

The Parables of Jesus: The Ten Virgins

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Date: 27 June 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome here for this Sunday, June 27th. Time is flying by, isn't it? Or maybe it's not. It's weird because I get up every day thinking, oh, COVID's still a thing.

I remember when we were all thinking, what is this? And yet here we are months and months later, still in it. For most of us, it will affect us for the rest of our lives.

For people who have lost loved ones, it will affect them for the rest of their lives. But we also recognize that God never went anywhere. He's still with us in this.

He has been and he will continue to be. As we continue to find our way through, he is faithful. We're continuing in our sermon series this morning, the parables of Jesus.

My mother-in-law and father-in-law listen online, so they tuned in when I was doing it via video, and they now listen to the audio versions. And Michelle's mom asked me, asked Michelle, I guess, two weeks ago or so, she said, so how long is this series continuing for?

[1 : 08] And I thought, wow, what does that mean? Ouch, or, well, she really must be enjoying it. But she was, I think she was genuinely curious. And I said, well, Jesus did tell over 400 parables.

So a year? No, I didn't say that. But I said, we're getting there. We're getting there. But I said, it's important to me. This struck me as important, and it's something that continues to be important, because throughout this series, we've revisited stories that I think are very familiar to us.

And then we've also recognized some that may be less familiar or even perhaps relatively new. We've explored some of these parables that Jesus has told throughout the Gospels in the past weeks, and we still have a few yet to go.

Some of them will be very familiar to you. And as always, my prayer in this for all of us is, may God grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the truth that is found in the parables that he told.

This morning, we're continuing in the category of Jesus' parables that focus on the idea of wisdom and folly, good choices and bad choices.

[2 : 27] Do you make bad choices sometimes? I do. Do you make choices you regret sometimes? I do. And we can recognize that some of the choices that we make may even be selfish at times, focused on ourselves, focused on our own circumstances, more so than an eternal perspective.

And so here's one of those. As we explore the parable of the ten virgins. The parable is also known by other names that you may be familiar with in the translation of Scripture that you have.

It's known as the ten bridesmaids, five foolish women and their friends. Nothing like being highlighted as the center of the story. You foolish ones and then their friends.

The wise and foolish bridesmaids is another title that it's given. In some translations. And there are perhaps even other descriptions that you've heard over time.

Or that you may even have in a translation that you're familiar with. But this passage is found in the book of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 1 to 13.

[3 : 44] So if you want to turn in your Bibles, open your Bible app on your phone, or you can listen as I read. At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be like, now remember, simile alert.

Do you remember that from the series so far? Will be like. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to something else. At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps, but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, the cry rang out, here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

And all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out.

[4 : 53] No, they replied, there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut.

Later, the others also came. Sir, sir, they said, open the door for us. But he replied, I tell you the truth. I don't know you.

Therefore, Jesus says, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. The word of the Lord.

One more time. The word of the Lord. Excellent. We'll get there. Braemar Liturgical Baptist Church. So knowing this parable fits into the category of wisdom and folly.

[5 : 58] Let's unpack this together to get a better sense of what Jesus was getting at here. Have you ever noticed that we tend to equate the idea of knowledge with light or illumination?

Have you come to recognize that over time? We talk about a light bulb being switched on when we're conveying the idea of understanding, right? When we're getting it.

If someone gets it, we think, oh, the light bulb went on. When someone is explaining something to us and it suddenly connects, the wires go, you recognize that you picked up the idea.

And I'd even suggest that when someone has, you've probably heard this expression, a spark of inspiration. There's a light connection there as well, isn't there? We equate light and brightness with knowledge, with wisdom, even with truth, don't we?

In lots of our expressions and our understanding. And conversely, we logically seem to equate darkness or the absence of light with a lack of knowledge.

[7 : 10] You've heard people say, oh, I'm totally in the dark on this one, haven't you? We even equate that with ignorance. The idea that we've somehow missed the point, right?

Oh, I'm completely in the dark. I didn't get it. I don't know what's going on. It's the story of my life. But have you ever heard someone say that? That they feel totally in the dark on something?

They talk about a concept or subject like that. And it's not a coincidence that that expression is related to illumination, to understanding. It's no wonder, then, that as Jesus is seeking to convey a deeper spiritual truth, to shed some light.

See, there it is again. Shed some light on this for his listeners and Matthew's readers. He's conveying a message about wisdom and folly.

