

Parables About His Coming

Matthew 25:1-30

Mark Vroegop

25 "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.

14 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matt 25:1-30)

For the last month we've been examining the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and there has been one over-riding theme: Be Ready! Throughout Matthew 24, Jesus has urged his disciples to see the future through a different lens – one that involves preparation, anticipation, and expectation. He has given them multiple cautions:

- Don't be too focused on the beauty of the temple and Jewish life (24:2)
- Be ready for a season of spiritual trial (24:9)
- Don't be deceived by false prophets (24:24)
- The Second Coming will be unexpected (24:42)

Matthew 24:44 summarizes very well the tone of this section: "**Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**"

So the focus has been on waking us up so that we think about the Second Coming. That may have been the effect of the video that I showed last week which would explain why it was so quiet at the end. Matthew 24 is designed to get our attention.

Moving Beyond Awake

But there is something more that Jesus intends to happen here, and it goes to what it means to be ready. The urgency and repetition of the message "Be Ready" begs the question: What does it mean to be ready?

In thinking about this, it seems to me that readiness means 1) that you understand the urgency (i.e., you "get it") and 2) that you take action (i.e., you are "on it"). Therefore, it is easy to make one of two mistakes. First, you could fail to realize the urgency. Secondly, you could fail to react to the urgency. Both are tragic but not equally so.

It is tragic to be taken off-guard by something that you didn't realize was so urgent. But it is far worse to realize that something is urgent but just never do anything about. In the first case you are tragically ignorant. But in the second case (failure to act) you would be guilty of a tragic stubbornness ("I do want to do anything"), arrogance ("Not going to happen to me"), or laziness ("I'll get to it someday"). And it is remarkable how many people, even though they are aware of the urgency of an issue, fail to take action.

The bottom-line is this: **urgent expectation should lead to thoughtful preparation.** This is true on many levels in life, but it is especially true from a spiritual perspective. And to drive home this point, Jesus gives two parables.

Preparation Parables

The parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13) and the parable of the talents (25:14-30) have different characters but similar themes. There are two verses that contain phrases that represent the turning point in both parables:

- Matt 25:5 – “As the bridegroom was delayed...”
- Matt 25:19 – “Now after a long time...”

So while the former passages strongly emphasized the urgency of the looking for Christ’s return, these parables talk about the importance of preparation. Again, expectation leads to preparation.

Ten Virgins

Jesus sets the stage for this parable by indicating that “the kingdom of heaven is like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom” (v 1). Not unlike our day, there were particular traditions connected with a wedding. In Jesus’s day, a couple was first betrothed which meant that there was a legal agreement between families for a future wedding. The husband-to-be (bridegroom) would make the necessary preparations over a number of months, and the wedding celebrations would begin with the bridegroom coming to the home of the bride to take her to the wedding feast. The bridesmaids would wait expectantly for the groom to come and for the wedding to begin.

There are ten young women, and the text tells us that only half of them were wise enough to make adequate preparation for the evening. Jesus says that their foolishness was demonstrated in their failure to bring oil for their lamps. These “lamps” were probably some kind of torch with an oil-soaked rag, and over time the oil would evaporate from the rags. Half of the women took extra oil and the other half didn’t.

Verse five gives us the important word “delayed” which is a turning point in the parable. The delay of the bridegroom, who represents Christ, caught half of the young women unprepared. When the cry comes at midnight that the bridegroom is on his way (v 6), the foolish women realize that their lack of preparation will mean that they will miss the processional to the wedding feast. Therefore, they beg the other women to give them some oil (v 8), but the prepared women only had enough for themselves (v 9). The only option is for foolish women to leave and attempt to purchase extra oil. Verse 10 tells us about the sad result: *“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.”* Their lack of preparation had caused them to miss the entire wedding event. They had done so many things right, but their lack of preparation for the delay of the bridegroom proved exceptionally costly.

Remarkably, they knock at the door but are still not given entrance. "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you'" (Matt 25:11-13). We've heard this before:

"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. 22 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?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matt 7:21-23).

The parable of the ten virgins ends with a warning in verse 13: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." The command is clear. Since you don't know the day or the hour – watch! The word "watch" means more than just look for or to expect. It a present active imperative verb indicating that this is something which is commanded and should be obeyed continuously. Watching implies a continuous state of spiritual readiness. Here's how 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 uses the word:

13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love (ESV)

13 Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you've got, be resolute, 14 and love without stopping (THE MESSAGE)

The point of the parable is more than just "look for the bridegroom." The point is to be ready by not forgetting to do some very important but basic things. Future expectation should lead to preparation.

Talents

The next parable makes this point with even greater clarity by setting the stage this time with a wealthy man who entrusts his property to three servants before he leaves on a long journey. Each of the three servants receives a "talent," which was a measure of weight estimated to be between 50-75 pounds.¹ When applied to money, it described a large sum of money – usually around 6,000 denarii. Most day-laborers would have to work 19 years to accumulate one talent. Some estimate that one talent was about \$800,000.²

The three servants are given different levels of talents according to their ability. One servant received 5 talents (\$40 million), another received 2 talents (\$1.6 million), and the last servant received 1 talent. The extent of the stewardship is meant to show both the wealth of the

¹ David Turner, Matthew – Baker Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 2008), 600.

² Grant Osborne, Matthew – Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 924.

master, the giftedness of each servant, and the levels of responsibility. The amounts are meant to make you go, "Wow!"

Each servant responds in a different manner. The servants with five and two talents put them to use by trading with them (invested), and the result was a doubling of their talents (vv 16-17). The third servant responded very differently. He took his single talent and buried it so that it would be hidden (v 18). So we have three servants with differing abilities, different talents, and two investment strategies: put the talents to work or bury them.

The turning point of this parable takes place in verse 19: "Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them." Again, here is this theme of a long delay. When the master returns, he settles accounts with his servants, and he enquires how they used his resources. He is both overjoyed some and very disappointed with one.

The conversations with the servants with five and two talents are identical. In both cases, they return the talents that they were given, and they also gave the master back twice as much. The master is filled with gratitude and praise: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (25:21, 23).

However, the accounting of the one-talent servant changes the tone of the parable and drives home the point:

Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours (Matt 25:24-25).

What is the problem here? The one-talent servant is filled with fear, and he makes his talent unproductive. He took a potentially useful talent and made it static. He was given something that had power and impact, and he made it useless. The master was not happy:

26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest (Matt 25:26-27).

The servant apparently is not just concerned about protecting the money; he is actually concerned about protecting himself. He is so afraid of some level of failure that he fails completely. He refuses to risk anything, and in the end, risks everything.

28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he

has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 25:28-30).

Once again we see the upside-down logic of Jesus. Those who risk everything – even their own lives – out of love for the master will be abundantly blessed. But those who live for themselves even though they say that they are waiting for the master, give evidence that they really do not know or love him. It is just like Jesus said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25).

Expectation leads to preparation. In the parable of the ten virgins, the foolish virgins failed to adequately prepare, thinking that the waiting would be easy enough. In the parable of the talents, the wicked servant failed to adequately prepare because he thinks the waiting will be too costly. Both groups are terribly irresponsible – tragically so.

A Call To Faithfulness

Where does this leave us? It leaves us with a very simple charge: be faithful. This is what understanding the second coming of the master should create. Listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15.

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed...Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Cor 15:51-53, 58).

"Steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord" – those are some great characteristics, aren't they? But the problem is that we often treat faithfulness like it is Junior Varsity trait. "They're not very talented, but they sure are faithful!" is how we often say it. And in an age of short-term, google search, and microwave mentality, I'd like to make faithful cool again.

Do you want to be a faithful follower of Jesus? Do you realize that he is coming again? Then you've got to prepare, and the way that you do that is by realizing that the challenge of the Christian life is that it is so daily. What do I mean by that?

I mean that the Christian life is a series of decisions that you make through the Word (Heb 4:12) and empowered by the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Faithfulness means that every day you get up and you use what God has given you. How do we do that?

Maybe this acronym will help:

- **Decisively** – You have a personal relationship with Jesus, your sins are forgiven, and therefore you say to Jesus, “I’m Yours!”
- **Availably** – You know that you live on this earth to glorify Christ, each day is a gift, and therefore you say to Jesus, “I’m ready”
- **Intentionally** – God has given you gifts, life is too short, there are no do-overs, and therefore you say to Jesus, “I’ll try”
- **Lovingly** – You are overwhelmed by grace and how much he loves you, and therefore you say to Jesus, “I’m doing this out of love for you”
- **Yieldedly** – When God asks you to do something hard, endure for a long time, or step out of your comfort zone, you say to Jesus, “I’ll trust you”

There are a number of people who live out this DAILY life at College Park Church. But there is one in particular that I hope is inspiring and motivating to you. Dr. Charles Smith will turn 89 this year, and he has served Christ longer than most of us have been alive. I first met Charles when he served on the Search and Recognition Team, and I was captivated by his love for Jesus. Most men get grumpy when they get old; but a few get even sweeter. I rarely have a conversation with Charles that he doesn’t tell me some compelling burden on his heart for a person in this church.

There are many of our people who were touched by Charles while they were in college. He would open his home every Friday night to a hundred or more college students who would come and listen to the speakers that Charles would line up, often flying well-known men to speak to his group at his own expense.

He used his skills as a radiologist to serve on short-term missions trips in 10 different countries. He and his wife Penny even move to the Caspian region for four months so that Penny could help in a Christian School.

But if you were to dive deep into the heart of Charles Smith you’d find a relentless passion for discipleship. Over his lifetime he’s personally disciple over twenty guys, and he is working with seven men right now. And at 88, he attends two Bible Studies a week.

When you grow up, I want you to be like Charles: a sweet man who has loved Jesus faithfully.

So what has God called you to do? What gifts has he given you? What burden has he put on your heart? What risk is he asking you to take? In light of the urgency of his second coming what are you doing every day to spiritually prepare?

The challenge with spiritual preparation and faithfulness is that they are not flashy, but they are so very important. Jesus doesn’t say: “Well done, you good and flashy servant” or “Well done, you good and popular servant” or Well done, you good and famous servant.” No. He says, “Well done, you good and faithful servant.”

Look at your life. God wants you to be faithful. He wants you to be consistently Christian. He wants a relationship with him through the Word and prayer. He wants you to love your neighbors as yourself. He wants marriages that model Christ's love, and Christian homes that model redemptive grace. He wants us to be concerned and doing something about poverty and injustice. He wants us to offer hope to people who have none. He wants us to look at our life and not say "Piece of cake!" (like the five virgins) or "This is too scary" (like the one-talent servant). He simply wants us to anticipate his return by a life-time of daily decisions that glorify him.

In an age of short-term commitments, quick fixes, google searches, and microwave mentality, I'd like to make faithful cool again.

Expectation should lead to daily preparation. Jesus is coming again...so be faithful.

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