been years where I went empty-handed. But I do know, to my chagrin, that there have been *many* deer I have missed over the years because I was not paying attention! I was distracted by a squirrel or a turkey, I was sleepy, I was reading a book and trusting my ears, I was looking the other way! I am much better at paying attention now. I have learned the bitter disappointment of not staying alert! Listen – the message of Jesus has not changed for people today.



If anything, it is much more urgent! He would tell us today “**Learn to stay alert!** *Get better at it! Stand up and shake yourself! Slap yourself awake! If you let yourself snooze, you can lose! Every day, don’t just keep me in mind, but keep me front and center! When you wake up every day, refamiliarize yourself with the reason why you still breathe! Live for me today! Love me with your obedience in all things! Don’t let the values of this world and all its distractions take over you mind and life! Don’t give in! It is tempting! It can be overpowering sometimes! But don’t give in or give up! Get up and trim your lamp! I’m coming to take you away with me, or I will delay until midnight, but you will see me soon, one way or the other*”

Someone has said that we should live as if today is our last day of life, but also live as though we are going to live forever! We simply do not know the day when we will meet Jesus. It could be today, it could be in a week or two. A “wise” person will continue to invest in future plans, but they will also not be careless about today. We will live purposefully, seeking our God, learning to trust Him more even when it is hard to – like these days of isolation – and learning to obey Him – to listen to His Spirit and to obey Him in all things!

[Col. 3:1-17]

Stay focused! Stay invested! Keep Jesus central! Follow Him! Get good at this one thing! Don’t give up the struggle against sin! You **will be** victorious! Be courageous and show your Savior to the world whenever there is an opportunity! Create opportunities – be creative! If you can do it in the Name of Christ Jesus, do it! If you cannot do it in His Name, do not do it! Get up in the morning and talk it over with Him – “*Lord, what do you want today?!*” Reconnect at regular intervals during the day! Don’t forget to acknowledge and thank Him as you crawl into bed at night. That is the process of being ready!