

Matthew 24

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[0 : 00] I want to talk about just one word, and that word is promise. From time to time we're all asked maybe to promise something, or somebody will give us a promise.

Very often when we're young, and perhaps not so young, our parents might ask us to clean our room, or to cut the grass, or to do some other task around the house.

And they might ask us to promise to do that, to promise to clean our room, to promise to do what we're asked with them, what we're asked to do by them.

And we might ask other people as well, maybe our friends or someone else, to promise, maybe perhaps to stay friends for life, or to promise to do this, or to do that for us.

Teachers, of course, in school, ask us to do homework, and sometimes we have to promise to do the homework as well. But the sad thing is, of course, that we sometimes let other people down by forgetting what we promised them, or perhaps not doing what we promised them.

[1 : 20] And other people may well forget what they have promised us, or what they have promised to do for us, because sometimes other people can let us down as well.

But you know, God's word is full of promises. And God keeps every single one of his promises. And they are covenant promises.

They are in his word. And some examples, for example, is God, we see a rainbow from time to time. And God promises in the word, this is a sign, this rainbow is a sign, it is my covenant promise that I will never flood the earth like I have done before.

God has promised, he made covenant promises to Abraham, that there would be a great and mighty nation would come from the seed of Abraham.

And that has been realized bit by bit as we go through this world, with many, many people coming to believe on Jesus Christ, and coming to faith in him.

[2 : 26] God made promises to Moses at Mount Sinai, as he gave him the law, and as he gave him the instructions for carrying out the sacrificial system as well.

God gave promises to David. He renewed his covenant with David. And he told him that there would be one born from his seed, from his ancestry, that would be the chosen Messiah.

And Jesus, of course, himself has given many covenant promises. Jesus never forgets either. And Jesus promises that if you put your trust and faith in him for your life and for eternity, that he will never, ever let you go.

He knows all of his own children personally. And he encourages the children, the young people especially, come to me, all of the children.

Not one of them will be or ever can be lost. God never lets any of his people down. And he says, you draw near to me, and you come close to me, and I will draw near to you, and I will be with you forever.

[3 : 36] He asks that you believe in him, to trust in him, to give yourself to him, and he will look after you always. That's his promise. And he will keep that promise.

That's for certain, because it's in his word. And he asks you today, to listen to his word, and to place your faith, and your trust, and your confidence in Jesus today.

And if you do, you will never, ever regret it. May he bless these thoughts to us. Well, let's sing again this time, and sing Psalms, version Psalm 96a.

Psalm 96a. And we'll sing the verses, Mark 7, down to 13, to the end of the psalm. It's on page 127, of the Blue Psalm books.

Page 127. Psalm 96a, verse 7, and the tune of Kilmarnock.

[4 : 40] All nations, to the Lord ascribe the glory that is due. Glory and strength, ascribe to God, and praise his name anew. Down to the last verse, they all will sing before the Lord, who comes to

judge the earth.

He'll judge the world, in righteousness. The peoples, in his truth. From verse 7, to the end of the psalm, to God's praise. Amen. All nations, to the Lord ascribe, the glory that is due. glory and strength, must cry to God, and praise his name anew.

Then turn his course with joy and ring, and offering with you.

Worship the Lord in holy fear, all that before him now.

[6 : 12] Tell them, tell them, tell them beyond the Lord is king, his salvation is the end.

and can't take the mile, and not whom the Lord will judge, the lost peoples in this truth.

Let heaven rejoice on earth, The fields and all in them will shine, and forest trees will sing.

They all will sing before the Lord, who comes to judge the air.

He'll judge the world in righteousness, love equals in His truth.

[7 : 54] I turn with me now to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24. We can take up our reading at verse 36 of that chapter.

Matthew, chapter 24, and at verse 36, on page 1000 of the ESV Bibles. Page 1000. We'll read through to verse 13 of chapter 25.

Here we have two chapters, two whole chapters that Matthew has recorded for us here that foretells of the coming, the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew gives signs of things that will happen towards the end. He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man and the man or of it.

There are parables here, the lesson of the fig tree, the parable of the ten virgins, which we'll read, the parable of the talents, and so on, all pointing us towards the second coming of our Lord Jesus.