About truth and ignorance. And he uses very clearly this concept of light and darkness to get that message across.

[8 : 13] And he specifically uses the metaphor of oil lamps. My grandparents had oil lamps to light their homes.

Some of those lamps were passed down and wound up in my parents' home. I was fascinated with the weird kid. But I was fascinated with those lamps when I was little.

For whatever reason, I remember just being enraptured with them. Just fascinated with how they worked and the fact that there was liquid in there and flame.

And what's this white thing that you crank the little metal? It was crazy. I thought it was amazing. I would wind that knob up and down to raise and lower that woven wick.

And I remember my mom or dad saying, Okay, take it easy. Take it easy there. Because I was like... But I loved to watch those lamps flicker. Recognizing that there was fuel inside the body of the lamp that you could see.

[9 : 11] That the wick was like wood in a fire. It was the combustible material that would keep the lamp going. I'd love to watch them flicker when it got dark.

Watch the glow that they gave off. I was fascinated by that. But I remember really resonating with the main concept behind those lamps.

That while all the other pieces and functions of them were important. There was one thing that was absolutely critical. An oil lamp cannot burn for any length of time without oil.

Right. Without fuel. For light to shine. Even for an electric lamp to function. For it to keep going and shining and serving its purpose. It needs what?

A source. Source. Without a source, any kind of lamp. Electric, oil, any kind. Is essentially useless. Ultimately useless.

[10 : 13] Because it won't be able to sustain its purpose. But even more than that. A lamp needs to be intentionally maintained. It needs to be cared for to continue to serve that purpose.

And our parable this morning recognizes this in a literal way. Five of the characters of this story recognize that too.

They showed wisdom. They showed preparation. They showed understanding. They made sure they were prepared. And you may have different thoughts about the other five characters.

They were clearly unprepared. We can say that. Maybe they were making assumptions about what was going to happen next. Maybe they were distracted by other priorities.

Who knows? The point is though that they were not prepared. They seemed to have forgotten in a literal way in the story that lamps need oil.

[11 : 17] It's pretty basic stuff, right? It's not like in the first century they could in Bible times that they could just flick a switch on the wall. I believe we take that for granted.

So you would need to have a wick. You would need to have a lamp. You would need to have oil to fuel your lamp. And for those lamps to shine their light, for them to fulfill the purpose for which they were made, they need to be connected to a reliable, dependable source.

We also recognize a well-known human state of being in this story. Our prepared and unprepared friends now had to do what?

They had to wait. Ask Michelle how much I like to wait. I don't like to wait. But we've considered this theme many times, haven't we?

Since I've been here at Bramard, we've considered that much of the human condition seems to involve waiting. We wait in line. We wait for appointments.

[12 : 27] We wait for Christmas. We wait for birthdays. We wait for the bus. We wait constantly. And in the case of this parable, the bridesmaids went out to meet the bridegroom, and we find them waiting.

And as they wait, despite knowing that the bridegroom is coming at any moment, that's clear, they get drowsy. They fall asleep.

I find the parallel here with Matthew 26, 40 to 45 so interesting. We read in that passage that Jesus leaves the disciples to stay behind as he goes off by himself to pray.

Jesus instructs the disciples to pray. Jesus instructs the disciples to be alert, to pray, to engage with God as they wait.

But we likely remember what happens next. But we likely remember what happens next in that story. Jesus comes back and finds the disciples asleep. They're unprepared.

[13 : 39] It's familiar here, isn't it, though? The responsibility is clear. The significance of the circumstances are clear.

And yet, the disciples and the bridesmaids in Jesus' story, they wander. They lose focus.

This is the theme that I've talked about many times over the past two years, is our tendency to wander. God created covenant after covenant because he knows his people wander.

We lose interest. We get bored. We get off track. And Jesus kept pulling us back. And that's what we see here in this story. In both passages, the passage with the bridesmaids and the passage with Jesus himself and the disciples, it's interesting that it's Jesus himself, again, who is the person whose arrival is anticipated.

In a literal way, with the disciples. And if you don't think that the bridegroom is representative of Jesus, then I haven't explained it very well.

[14 : 57] But the bridegroom for whom the ten bridesmaids are waiting for is the Lord Jesus. In that parable of the bridesmaids, we recognize that that's who they're waiting for, Jesus.

And the church represents the bridesmaids, the bride of Christ, waiting for him to return. So I want us to consider some questions this morning.

They can be rhetorical questions. You don't have to answer out loud. But if you feel led to, go for it. Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?

Do you believe that he died a literal and very real death by crucifixion more than 2,000 years ago?

Do you believe that he was resurrected, as the Bible tells us, on the third day, and that he lives today and is seated at God's right hand, waiting for his father to say, Son, it's time.

Do you believe that? My friends, if you believe those statements to be true, then you must, must also believe something else.

[16 : 16] that Jesus, the bridegroom, will come again. That he will return in a very real way.

Scripture doesn't tell us this because it's a nice story. Scripture tells us this as fact, my friends. This will happen. God's ultimate plan for all creation will be realized when Jesus returns.

So what are we waiting for? Jesus is coming back. Amen?

As someone who personally identifies as a Christian, a follower of Jesus, we need to remember certain things that that identity declares about us.

It declares to the world that we believe that light will triumph over darkness. That the darkness of the world, the darkness that may even happen in our own lives, that darkness cannot overcome the light that is coming, the light that is in you.

[17 : 38] It declares that we believe that the battle for our lives, the battle to restore things to the way God intends them to be, can you recognize?

Already won. Isn't that amazing? We're not waiting for something that's gonna happen. It happened. We're waiting for the final realization of that.

And yet we must also recognize that we are awaiting people. But we must not wait idly.

Not passively. Not selfishly. This parable so powerfully illustrates for us that we must be ready.

As you recognize this state we're in, this posture of waiting, are you impatient? Are you feeling like, all right, Lord, just come back.

[18 : 38] I'm done. Let's get this over with already. Are you more interested in fast-forwarding to the end? Fast-forwarding to the end of God's story for you and for your life than you are in living moment by moment as you seek to be prepared?

Are you a Christian who is constantly looking for signs and signals of when Jesus will come back? I'm related to some. I have some news for you.

I think Michelle just swallowed her gum. I have some news for you. You can't know. You cannot know. You won't figure it out. Pastor Kent, that's very discouraging.

You're not meant to. How can I say this so confidently? Well, Jesus, fairly good source, says it himself in Matthew 24, 36 and 37.

Jesus says, no one knows the day or the hour. Not even the angels in heaven. Catch this. nor the Son.

[19 : 51] But only, only the Father. A few years ago, get it together.

A few years ago, I was struck by kind of a powerful sense of when the time comes, Jesus will be with God.

And I believe it's going to be as simple as Jesus, the Father will turn to Jesus and say, son, it's time. And that's it. That will trigger the ultimate end to God's plan. Because Jesus himself says he doesn't know. So why are we trying to figure it out?

Then continuing in verse 24, this so beautifully connects to our parable. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

[20 : 57] Does that sound impossible to you? How can you wait patiently for a day that you can't even remotely begin to guess? How can you wait for the arrival of Jesus knowing that one event will light the fuse on a chain of events that will alter the reality, catch this, alter the reality of every human being who has ever lived or died for all eternity?

It's heavy, isn't it? Have you ever thought about it that way? That one event will change everything. How can we be ready?

Are you thinking, oh, Pastor Kent, that's a lot of pressure. Thanks a lot. It's already hot in here. Now I feel more uncomfortable. What have we been asked to do, though? Let's consider that for a moment as we gear up to close in this sweltering sanctuary.

How can we be ready? What have we been asked to do? Let's consider it. Remember the lamps from our parables. today. There's such a powerful metaphor for the truth of the gospel that we have received.

Are you tending that lamp in your life? Are you drawing close to God in prayer? Are you committing or recommitting your life and your choices to Him day by day, even moment by moment?

[22 : 36] As we considered last week, are there areas of your life that you've previously that you've previously held back from God that you need to let His light shine into?

How brightly does the light of Jesus shine in and through you? Do you share the light of the gospel with others?

That's our blessing to be able to do that. That's what we're called to do. We are light bearers, my friends. recognize that tending that light, that growing that light is a process that continues throughout your whole life.

But that light cannot grow. It will not grow unless you tend it. Remain connected to the source of light in you.

My friends, we live in a dark world at times that so desperately needs the light that only a relationship with Jesus can bring. tend your lamp.

[23 : 48] Let the light of Christ shine into your life and out from you into everyone you meet. May you be a beacon of light in this world that so needs Jesus.

Amen.