

Parable of the Ten Virgins

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25. And I want us to consider a very, very well-known one that we're all very familiar with, the parable of the ten virgins.

I'm not going to read it all again, we'll just read from the beginning. Matthew, chapter 25. Then the kingdom of heaven would be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

And so on down to the end where Jesus says, Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. And when Jesus says this, Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. That, of course, is all in keeping with this whole passage that we have here, where Jesus begins in chapter 4 by foretelling the destruction of the temple.

[1 : 13] This morning we were looking at the great privilege of being a son of God. And the sons of God and heirs and joint heirs with Christ.

And we saw how one of the great longings in people's hearts is the longing to belong. The longing that is in a heart to be part of something.

And that is why the believer will never really be alone in this world. Supposing everybody deserts you, forsakes you, everybody ultimately leaves you, at the end of the day there is a bond and a union with Jesus Christ that nothing can break, not even death itself.

And we were looking this morning at the great, one of the great privileges of being a son of God, or sons of God, is that we have the ministry of the Spirit, the Spirit witnessing with our spirit, assuring us and making us so aware of the fact that we belong to Jesus.

Again, tonight, as we come to look at this particular parable, it's again a passage that speaks to us of belonging.

[2 : 33] But it also speaks to us about separation. And separation, I think, is one of the most awful words in this world. Because to be separated from those who are precious to us, to be separated in whatever way or form, is always painful.

And we know the separation that brings the greatest pain to us in this world, of course, is death. And this passage here is speaking to us of the most awful separation possible.

The separation from God forever. It speaks to us about the belonging to God forever. And it also speaks to us about the separation from God forever.

And these are realities that it is important for us to understand. And that's one of the wonderful things that the Bible does for us. That our own natural intelligence, our own wisdom, cannot possibly work out ourselves.

Were it not for the fact that God has revealed these things to us, we couldn't work them out ourselves. So we give thanks to God constantly for these great truths that are revealed to us in the Word.

[3 : 57] Now, Jesus, back in chapter 24, when they had left the temple and they were going away, his disciples began to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

Because we know that the temple was one of the architectural masterpieces of the day. And they were just pointing out to Jesus, just look how beautiful that is. And Jesus tells them that there's going to come a day when there won't be one stone left upon another that won't be thrown down. And that was one of these sort of jaw-dropping statements that the disciples, when they got alone with Jesus, they said, they wanted a sort of a fuller description.

Tell us about these things. But they wanted to go further than that, and they wanted to go on. What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? And Jesus begins to tell them about things that are to happen.

He begins with things that will happen soon and things that will happen away in the distance. And there's a kind of a mingling of these two things. But when we read through some of what will take place, we find it as almost a, you could say, a description of the day that we live in, where there's famines and earthquakes in various places, and we see one nation rising up against another.

[5 : 20] We see the Christian being hated by all nations for my name's sake. We see that happening in the world. We see many falling away. There's false prophets.

There's betrayals. There's lawlessness. The love of many growing cold. All these kind of things. And if we were to spend our time reading through it all, we would see so much that's taking place before our very eyes.

And I think everybody would agree that we are moving on. Of course we are. But that we seem to be moving on quicker than ever towards the end.

The one thing, of course, that we don't know is when that end will be. Nobody knows. And Jesus tells us that not even the angels in heaven tonight know when that great day will be.

But it's coming. And it's coming sooner than ever we expect. Now, of course, all these kind of things are highlighted in this particular parable.

[6 : 24] And Jesus then tells us how we must, that's at the end of chapter 24, He's showing us how important it is to be ready, to be prepared when He comes.

Because He's going to come unexpectedly. There isn't going to be any prior warning. There's not going to be any notice given beforehand. He is just going to come.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, where they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. They were living an ordinary everyday existence until the day when Noah entered the ark.

And they were unaware until the flood came. Even when Noah went into the ark, even when God shut the door, they were still unaware of the coming of the judgment.