[9 : 10] We'll take up a reading at verse 36. But concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away.

So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field, and one will be taken, and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, and one left.

Therefore stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake, and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?

[10 : 25] 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 if that wicked servant says to himself, My master is delayed, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the hypocrites.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the kingdom of heaven will 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 flashes of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

But at midnight there was a cry, Here is a bridegroom, come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

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. 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 : 49] Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Amen. Amen. And may the Lord bless to us that we do not know this word. And to his name be the praise and the glory. Let's bow our heads again for a short word of prayer.

Father in heaven, that word that we have read, it tells us to be ready.

And it tells us to take heed of your word. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your gospel. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you, O Lord, that you have not left us to ourselves. That you have opened up a way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, our beloved and blessed Savior.

[12 : 54] We thank you, O Lord, that he has done everything for us. That his sacrifice at Calvary has satisfied the divine justice that was required for sin.

We thank you, O Lord, for his sacrifice, for his death, and that he has risen again. We bless you, O Lord, for the great gospel invitation that tells each one of us, come, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.

We thank you, O Lord, that it is nothing of ourselves, but that it is all of Jesus and what he has done on that cross at Calvary. That it is all of grace.

And we truly pray that your word will be blessed today and that your own people might be encouraged and that for any who are with us here today who are still strangers to your grace, that they may come to know you savingly, that there may truly be rejoicing in people coming to faith and a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior.

We ask your blessing, O Lord, upon the church worldwide. We pray that your word would go out with power to all corners of the earth today. We remember your people who have been persecuted.

[14 : 25] We remember your people who are in fear of their lives, perhaps even this very moment, that you would be very close to them, that they would know of your close presence and that you would bless them.

We pray, O Lord, for all who are suffering, all who are going through hard and difficult circumstances today. We pray, O Lord, for those who are mourning and grieving.

We remember them. We pray for those who are laid aside, who are unable to be with us today. And we thank you that you are to be found wherever your people are.

You are not confined to any four walls. Bless them, O Lord, where they are today. Bless your gospel who may truly flourish. We remember our town here and the surrounding areas of our town. We remember the many people who seem to have no concern for their souls, no care for the gospel, and who seem not to worry at all about eternity.

[15 : 32] Lord, we pray for them. We pray for each and every one. We pray that you would work in them, that they would be turned from the walk that they are on that leads to eternal death, that they would be turned, that they would seek the Lord while he may be found, that they would call out to him while he is near, that they would come to a saving knowledge.

We pray for our town. We pray for the surrounding areas. We pray for our island, and we pray for this whole region of the Western Isles. Lord, remember us, we pray, and come with your power. Bless our leaders. Lord, we remember our local councillors, our MSPs and MPs, and we pray, oh Lord, that you would bless them in the privileged positions they are in, and we pray especially that you would bring men and women to the fore that would lead us in the ways of righteousness. Remember us as a country, and as a nation, we ask these things, oh Lord, as we remember our royal family as well, and pray your blessing upon that household.

Continue with us here, then we pray, and bless your word to us, forgive our sins in Christ. Amen. Amen. Well, before we consider aspects of that passage, we'll sing again and sing Psalms, Psalm 45a, and we'll sing the verses marked 10 to 15.

[16 : 59] It's on page 57, page 57 of the Blue Psalm books. Verse 10 to 15.

O daughter, listen, and give ear, consider what I say. You must forget your father's house, your people far away. To verse 15, attendant maidens follow her, and so to you are led.

They enter, and with great delight the palace courts, they tread. These verses 10 to 15, to God's praise. O daughter, listen, and give ear, consider what I say.

You must forget your father's house, your people far away.

Because your beauty is so great, the King is held in throne.

[18 : 22] He is your Lord, give him respect, before him humbly fall.

We have a chance of time, to offer gifts to you.

Your faithful to pursue.

You must protect. In glorious golden brighter gold, the princess waits within.

In richly armamented rose, she's proud before the king.

[19 : 44] A tender maiden follower, and so to you are led.

They enter and with great delight, the palace courts may tread.

I return back with me then to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 25. And I'd like us to consider this parable of the ten virgins.

Read from verse 7. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

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. 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.

[21 : 08] This great wedding feast that is portrayed for us here is symbolic of the joyous occasion that we're told about when Christ shall come for his church.

And in Revelation chapter 19, a chapter of rejoicing in the first half, then there's a section on the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And the Lord says, in verse 9, The angel said to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The way into the marriage supper is set out for us in the Gospel.

And the way in is granted to everybody who prepares according to what the Lord asks them. The primary teaching we have in this passage, It clearly implies to us that there are those in the church who are prepared for this event, and there are those within the church as well who are not prepared.

[22 : 34] The only difference we have here in the passage between the ten bridesmaids is the failure of the five foolish ones to prepare for the Lord, who returned sooner than they expected.

So we have the Lord portraying this Jewish wedding here. This wedding scene in Jewish times was, all the people who were round about him, the disciples who were with him here, they would have known of all that happened at the Jewish wedding.

It was a very relaxed affair within the culture and historically. There was no set time really when the bridegroom would come to the bride's house to take her to his own home for the wedding feasts.

And the festivities lasted a long time. And there were occasions of great joy with much feasting, and there was much music there as well.

And for these weddings in the culture at that time, there were three stages to the marriage procedure. The first stage was the engagement.

[23 : 52] And at the engagement, the respective fathers of the bride and groom, they made a formal settlement together and accepted what was to happen between their children.

The second stage of the procedure was what's called the betrothal. And this was a ceremony which was held normally in the bride's parents' house.

And at that ceremony, mutual promises were made relating to the settlement that had been made in front of witnesses. And the bridegroom normally gave his future bride gifts at that point as well.

The man and the woman, through this betrothal, they were then bound to each other, as it were, by the ceremony, even although they were not actually man and wife at that point.

But this betrothal, it was so binding at that time that if the man died during that period it lasted, then the woman was actually regarded as a widow.

[25 : 03] So these are the first two stages. And the third and final stage of the wedding, after a lapse of normally about a year, the third stage was the actual marriage itself.

And this final part, where we have it here, where the ten bridesmaids in the story are going to meet that procession, this is what's pictured here for us in the parable.

And at this stage, then, the bridegroom and his friends, they would go to fetch the bride from her father's house, and the bridegroom would take her back to his own home for the marriage and for the feast.

And it was that procession, from the home of the bride's parents to the couple's new home, this was a really important part of the whole wedding ceremony.

We have ten bridesmaids here, and it was a great honour for these young ladies to be chosen to be bridesmaids. And they would have had their lamps with them.

[26 : 09] They would have been waiting at some point on the road, waiting for the wedding party. And as it passed, they would then join the procession. If the bridesmaids went to sleep and didn't waken, for example, or if they didn't have oil for their lamps to keep them burning, or if they were gone somewhere else for some other reason, when the bridegroom came, they would miss out on

the festivities, and they would bring embarrassment and shame upon themselves and upon their families and effectively be cast out.

Once a bridegroom arrived at his home, he went in with his bride and with the whole wedding party, and then the door was shut.

And there was no possibility of any late access to anyone. So this is a custom that Jesus has used for illustrating this particular parable.

So we have these bridesmaids, and they would have been given the invitation to be bridesmaids well before the actual marriage ceremony took place.

They would have had plenty of time to prepare themselves for the actual event of the marriage.

They would be given instruction, and they would be given guidance.

[27 : 38] They would be told what would be expected of them in carrying out the duties of a bridesmaid. And what we see here is that at the time when they were just waiting for the bridegroom to go and correct the bride and to come along the road, the foolish bridesmaids took their lamps, but they never took any oil with them.

But the wise ones, the prudent ones, they used the time beforehand wisely, and they prepared themselves, and they made sure that they had oil.

They made sure that they had what was needful to carry out their duties and to enter into the marriage ceremony and to go and enjoy the marriage ceremony.

They took, we're told here in verses 3 and 4, they took flax of oil with their lamps. And we're told also all the bridesmaids, because they're waiting for quite a while here, they fall asleep.

And they're set to greet the bridegroom, and when he arrives, no matter when he arrives, they're ready, we're led to believe, or so it seems. And we would normally expect these young women to be ready, because the bridegroom's coming was going to signify the start of a great and joyous occasion, a great ceremony, a great feast, and a time that they would remember for the rest of their lives.

[29 : 11] No doubt that would be a highlight for the rest of their lives, apart from perhaps their own marriage itself. But the real surprise we have here is that five of the bridesmaids have not prepared.

And it actually comes almost as a bit of a shock in the whole narrative that we have here. And I think we need to understand in the passage that the five wise ones have clearly searched out and found where to purchase the oil and where to find out everything that they needed.

But the five foolish ones didn't seem to bother. For some reason, they didn't bother to get oil for their lamps. They thought everything would be fine, even without the oil. And it's quite strange.

They took a chance, as it were, that the bridegroom would come in daylight and that they wouldn't need to use their lamps. They wouldn't need to light their lamps. But then at midnight, we're told, in verse 6, there's this shout.

And they hear the commotion and they're told, the bridegroom is coming. So what we see is the ten bridesmaids, they waken, they all waken, and they go to trim their lamps.

[30 : 32] But the foolish bridesmaids, seeing that they didn't have any oil, they asked the other five to share their oil. But of course, the wise bridesmaids can't, because they won't have enough oil for themselves if they share.

They can't share their oil. And I'll explain a little bit more of that shortly. So the foolish bridesmaids had to go and buy oil. But as they are still searching for this oil, as they're looking out for it, the bridegroom reaches his home.

And those who were ready with him went in with him to enjoy the celebrations and to enjoy the wedding banquet. And we're told the door was shut in verse 10.

The key point we have here is that foolish bridesmaids didn't have oil when it was really needed. And we're told they plead with the Lord.

They go to the door and they knock the door and they plead with the Lord. And they say, Lord, Lord, open to us. And the bridegroom replies to them, Truly, I didn't know you.

[31 : 44] And this connects very clearly with chapter 7 of Matthew. And at verse 21 there, the Lord says, 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.

And so on. And the bridegroom's attitude might seem a bit harsh to us, really, when we look at the whole parable here.

But it's truly an appropriate response because these five foolish bridesmaids, there is a gross breach of responsibility on their part on what they were required to do. And so they were shut out of the wedding feast, shut out of heaven, as it were. They looked very like, these five foolish bridesmaids looked very like the five wise ones. And we might not be able to see the difference outwardly either between ourselves, but we need to remember it's not on the outward that God looks at.

[33 : 03] They went searching for oil and it was too late. They couldn't find it. And the door was shut to these five bridesmaids. I remember not that long ago attending a wedding in in Mernison St. Stephen's Church there.

And it's compared to this church, it's a relatively small church. But what I recall from that day, because we could see the actual outer door from where we were sitting. And what I recall from that day is that when the bride came into the church and her bridesmaids and the whole party after her, once that was done, the door was shut right in front of us. And there was nobody else going to come in to that wedding ceremony. And it reminded me very much of this parable on the day. And I realised the significance, I think, of this door shutting. Because anyone who would come in afterwards would be truly embarrassed. And it's just not the done thing to come in after the bride has arrived in the church.

[34 : 10] So it was quite clear on that day in the small church setting to see the door closing and those people who were in, they were the ones who were going to enjoy the feast later. So these five, these ten bridesmaids all look the same.

And just take a moment just now just to have a look around you in here. Have a look at the people beside you, across from you. The people are sitting down from you or whatever. and have a look round here at all of us gathered here in this congregation today. Some people here you might know and other people you might not know.

Some people here are genuine Christians and some people attending here today are not. That's what we believe. How do you know just by looking at the person on the outside? Perhaps you might make a personal judgment call on them. And that we might think well there are people here who definitely live their lives in a Christian manner according to the word and believe that they are Christians.

[35 : 22] And you might think that there are people here who perhaps don't live their lives in the way you would imagine them, the way you think a Christian should be and so you might come to the conclusion they are not Christians.

But really how do you know and how can you tell from the outside? Because we are all sitting here and we are all generally the same the same as these ten bridesmaids. We are all dressed very similarly.

So how can you tell from the outside whether a person is a Christian or not? How can you tell by the way they look and just by the fact that they are here in church? You can only guess can't you? You can really only guess about other people. So it's got to lead to the question then how do you know yourself that you are truly a Christian?

How do you know that you are the Lord's? Well if your life is committed to Christ and if you depend on him for everything even your next breath then you are his.

[36 : 29] If you truly love him and you know securely within yourself that you are the Lord's and that he loves you you are his. If you have a love for your brothers and sisters in Christ you are his.

The word makes it very clear to us. If you realize that you need to have oil in your lamp you are his. in other words if you realize your need of Jesus and of the grace of God in your life you are his.

If you truly realize it. So it leads to another question that becomes very personal. So where does that leave you as you sit here today with respect of what we've just discussed there?

Are you sitting here again today under the gospel with your lamp but no oil in it? That's a question that we have to ask ourselves.

We have to search ourselves. Are you looking to go, are you searching for this oil? How do we tie that in together with scripture?

[37 : 53] Well let's go to Isaiah chapter 55 and just one verse there tells us at the very beginning and the whole chapter put it into context but in the first verse in Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 55 we read this.

Here is a great invitation from the Lord. He says, come all of you, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and he who has no money, come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Here is the great invitation that we have from the prophecy of Isaiah.

That invitation is based upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work at Calvary. Isaiah himself just prior to that gives us these great words in chapter 53.

He tells us that he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed.

[39 : 06] Isaiah's words, it's almost 700 years before the events at Calvary actually took place. but we now have the word of God that confirms to us that the Lord Jesus Christ, he was born into this world and that he gave himself as a sacrifice for many, for all who would search out and for all who would seek to buy without money and without price because the Lord Jesus himself has paid the price on that cross at Calvary.

and he's saying today come, come to me. Paul tells us that he who had no sin, he was made to be sin in our place so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

That's a great invitation and we have the great words of John 3 16 that God loves you so much that he has given us his only begotten son that whoever will believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Those who were with Jesus in his ministry on this earth, they have been by the power of the spirit have been given to write and record for us. Those who were eyewitnesses to all that happened to record for us what happened with our Lord on that cross at Calvary.

And God has not left us to ourselves but Jesus has opened up this way of salvation and says I am the way and I am the truth and I am the life and it's only through me that you can have access to the Father by believing in him and his finished work on that cross at Calvary.

[41 : 02] so we have to look at ourselves and we have to examine ourselves personally in the light of these things and we have to look past the outward which we do so often because it may well be that you're here today and that you have the outward appearance and that you fit in to everything that's perhaps expected of the people round about you but maybe there is no inward reality maybe there is no spiritual life within maybe there is no oil in your lamp no vital link to the source of eternal life no union with Christ God isn't interested in looks God isn't interested in any status we might have he's not interested in what position we might have in anything in this world he's not interested even today in what we're waiting and if we just fit in and look right here what God does is

God searches our hearts and God looks inward to establish what we're really like and what we are really wanting in this life and to establish whether we are truly wanting Jesus as our saviour and to see if we have Jesus as our saviour you see there's no such thing as a second hand faith someone can teach us about religion someone can teach us about theology but that person cannot give you the oil he or she can't give you faith because that's just like if you're sitting in here and you know there's a Christian sitting next to you it's like turning to that person and saying give me some of your grace give me some of your faith because I need some of that for myself and I don't have it but they can't in just the same way as the five wise bridesmaids couldn't give the five foolish ones any of their oil because they needed that oil for themselves and every

Christian needs that grace for themselves it's personal and it can't be given to anyone else this is a personal gift from a personal God to each and every individual who comes to faith in Christ it can't be shared so it tells us that we have to be prepared individually and we need to be prepared outwardly if you like by having oil in our lamp and inwardly by having that oil in our lamp by having the grace of God active in our lives that precious precious gift from God that he offers to everyone his grace and his love and his mercy to have God's grace in your soul you know Jesus makes it very clear even in this parable that it's a time for repentance and it's a time when repentance will be too late because when the bridegroom comes it'll be too late to ask for help it'll be too late to pray it'll be too late to read the Bible it'll be too late to plead for mercy it'll be too late to get ready and there's something really awful in the thought that that you can have just enough religion in your life that you can have there can be just enough religion in you just to deceive your heart and to deaden your conscience to the reality of these things that the word tells us about just enough religion in there that leaves you without Christ and so without hope in this world or for eternity just enough religion to prop up your soul with a false confidence perhaps based on your own good works and perhaps thinking well yes

