

Stay Ready So You Don't Have to Get Ready

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[0 : 00] and pray for Carl as he preaches. Thank you. Can you hear me?

Oh, yeah, that's good. That's good. Well, it kind of reminds me of what I went through when I was in college. I kind of pulled the niter.

So forgive me for being late this morning, but, well, you know, I got to sleep was so good. I was dreaming that I was with you, but then that was not the right thing.

Amen. Amen. Okay, let's turn our attention to Matthew 25, verses 1 through 13. This is a passage that I've always been a little curious about.

I thought, well, that would be a good place to go. For this morning, Matthew 25, verses 1 through 13. It's something that I have to remind myself of here.

[1 : 07] 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, or enough oil with them, as it were.

The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

At midnight, the cry rang out, Here's the bridegroom. Come out and meet him. Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

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.

[2 : 14] But while they were on their way to buy 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 came, Lord, Lord, they said, Open the door. But he replied, Truly I tell you, I don't know you. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

You may be seated. I was wrestling with what the title is, and my wife, as brilliant as she is, came up with a good one.

You ready? Stay ready so you don't have to get ready. Let's say that together. Stay ready so you don't have to get ready.

You know, I'm sorry about my throat. The recent Supreme Court decision was a great triumph, not only for life, but for constitutional government.

[3 : 33] I'm concerned that this country has entered into a post-constitutional phase, and we're in serious trouble. Not just for the unborn, but even for those who are already born.

We see an increase in violence, and we get concerned about those kind of things, as we should be, and we get tied up in these things, as we should be concerned about these things.

But why do we concern ourselves with these things? Because our primary objective objective is to bring glory to God.

So whether we protest or sing or do work in the community and whatever, we have to remember that the ultimate object of what we do is to bring glory to God.

You know, when I first came to Christ, I expected Jesus to return at any moment.

[4 : 37] Thank you. I expected him to return at any moment. I'd look up to the sky, and I'd look at the clouds.

So is that the one he's coming on? And as the years passed and I got involved in ministry and other things, I kind of lost sight of that. I know he's coming, but I kind of lost sight of the immediacy of his return.

Does that make sense to you? Some of you already know that in my early life as a Christian, I didn't know the hour nor the day that Jesus returned, but I knew the week. But I don't know anymore.

Because I read my Bibles. So here in this passage, the idea of the Messiah as a groom is a familiar theme.

In the Old Testament, God often portrays himself as the husband of his people. Remember Hosea? Remember that? That's an incredible story. And since Jesus is God with us, it is clear that he is the groom in this passage.

[5 : 49] So what was the focus of this parable? It was not the oil and the lamps that distinguished the wise from the foolish. Because they all came with lamps filled with oil.

But the foolish did not forget, did forget, you know, they didn't forget just to bring oil. They just only had enough oil for the lamps that they were carrying.

And instead, the delay of the groom shows us that the amount of oil the foolish ones had was not enough. The focus of this parable, then, was on the groom's delay.

That was the point. The groom's delay. And the point of this parable, can you guess? Stay ready.

So you don't have to what? Get ready. Okay, all right. You'll have some other opportunities later on. This parable is the third in a sequence of parable.

[6 : 59] There are five parables in this particular long passage, but I'm going to focus on three. And each of these parables deal with some aspect of watchfulness or awakeness.

Okay? But watchfulness is not always passive. There are important things that must be done while we watch. It's just like the Bible tells us to wait on the Lord.

But as we wait on the Lord, we must work for the Lord. It's not a matter of sitting around twiddling our thumbs. And so, the overarching theme of this parable is to be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man.

That is so important. And I think sometimes in our busyness and everything, we begin to think that Jesus is about to come back. These parables call us to be faithful in behavior in light of Jesus' return.

Now let's look at that first parable I mentioned. I said it was a series of three. The first parable was found in the previous chapter, Matthew 24, verses 42 through 44.

[8 : 10] And in this parable, he warns us of the unexpectedness of his return. Quote, therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour of the Lord's return.

But instead, but understand this, if the owner of the house had known what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

So you must be ready because the Son of Man will come in an hour when you do not expect him. I realize that that's the exact time he's coming when we least expect him.

In this case, foresight and wisdom are indispensable. Since no one knows what time the thief would strike, constant vigilance is required.

And so we must be ready at all times because the return of Christ will be like a thief. So what's the point here?

[9 : 21] Stay ready so you don't have to get ready. All right. The second parable is found in verses 45 through 51 of chapter 24.

And it shows us that we should actively obey Christ as we watch for his return. Verse 45.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom the master puts in charge of the servants of his household to give them their food at the proper time. It would be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

Truly I tell you that he will put him in charge of all of his possessions. But, suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, my master is staying away a long time.

And he begins to beat his fellow servants. Hmm. Interesting. And to eat and drink with drunkards.

[10 : 33] The master of that servant will come on the day when he does not expect him and at the hour he is not aware of. he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It is sinful to be senseless and inactive. It is by grace to be watching and waking. to watch does not just mean believing that Christ will return.

Everybody believes that. Or at least they should. It means to be to desire his return. To ponder his return. To always be conscious of his imminent return.

Whatever you do has got to be salted with that consciousness that Jesus is coming at any minute. Our wakefulness is in vain if we do not get ready.

We don't know the time of his return but we know that his return is certain. It will come quickly without warning so Jesus tells us to be on the lookout.

[11 : 49] Now don't be like the disciples at the ascension they were just looking up at the clouds and the angel said hey guys stop staring. Let's get busy.

Right? Remember that? My translation. My translation. So the return of Christ will be when we least expect it and when he comes he will display his glory he will humiliate his enemies and he will maximize the joys of his people.

If Christ finds us asleep and unready we will suffer loss and it will not be the result of robbery but the result of his judgment.

If Christ finds us awake and ready we will have great fulfillment and peace. The end of one mercy will be the beginning of the other.

The end of one joy will be the beginning of the other. If we are not watchful and ready we will begin to think that his delay is never.

[12 : 54] And when you start thinking and forgetting that Jesus is coming back pretty soon you know what happens to the servants? Remember that wicked servant?

He began to beat his fellow servants. Brutality broke out. Meanness cruelty even against our fellow believers.

all right. The point of this parable is stay ready so you don't have to get ready.

Now the third parable is the one we read and we are looking at in this it stresses the need to be prepared in the case of an unexpected delay in Christ's return.

So give me one more chance here. What do you think is the point of this third parable? All right.

[14 : 08] All right. All right. Now let's look at the marriage ceremony customs of that day. You know I used to read this thing. I didn't quite understand what was going on. I'd been to weddings before but I didn't understand this thing with the lamps and all that.

So I did some digging. All right. First of all the ten virgins were bridesmaids whose role was to assist the bride. That's what it was. It was a big wedding.

He's a bridesmaid so we all know what that is. And the groom would gather his close friends at his house. Maybe that's where the bachelor party came in right? I don't think this bachelor party was quite as wild as some others I've heard of.

All right. And after some of the festivities they would leave his house and go to the bride's house. So there would be this procession of people going to the bride's house.

The marriage ceremonies would take place at the bride's house. And this would be followed by a procession through the streets back to the groom's house.

[15 : 12] So you got it? So the groom would be with his friends having a good time. Then they process to the bride's house. Right? And then the ceremonies would take place there.

Then they would process back to the groom's house. The procession was usually after nightfall. And the bridesmaids were expected to meet the groom as he came from the bride's house.

house. And everybody in the procession was expected to have a lit lamp. And anyone without a lit lamp was assumed to be a party crasher or even a criminal.

You get this? And thus the groom was justified in excluding them. And hence it was wise for the bridesmaids to have an extra supply of oil.

And hence in the case of the marriage ceremony, in case the marriage ceremony lasted a little longer than expected. You've been to weddings. You know how sometimes things go on and on and on and on.

[16 : 19] Okay? All right. Now the post marriage festivities would begin once the procession arrived back at the groom's house. First there will be a lavish banquet.

And then second there will be joyous celebrations to follow. Lasting many times for several days. So let's make some observations about this. Both the wise and the foolish bridesmaids dozed off while they waited.

Their drowsiness, I don't think in this passage, was not the main issue here. I mean, look at me, I was sitting on my computer and I dozed off.

That's why I was late. The only distinctions between the two groups were the following. First, the wise bridesmaids brought extra oil just in case.

The foolish bridesmaids had no extra oil at all. These bridesmaids had a preconceived idea about the timing of the groom's arrival.

[17 : 41] They were like me in my early Christian days, you know. I knew the week when he was coming back. By the way, if he came back when I thought, most of us wouldn't be here today.

Praise God for his grace, right? All right. So, and once the oil ran out, if you know about kerosene lamps and stuff, once the oil ran out, the wick itself would burn brightly.

Have you ever, you know when a light bulb goes out, you know, you turn on the light, it's real bright, boom, it's gone. You ever notice that? That's the situation here. The wick, when it starts burning, it burns brightly.

But the bright flame dies out very quickly. The second distinction, the wise bridesmaids were prepared for the groom's delay.

The foolish bridesmaids were not prepared for the groom's delay. They expected to meet the groom on their own timetable, not his. Sadly, the foresight of the wise bridesmaids could not help the foolish bridesmaids when crunch time came.

[19 : 00] If they had shared their oil, all their laughs would have gone out. The wise bridesmaids knew that being prepared could not be transferred and not shared.

saved. So when the groom finally showed up, the results of their decisions was revealed. The wise bridesmaids were able to join in the procession and enter the groom's house for the lavish banquet.

The foolish bridesmaids had to hurry to 7-Eleven or wherever to buy oil, right?

Okay. And once the groom's door was shut, the wise and prepared joined in the joyful ceremonies and the foolish and unprepared latecomers were left outside to weep and wail.

And their intense cries were to no avail. So what's the message here? The refusal to admit the foolish bridesmaids was not a cold rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the kingdom.

[20 : 23] The bridegroom was not being mean here. It was not a rejection of their desire to enter the kingdom. Instead, it was a justified rejection of those who never prepared for the coming of the kingdom.

Now, what is God telling us today? That's right. Stay ready so you don't have to get ready.

All right. So let's put all this together. When Jesus tells us to keep watch, it does not necessarily mean merely to keep woke.

It does not necessarily sleep. Ooh, that has some double entendre, doesn't it? The ability to fight off sleep is not what Jesus is talking about because they both fell asleep.

The real message is this. Be prepared. Keep watching because Jesus is coming when we least expect it. tomorrow, the foolish will see the need for grace when it could have saved them.

[21 : 37] Today, they do not see the need for grace when it can sanctify them. Don't be foolish and unprepared for Jesus' delay.

What? What? Stay awake. Say ready so you don't have to get ready. So picture the end here.

When Jesus returns, he's going to ask, all set? And if we are wise, our joyful reply will be, you bet.

Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, for this word, this challenge you've given us. We ask, Lord, that you will give us the wisdom to be ready, to stay ready.

We don't want the tragedy of trying to get ready when it's too late. Lord, we have a lot of concerns.

[22 : 49] We're living in a time where there's a dramatic increase in Christian hostility. I just shudder to think about what's going to happen as people try to retaliate for this court decision.

I pray, Lord, that you will keep us ready so we don't have to stay ready and don't have to be ready. Lord, we ask that you will give us the wisdom not to be surprised by the hostility because after all, you told us that we would suffer this.

After all, look at what you suffered. We just pray, Lord, that you will keep us mindful that you are loving Lord and you are coming back and you are going to balance the books.

Don't let us be like the foolish ones. Lord, give us the grace to be the wise ones, to be mindful, to be watchful, to be busy bringing you glory.

For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.