And then it came, just like that. And so that's what Jesus tells us. It's going to come, but it's going to come unexpectedly. And so He goes on to give us this parable about, The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

[7 : 33] Five of them were foolish and five were wise. Now it was often the custom in those days that the groom would, with his attendants and so on, would leave his own house and go to the house of the bride.

And it was often the custom that the marriage, the actual marriage would take place there and then that the bridegroom and the bride and all the attendants would make their way back to the wedding feast.

And so Jesus is using that background to tell us a very powerful message or to give us this very, very powerful message. And we see these ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

And five were wise and five were foolish. Now, we're not to strain at every particular thing here and try and find a meaning to everything. Because the great message is the importance of being ready when Jesus comes.

But there are certain things that are quite obvious. And Jesus is here when He talks about this being a parable of the kingdom of heaven, is speaking to us about the visible church. About all who are part of, and when we term the visible church, we talk about all who are in any way linked to church.

[8 : 53] Those who have been baptized in the church, those who attend the church, those who contribute to the church, those who are in office in the church, those who are members in the church, those who are adherents, those who maybe never come but once a year or maybe wouldn't really claim any great attachment and yet they would say, oh, I'm bound to the church through my father or through my mother and I would claim an adherence, even although I don't go, but I still link, I count myself as part of the church.

There are many people who will have no thought of church. In fact, somebody was saying to me, it's one of the most disturbing figures I've heard for a long time. It's reckoned that only 4% of the population of Edinburgh actually go to church.

I don't know whether that is true, but I was told that yesterday. And I find that an incredibly disturbing figure. 4%. But here are those who would count themselves, who are attached to the church in some way.

So this is what we term the visible church. Now, within the visible church, there is what we would call the invisible church. And those are the ones who belong to Jesus Christ.

Now, what we have here, and I would say that it's clearer than simply those who might claim an attachment to the church but never go, I would say that Jesus is making it much narrower than that because there are great similarities between the five wise and the five foolish.

[10:34] for they all took lamps with them. They all had lamps. And I would say that the lamps, in many ways, are representing an outward profession.

So here are people who would actually belong to the church, who would be churchgoers, who would be part of the church community in its broadest sense.

But there's one distinguishing feature. Half of them had oil in their lamps. The others hadn't oil. And that was the great, the great significant difference.

And my friend, I believe very simply, it talks about those who have the Holy Spirit, those who are united to Jesus Christ, those who have Christ as Savior, and those who don't.

And at the end of the day, that is it. That is a distinguishing feature. And all other things will have to fade away and pale into insignificance.

[11:40] It's this one thing. Is Jesus my Savior or not? That's what matters. And if Jesus were to come tonight, let me ask you this question.

Is Jesus your Savior? Because if not, you are standing on the very brink of eternity, and you will be lost unless you find Christ as Savior.

That's what the Bible teaches us. And so it is imperative that we look to Jesus and that we seek Jesus as Lord and Savior. And so we find that there's the five wise and the five foolish, and they both have their lamps, but the foolish took no oil with them.

But the bridegroom was delayed. And while he was delayed, they all became drowsy and they slept. There's a delay. God often delays his work.

Now, I will qualify that. God never delays his work according to his own heavenly timetable. But God delays his work as far as we're concerned.

[12:51] We think God is delaying his work. Maybe there are people in here tonight and you think you cannot understand why God is delaying his work with regard to answering your prayers.

There are people you have prayed for for years and you're saying, why is the Lord delaying? My friend, the Lord has an appointed time for everything.

Absolutely everything. There were people who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And it appeared to them that the Lord was delaying.

But you know what the Bible says? In the fullness of time. That's when Jesus came. At the right time. When all time, all the different things as God was working in providence and in grace in the fullness of time, just like in this, it's almost the description of a mother who was ready to give birth to a child.

In the fullness of time, Jesus came into this world. God's time. Didn't come a day early. Didn't come a day late. Even although the church were waiting for the consolation of Israel, thinking that God was delaying, he wasn't.

[14:12] And it's going to be the same at the end. Where is the promise of his coming? It's going to be the cry. And there are many people who somehow think that the fact that Jesus isn't coming, some think he's not going to come.

And even sometimes the church say, because he's delaying coming, then I can take my foot off the pedal. The urgency is gone.

I don't need to be too exercised about my spirituality. I can let things slip. I'll pick it up again. I'll become more concerned about my Christian living later on, because Jesus is not coming just now. I want to take it easy. Jesus warns the church and he says, do not do that. Because it's in such an hour as you start to do that, that I am likely to come.

And so we've always got to heed this warning, because the church has to be vigilant. And there are many indications that when Jesus returns, that he will find the church sleeping.

[15:20] It tells us that in Luke's gospel, will he find faith when he returns? Of course, there will, but it's almost as if faith is at a low ebb.

My friend, you've got to ask yourself tonight, are you a drowsy, slumbering, sleepy Christian? Is your faith, yes, your faith is still there, but you're going through the motions.

You look back and you say to yourself, I remember a day when my faith was vibrant, when my faith was energized. I've got to be honest, it's not today. Your love.

Was there a day when your love for the Lord was burning, you were on fire? And today, it's just this kind of drifting. Hope. Were you living with the light of eternity just in front of you, waiting for the return of Jesus?

Or is it a hope that's distant? Are you slumbering tonight? Are you drowsy? Are you sleeping? Jesus warned his disciples, remember, just before his crucifixion.

[16:35] And he went away, he left the three disciples and he went away to pray in great agony of heart. And every time he came back, he found them sleeping. Watch and pray, he says, lest you enter into temptation.

Well, anyway, we find that they were all drowsy and sleeping. But at midnight, there was a cry. Here is the bridegroom. Come out to meet him.

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. This was a cry that they all heard. The ones who, all the ones, the wise and the foolish, everyone.

And the one thing that would make them aware, the sleeping, slumbering Christians, that cry made them realize that they were sleeping. You know, sometimes you can be a Christian and you don't realize that you're a slumbering Christian.

You think you're okay. You think things are all right. until something happens. Until God breaks into your life in a powerful way again.

[17:46] And all of a sudden you're made to realize I was slumbering. You know, sometimes it can happen if you're very tired and maybe you're sitting in the chair, you're working.

And you may doze off without realizing. And then maybe the phone or something goes and you jump awake and you say, I hadn't realized I had drifted off to sleep.

That can happen spiritually. What people are going through the most, you can come to church, you can be reading your Bible, you can be doing this and that, engaged and everybody says, my word, look how good that person is.

A bright Christian. But you're slumbering and you don't know it until something comes and you realize, I was sleeping. I was slumbering. Well, the Lord doesn't want his people to be slumbering and sleeping.

Well, here's this cry, this midnight cry. Here is a bridegroom, come out to meet him. Everybody heard the call. You know, sometimes at night there's a storm, thunderstorm.

[18:53] Some people sleep through it. And in the morning you meet people and they say, oh, that was a bad storm last night. You say, never heard it. Well, when this cry comes, nobody will miss it.

Every eye will see him. This is not something that's going to be hidden away. This is not going to be for only a few people in this world. It will be a cry that will be heard globally.

Every eye will see him. It's an amazing and awesome concept. And I believe that there's just, I don't know, we don't know exactly all that's going to happen at that particular time.

But anyway, the cry comes, come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil for our lamps are gone out.

But the wise answered, we can't. My friend, you know, one of the things that we cannot do, we cannot save a soul.

[20:06] Supposing somebody came to you and said, you know, see, you're a Christian. Can I get some of what you have? You cannot give Christ to anybody.

You can point them to Christ. You can pray for them. You can bring them to church. You can read the word with them. You can give them tapes and discs and books and you can give them and you can point them but you cannot save them.

You cannot give what you have. What you have has been given to you by the Lord. The Lord has given himself to you and you cannot take what he has given and give to somebody else.

This is personal. This is where Christ has come into your heart. To you personally. And so these, they say, we can't give. And my friend, there is only one who can give and that is the Lord himself.

You go to him. If tonight you are empty, if tonight you have no savior, then go to him and ask him, please, Lord, come into my heart. I need you. I need you as my Lord.

[21:14] I need you as my savior. Plead with him. Ask him to come in. So we find that these went away to try to find something for themselves.

But while they were gone, you see, the cry had come. The bridegroom's coming. The bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast and the door was shut. Those who were ready. Now it tells us how it will be in back of chapter 24 at the end. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household?

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But then there's the wicked servant and he lives a life that is so far removed from what a servant should be.

Ready to go in. If that midnight cry were to come tonight, are you ready? You know, there are lots of things in life we miss.

[22 : 28] If you're anything like me, you've missed boats, you've missed buses, you've missed trains, you've even missed planes. But the thing is, you can get another one another day.

This is one miss that is fatal. There is no other time. Here we have reached the end of the day of opportunity.

Tonight, just now, is still the day of opportunity. Jesus, tonight, is still offering himself. That cry, that midnight cry, has not yet come.

The cry that Jesus is crying to you tonight, is come unto me. It will be a different cry then. And it's going to be too late.

Because the door, we're told, was shut. It's just like when Noah went into the ark. When Noah went into the ark, we're told that God shut the door. Noah could no longer get back out.

[23 : 35] nobody else could get into the ark. That's the way it was. And my friends, it's a solemn, serious thing to realize that there's going to come a day when the day of opportunity has closed and God closes the door.

And never again will there be the opportunity to find safety in Christ. And we find the desperation and the urgency of those who come afterwards, the others saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

You hear the desperation in their voice. You know this, if they had cried that cry and prayed that prayer in the day of opportunity, the Lord would have opened the door to them.

Because now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. And if they had cried, Lord, Lord, open to us, he would have opened.

But the day of grace is over. The day of mercy has finished. It is now the day of judgment and the day of God's wrath.

[24 : 42] And for all who are on the outside, it's a fearful thought. And Jesus says, the Lord says, I do not know you.

Isn't that an amazing, a fearful thought? I don't know you. Lord, Lord, open to us. I don't know you. That is why it is so important in life to come to know the Lord.

Do you know the Lord tonight as your Savior? And I want, maybe I'm speaking to people who have been in church all their life. And maybe you really don't know how things are.

Well, I want you tonight to grapple with this one thing. And I want you to go to the Lord and to tell him. The most important thing is to be honest with the Lord and tell him exactly how things are.

And say, Lord, I have heard many a sermon. And there have been days I've asked you to become my Savior. And sometimes I wonder if I'm a Christian and sometimes I wonder if I'm not.

[25 : 49] I don't really know where I am. Well, Lord, tonight I really need to know. And I really need to have you as my Lord and my Savior. Please come into my heart.

Be the King of my life. Be the Lord of my life. Because tonight is the day of salvation. We're not promised another. Seek the Lord while he is to be found.

Call upon him while he is near. For you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will return. Let us pray. O Lord our God, we pray that we might be wise unto salvation by laying hold upon Jesus as he has offered to us in the gospel.

Help us to realize that the very words that we hear tonight are words that won't go away from us. And if we turn away from Jesus, they will be words, if any soul is lost, that will reverberate eternally before them, that the day of opportunity was there and it was despised.

O Lord our God, we pray that we may call upon the Lord and we're told that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[27 : 10] we pray then tonight in the day of opportunity, in the day of grace, in the day of mercy, that souls may seek the Lord. O be with us, we pray, and take away from us our every sin.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen.