

Matthew 25:1-13

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Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ 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.' ¹⁰ 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 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

I've never been one to watch horror movies. I'm kind of a scaredy pants, and I really just don't like many of the themes that dominate that type of film. Plus, of the few that I've actually watched, once I got past the fear aspect of the movie, the one thing that really drove me nuts was the incredibly dumb decisions that people always make in those types of movies. The main character is alone in the creaky, drafty house in the middle of the woods. The power goes out, there's movement outside the window, and suddenly a knock is heard at the door. What does the person do? They go and answer it! "Don't answer the door!" You shout at your TV, "What are you thinking?!" Of course, that's just the type of thing someone does in a scary movie—they open the door, they go down to the basement, they run off alone in the woods.

Unbelievably foolish decisions. That's also a theme that we see in our sermon text for this morning. The main characters in our account are ten young women who all have a part to play in a wedding ceremony. What that role is exactly, we don't know, but we do know that they were to be ready when the groom came—ready with their oil lamps burning brightly for the wedding processional. Of course, for an oil lamp to be burning, much like with our candles up front here, you need oil in them. And sadly for five of these women, they made the very foolish decision of not bringing any extra oil. They were wholly unprepared when the groom arrived. It's that type of decision that just makes you want to shout at the TV, "What are you thinking?! You had one job? Why wouldn't you bring oil?!"

An unbelievably foolish decision, and yet one that we have all made again and again, because there have been times in each of our lives when our oil was running low. In fact, maybe your oil is running low this morning—the lamp of your faith seemingly just a flicker as you feel you've grown apart from God. Maybe you can't even really tell that your oil is running low, and yet so many things have been edging God out of your life, that your faith has become just a smoldering ember. If this is you, then you would do well to listen to our Savior's words this morning as we consider the theme:

Keeping Your Lamps Well-Trimmed and Burning

- I. The foolish one puts off filling the oil until tomorrow
- II. The Wise One fills your oil so that you may live "tomorrow"

We could really get into the weeds in this text. Much time has been spent looking at ancient Jewish

wedding customs and traditions. Questions have been asked about what these women's role was, what the lamps were for, why the groom was delayed, what's the backstory here. Instead of digging into all of those questions, let's keep it simple: what was Jesus' main point with this parable? In this story Jesus is the Bridegroom; the visible church on earth—that is all those who claim to be Christians, including us—that's the ten virgins. And the main point of the parable is that Jesus is coming back. We don't when, so we ought to always be ready for His return.

Now, of those ten virgins, there are the five wise ones who are prepared for the groom's arrival with their lamps pre-filled with oil. And then there are five foolish ones that are unprepared, apparently just planning on finding or purchasing oil at the last moment. Similarly, in the visible church on earth, there are the wise who are *actually* getting ready for Christ's return, and then there are the foolish who figure they'll always have time later to start preparing. So, which camp do you fall in? Are you wise, or are you foolish? Yes. That's the answer. We are *all* both wise *and* foolish. We are wise because we believe in Christ as our Savior; as Christians we await His return. And we are foolish because we are sinners, and we're inclined to allowing our oil to run low.

Think back to when you were in school. If your teacher said, "We are going to have a test one week from today," you probably would not spend the next seven days studying. You'd likely wait until a night or two before to begin studying. Even if you just waited until the night before the test to study, you'd still probably do fairly well on the test. *But*, if you were a student of a teacher that loved to give pop quizzes to see if you were actually doing all of your assigned reading, and if your overall grade depended heavily on those pop quizzes, well, then you couldn't just wait until the night before a pop quiz to start studying, since you never know when those types of quizzes would come. For that type of teacher, you always have to be prepared, you always have to do the assigned reading. You stay ready at all times because you know that any day could bring another quiz.

In our text we have the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom, but as we read starting in verse 5, "**As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'**" It's a pop quiz! He came when they weren't expecting, after midnight, during the middle of their rest. And so it will be on Judgment Day! Jesus told us in the previous chapter of Matthew, "**Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**" (Matthew 24:44) Just like a pop quiz, we don't know when Jesus is coming back, but He is coming! So we ought to be preparing at all times.

And yet, don't we treat Judgment Day as if we knew *exactly* when it was coming? We treat it just like a test on the schedule, that as long as we study the night before, we should do just fine. And so, if a Sunday comes when we really aren't feeling like getting up and going to church, we tell ourselves, "That's ok, we can just go next Sunday." We fill up our weekly schedules, we plan long trips over the weekends. All the while, we push God to the remnants of our time, so that maybe we don't even get to Him for a few weeks. Maybe you have children, and perhaps you recognize the ways you've been guilty in your duty of raising them up in the training of the Lord. How easy it is for us to convince ourselves that things like nightly devotions, regular Sunday church attendance—"That would be a good routine to get into, but how about we just start that *next* month. We'll always have more time later."

Jesus is coming back. And we don't know when He will come, but we treat it as if we have all the time in the world. We are foolish! We *often* allow the lamps of our faith to run low on oil, convincing ourselves that we'll have time to fill up later. And when you see how lax we've been with God's Word, it makes you want to yell at yourself, "What are you thinking! God gave you one thing to do, and you're blowing it!"

This all reminds me of another judgment deadline from Scripture. God told Noah to build an ark. He told him He was going to destroy the whole earth with a flood because of the great sin and wickedness of the human race. And for the next 120 years Noah built that ark, and you better believe that he told a lot of people why he was building that giant boat in the middle of nowhere. The Bible tells us that Noah was a "**preacher of righteousness**," (cf. 2 Peter 2:5) and it also says that no one listened. No one believed him.

You can just hear them, watching on as year after year Noah continues his work on this giant vessel: "Stupid Noah. Foolish old man. He's building this ark saying that the end of the world is coming. That's not going to happen, that's *never* going to happen!" But then one day the rain started falling. Noah and his family were inside, and everyone else was outside. And God Himself sealed the door, and there were no second chances. So it will be at the end of the world! Judgment Day will come at a time you do not expect. It will come suddenly, and we cannot make ourselves ready with some last-minute adjustments.

We need to be urgent about this. Because, if we are not, then we are the foolish ones, always expecting to have time to fill our oil tomorrow. And if that's the case, then Jesus will answer us from the other side of a closed door and say, "**Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.**" Kind of makes you feel sick, doesn't it?

Now, an important point needs to be made regarding this text. Notice that all ten of the virgins—what were they all doing when the bridegroom arrived? Every one of them was fast asleep! They were *not* awake standing watch. Even the ones with lamps filled with oil were asleep on the job. Interestingly though, we see the patient mercy of God shining through in this parable, because the bridegroom sends someone to cry out and wake them up. "**As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'**" If it were not for this cry, all ten of them would have been doomed. None would have been prepared for the wedding feast.

So this parable is not just about "am I wise or am I foolish," it's about the Wise One, who knows that *He* must make the preparations. *He* must fill the oil of our lamps. *He* must send out a call into our hearts to shake us awake, to prepare us, to make us acceptable before His judgment throne. Because when He returns, He's not coming at an unknown hour to try and *catch* us asleep and unprepared, He is coming back to *catch* us up to *heaven* to be with Him!

And so, He sends out the call right now into your hearts every time the Word of God hits your ears. God promises that every time His Word is preached or read, the Holy Spirit is with that Word giving it glorious effect. The Prophet Isaiah says in his book, "**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to**

the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11) He is sending that Word to you today, as a voice crying out, ***“Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet Him.”*** He sends His Word to wake you up to your true spiritual condition, so that you recognize how lax you have been in your preparations. He sends out this call now, so that rather than frantically turning to others and asking for some of their oil, you can prepare now. You can simply take all of your sin and failure and lay it at the feet of the bridegroom and believe that it’s all been paid for on the cross of Calvary. And then, when Jesus comes, He will then look at you and say, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*** (Matthew 25:34)

Now, if you do feel like your oil has been running a bit low, if you are concerned that when Jesus comes back you might be on the outside of the marriage feast looking in—I would invite you to remember: the hour is late—we know Christ can return at any moment—but as of right now, it’s not *too* late. You can return to the Lord your God, for ***“He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*** (Psalm 103:8) The only time His patience ever ran out was on that dark Friday on a hill outside of Jerusalem. There, He poured out His anger over our sin and our faithlessness. He poured it out on His own Son, until the Son of God cried out, ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46)

But He did all this so that as long as you are alive, there is still forgiveness to be had for you. As you wait for the day when Jesus will come again on the clouds of heaven, you can take your sins, no matter how great, and lay them at Jesus’ feet. For Scripture says, ***“Where sin abounded, there grace abounded much more.”*** (Romans 5:20) With this grace in hand, do you realize what great blessing belongs to you? You—out of all the multitudes in this world—you have been filled with the oil necessary for eternal life. While countless thousands are perishing in the darkness of their unbelief, God has put faith in your heart, filled your lamps with oil, to trust in Christ alone as your Savior.

Do you know who the richest American ever was? Today it’s Elon Musk, but if we were to go by *relative* wealth, the richest ever was John B. Rockefeller. In an interview once, Rockefeller was asked, “What is the secret for becoming wealthy?” He responded, “There are three simple rules for anyone who wants to become rich: 1) Go to work early. 2) Stay at work late. And 3) Find oil on your land.” Do you want to get rich? The only foolproof way is for God to bless you with it, to give you oil on your land.

And so it is when it comes to the oil in our lamps. God has blessed us with an abundance so that our lamps will be well-trimmed and burning when He returns. Oil filled, believing in our Savior, we don’t need to be worried about when *exactly* Christ will return. Because, we can say, “The one who is coming to judge me most truly—He is the one who loves me most fully.” