

The Bridegroom Comes

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, there is obviously one event very much on all of our minds this evening. And for that reason, I'd like us to think for a little while about the opening section of this chapter, Matthew 25, where we find the bridesmaids or virgins, the wise and the foolish, and the arrival of the bridegroom which is delayed, but which has been promised, and which inevitably comes.

And when it comes, there is a sense in which all the bridesmaids are taken by surprise. All the virgins are taken by surprise. When the bridegroom comes for us, there is a sense in which we are always taken by surprise.

We know that he is coming. We know that there will come the day when he calls for us or when he comes back himself. And yet, although we know it is coming, and although we know we have no promise of tomorrow, there is a sense in which it is always a shock.

It is always a surprise. I remember in my former charge, there was a godly old elder who lost initially his memory and then the use of his limbs and for a long time was bedridden.

And his wife, who was devotedly, looked after him and cared for him and eventually got to the stage where he couldn't even speak or utter words. But when you would sit with him and read the Bible or pray, you could just see a little tear would come out the side of his eye.

[1 : 3 5] And that was the only communication, really, that he could have. And after he finally passed away, she said that she thought she had done all her grieving before when he was in that so limited state.

She thought knowing that he was going down and all the months that he spent bedridden, she thought she had done her grieving. And then when he finally passed away, it was still a shock.

And in a sense, she had to grieve all over again. No matter how much notice we think we have, we are always, in a sense, taken by surprise when the bridegroom comes.

What we find with the wise and foolish virgins is that they, too, are taken by surprise. Even the wise who have well prepared, they have taken oil in their vessels.

They have taken, as it says here, additional flasks so that even when the lamp burns low, they have the means to top it up. Although they all fall asleep.

[2 : 3 7] And although, in a sense, they are all found in the immediacy of the moment, in a sense unprepared for the wise, it doesn't really matter because they have made provision already.

They have provided already for this eventuality which they have trusted and believed would come. Because the bridegroom had said he would come. And we know that he was delayed.

It says he was delayed. He didn't come when everybody expected him. And sometimes you can get that way also with, let's say, we mentioned the example of my own former elder. But sometimes if people have a long illness and they may be fully conscious, maybe like Isaac of old, you know, when he says to Esau and Jacob, when he's about to give his blessing, he says, I know not the day of my death.

But he lived for another 80-odd years after that. We might not be spared for as long as that, but we might still have a long time that the Lord keeps us, perhaps in a state of weakness, perhaps in a state of illness, before when he comes still, because there has been that illness for so long, it is still a surprise.

It is still a shock. The shock and surprise that greets us all today with the passing of our brother in Christ is, yes, something which causes us great grief and amazement.

[4 : 03] And in a sense, we don't know how to deal with it. But in another sense, we cannot grieve for him. We grieve for all of us who are left behind and particularly for his wife and his family.

But we know that he has, in a sense, gone in with the bridegroom. The door is shut for now. The door is shut until it will be opened again for the next person or the next who will be received in.

But for now, we trust and believe, and as far as the word is true and the faith of our brother was, we trust and believe our true faith that he has gone in with the bridegroom.

And he enjoys the marriage feast and all the joys and all the festivities that are there. In that place, will there be no more sorrow, no more crying, for the former things are passed away.

But still, if you could have said to our brother two days ago, do you think you'll be in eternity in two days' time? He'd probably say, well, we have no promise of tomorrow, which none of us do.

[5 : 09] But still, it takes us by surprise. We still anticipate that there will be the next day. And that's not wrong.

We have to plan. We have to work. We have to go about our business. We cannot be always on tenterhooks watching the skies. But the key thing is, like the wise virgins, like our brother in Christ who is no longer with us here, but whom we trust and believe we shall see hereafter, the provision had been made in advance.

There was still oil in the vessels, oil in the flasks. The lamp may be guttering, but it can be topped up because the supply is not simply of themselves.

It is that extra that is brought with them. We have no supply in and of ourselves to keep the lamp burning in our spirit and soul. It is the supply of the oil which the Lord gives, which alone keeps us going now.

So there's that vision, of course, in the Old Testament prophets. I think it might be in Zechariah where you've got the two-leaved gates and then the branches that are pouring oil directly down into the lamp, straight from the trees, straight from the branches, straight into the oil, straight into the lamp, and it keeps burning.

[6 : 26] That's what it's like with those who are in Christ, the fresh supply of the Lord's spirit. It keeps that flame burning, keeps that relationship alive, is constantly fresh, constantly renewed.

Because the supply is secured not from ourselves, not simply what we may have in our little lamp, but it is a supply from elsewhere which we have secured whilst there is still time.

Now, there is no suggestion that there is a shortage of oil. So I've mentioned on a previous occasion taking a different tack on this particular section, focusing at that time on the lamps.

Tonight I want to focus particularly on the bridegroom and his coming. But bear in mind that there is no suggestion that there isn't enough oil to be had. When the wise say to the foolish, go and buy.

Go and buy from the traders, from those that buy and sell. Nobody says, oh, they won't be open at this time, oh, you haven't a chance now. The implication is, if you go and knock on the door, if you rustle them up, they'll sell to you.

[7 : 33] They'll be business. They'll do business with you tonight. There's plenty of supply. There's plenty of oil. And they're willing to give you it. They're willing to sell it to you. The only question is time. The only question is opportunity.

There would have been plenty of time had they not fallen asleep, or had they roused themselves sooner and gone and got the extra oil, or if they thought that they actually needed the oil instead of just the outward lamp that may or may not have a little peep of a flame on it.

They need the oil. They need the lamp. They need the fuel. Because the bridegroom is delayed. They don't know how long he's going to be. There is a supply if they go and get it.

If they are willing to go and receive it. Now, none of us can say if we end up in a lost eternity, oh, there wasn't any supply. There wasn't any of what I needed.

Yes, there is. Oh, they wouldn't have sold to me. The Lord wouldn't have given it to me. Yes, he would. The Lord has said, ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.

[8 : 33] He says, everyone that asketh receiveth. The Lord Jesus never turns anyone away. You notice that in the New Testament. There are times when people turn away from the Lord.

There are times when they go sadly away or when they refuse his teaching or his counsel or his example. They go away from him, but he never turns anyone away. He never rejects anyone.

The nearest you have to it is the Syrophoenician woman pleading for her daughter to whom the Lord answers not a word. And she keeps on pleading and still he doesn't say anything. And then he says, it's not fitting to take the children's food and give it to dogs.

And he says, oh, but even the dogs take the crumbs up from under the table. She won't let go. And then he gives the reason why he has tested her all this time. Oh, woman, great is thy faith.

Be it unto you, as you have said. Because he knew that her faith was great, it had to be exercised. It had to be put into practice.

[9 : 38] You may think what you know about the Lord in your heart. You may have good thoughts of him. You may have a lamp that is ready for oil to be put into it.

But until the oil is in it, it will not come alive. It will not be lit. Our brother mentioned earlier in prayer how outward forms and rituals will not save us. A beautiful building such as this will not save us.

Going through motions will not save us. It is Christ. And our relationship with him alone that will save us. What he has done upon the cross and his supply of his spirit.

when the bridegroom comes and he will come and he does come and we know that he comes. We know that he comes for every single one of us sooner or later.

Perhaps later. But often sooner than we imagine. Almost always we are taken by surprise. But for those who have made provision beforehand that surprise is not an unpleasant shock.

[10 : 48] They are roused from sleep and here is the bridegroom now and there they are ready to go in with him. If we have made provision already while yet there is time that provision will stand us in good stead.

What the Lord supplies he will not take away. It is meant to be used. You will notice that the Lord did not give in the wilderness other than prior to the Sabbath when they had two days to supply.

The Lord didn't give them mountains and mountains of manna to do them for a month. He gave them one day at a time. It was to be used for that day. And we would all love to have abundant supplies and store up the Lord's spirit so we could dip into it whenever we like.

But the Lord gives us what we need for each day. He gives us the abundant store that is his and he will always keep supplying it pouring it into the lamp as we need it but it is meant to be used.

It's meant you might say to be burned up. It's meant to have that illumination. That's what the lamp is for. That's what the oil is for. That's what the flame is for. It's meant to be used.

[11 : 57] And if the oil is in the lamp it will burn and the flame will be seen and it will not be hidden under the bushel. There can be no doubt about the change that took place in our brother's life.

A life given to athletics, football, all the good things of this world but these things were not his God. He was able yes to appreciate, yes to enjoy but they were not his God.

Thank goodness they weren't because the false gods of this world when we make gods of these things are always cruel and they always let us down and they never satisfy and they most certainly do not save.

But he had given his life to the Lord and the change was there for all to see and the supply of God's grace and God's spirit had changed that life and made it a life lived in service and witness for the Lord.

Anyone could see that lamp was burning. So, although we are taken by surprise, although in a sense sometimes the Lord may find us sleeping, you know, it's not always bad to be asleep.

[13 : 10] The Lord says, so he giveth his beloved sleep. It says in the Psalms, I will both lay me down in peace and sleep for thou Lord only makest me to dwell in safety.

And so it is the Lord who makes us dwell in safety. We can close our eyes in sleep. We can rest in the Lord. We can trust in the Lord if we have his supply already because it may well be a surprise when he comes.

It may well be that the bridegroom having delayed so long, we think, oh well, because he's delayed for so long, he's going to take forever still. He's not going to take forever. There will come a day, there will come an hour when he comes for us.

We may be alive when he comes back. But if that's the case, it doesn't alter anything because we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed. We'll have our resurrection bodies there and then on the spot and thereafter, of course, the judgment.

It doesn't alter the fact we have that encounter, we have that appointment with the bridegroom when he comes. In earthly terms, of course, and sometimes it's said with a bit of tongue in cheek that it's a bride's prerogative to be late and that's sometimes quite often the case.

[14 : 25] It was the case in my own wedding day and I, of course, you all, the anxieties that fill your thoughts, you think, has she changed her mind? Is something wrong? I never actually thought she'd changed her mind.

I thought she might have been getting cold feet or second thoughts. In fact, there was just a problem stitching up the last bit of the wedding dress but I didn't know that. She was a bit late. Sometimes brides are late. Maybe it's the photographer, maybe it's the car, whatever it is.

In this instance, it's the bridegroom. We don't say that he was late. Notice the Bible doesn't say that he was late. It says that he delayed his coming but he doesn't delay it beyond what he has intended.

He delays it until exactly the right moment. He delays it until the hour that he has fixed and when he comes, although it may be later than the bridesmaids expect, although it may be so late, it's used up all the oil of those who didn't make provision before he comes at the time that he has fixed which will be perfect.

God's time is always perfect and although it's not perfect for us, there's no such time thing as a perfect time for us. If the Lord does something, we know that he has planned to do it.

[15 : 43] We are taken by surprise. God is never taken by surprise and God does not make mistakes. And for us, as we think on this incident, as we think on this account, we should be from that comforted somewhat in the knowledge that from all eternity God has simply kept the appointment that he intended to keep with our brother.

God has taken him from us but taken him to himself, we trust and believe, at the hour that he appointed. When the bridegroom came, he wasn't late.

He may have been later than some people expected. He probably had been sooner than we would have liked. But he came at exactly the hour that he had appointed. And the provision that had been made beforehand meant there was plenty oil, there was plenty light, there was plenty witness.

And our brother may or may not have been physically asleep at the time. But the point is he was ready. And because he was ready, we don't have to fear or worry or sorrow as those who have no hope for him.

We have to do what we can to support, to help, to pray for, to uphold and sympathize with his widow, his family, his dear ones, and to uphold one another in our community and congregation where yet another breach has been made.

[17 : 18] One that we did not see coming. One that we did not anticipate. And it's not so very long ago since he himself was here in this very spot leading the prayer in a funeral of his own former friend.

None of us does know the day or the hour, but the bridegroom knows. And when he comes, he will find some who are ready for him.

Even though they may sleep, they are ready for him because they have made beforehand the provision with the supply of which there was abundance and which for us even unto this hour there is abundance.

abundance. When the bridegroom comes, it will take us by surprise almost certainly whenever it happens to be. But the real question will be how ready are we beforehand?

What supply, what provision have we made with the supply the Lord provided? Because he has made that supply available. He has provided it.

[18 : 29] It's there. If we ask, if we seek, if we knock, nobody's getting turned away, nobody's getting refused, nobody's being told, no, you don't have enough money for this. This is free. Come ye, buy wine and milk without money, without price, says the Old Testament in Isaiah.

The Lord does not turn anyone away. Jesus never turned anyone away in the New Testament. He was always ready to receive and to supply the needs of all who would come and ask him.

Think of blind Bartimaeus there where he cried out, son of David, have mercy on me. And people said to him, shh, don't bother the master, don't call out. Now he could easily have said, oh, you're absolutely right.

I'll just stay here and I'll sit by the side of the road and I'll wait while the noise passes. But there's one of the gospel accounts where it has that wonderful phrase, he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth that passed by.

And there is always the danger for us that we come so close in our lives where Jesus just passes by and we don't call out and we don't ask and we don't reach for the supply that is there.

[19 : 39] Remember when Bartimaeus called out, Jesus stood still and he called for him to be brought to him. He didn't turn around and change direction because his face was set to go to Jerusalem and that's where he was going.

Jesus has his plan that he will fulfill. He has that divine destiny, that perfect number he will gather in. He is not going to deviate from that but nor is he going to turn anyone away who will come to him and ask for his help.

We may be taken by surprise. The bridegroom is never taken by surprise. He comes and however he finds us, it will not be simply are you awake?

Are you asleep? It's what do you have? Do you have the supply? Do you have that relationship, that forgiveness of sin, that joy within even if there may be sorrow without which will see you saved and redeemed and brought into the wedding feast?

When the master summoned his servants, of course, he wasn't simply concerned are you all here? Are you all present and correct? He wanted to know what have you done with what I gave you? And in the separation of the sheep and the goats, one of the things that is most telling is that those who end up condemned are condemned not for what they've done but because of what they haven't done.

[21 : 07] And I never cease to be amazed at the number of people who think they will be all right with God on the strength and the basis of what they haven't done. They will say, I'm a good person, I'm not a murderer, I'm not a drug dealer, I'm not a thief, I pay my taxes, I don't do this, I don't do that, I don't do the next thing, I'm not as bad as that person there and their entire sense of righteousness is predicated upon what they haven't done.

And here we find people condemned for a lost eternity precisely on the basis of what they haven't done that they should have done.

And it's not just a case of outworking this goodness and helping those in need and being moved to support the weak and the needy and those who are naked and hungry and so on.

You've got to go behind the actual narrative and say, well, what would have been the motive for people to help these poor and needy and afflicted and in prison? It's because the Lord had given them a heart of love for them.

And they had a heart of love for them because they had a heart of love for the Lord. And that heart of love wasn't by nature, it was because the Lord had given them a new heart and a new desire to serve Him and in serving Him to serve these poor needy and suffering.

[22 : 27] And as much as you've done it unto one of these, at least to my brethren, you've done it to me. What makes them want to do that? Not just because they're nice people, but because the Lord has moved their heart to do it. When the Lord changes our heart, He doesn't just change our heart in relation to Him, He changes in relation to everybody around us as well.

That supply of oil permeates everything, not just the lamp, but it lights up our whole lives as well. That's what the bridegroom is looking for when he comes.

That's who he will gather in with him and the door is shut. And when the door of eternity shuts behind those whom the Lord takes in with him, those of us who are still outside, not because we may be bad or because we may be lost, but simply because it's not yet time.

And it's not time for us yet, perhaps, to go into the marriage feast. It's not time for us, for the bridegroom to come for us. But those for whom the bridegroom comes, go in with him if they are ready.

And if they are found with the supply of what he gives, and they go in to the marriage feast, and the door is shut. They go no more out, says in Revelation about those who are pillars in the house of God.

[23 : 45] They go no more out. They never depart from the Lord's presence anymore. Sometimes in this life, it may have seemed as if the Lord was far from us. But actually, he isn't.

He's right there. Just like we mentioned in prayer, you know, maybe he didn't know it was Jesus in the garden, but he was right there. And the Lord is right here in the midst of his people because he has promised to be wherever two or three are gathered in his name.

And he is ready with his supply of his spirit, of his oil, of his grace. We must ask. We must seek. We must plead with him to give it to us, and he will.

He never turns anyone away. But we must do it just now whilst there is opportunity and while it is today because in truth, much as it may seem like a cliché, we find it to be true again and again.

We do not have a promise of tomorrow. But the Lord in his mercy has given us today. And it says in the scripture, today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart like they did in the wilderness.

[25 : 01] Today, if you will hear his voice, then if you do not already have that supply of his grace, ask him that you may have it because, rest assured, the bridegroom comes and he will come and he does come and he always comes in the end.

at the time and the hour known perhaps only to him, but at the time he has always intended, his time will always be perfect.

God does not make mistakes. Let us be very sure not to make the biggest mistake of our life in not being ready when he comes because come the bridegroom does.

Let us pray. Let us pray.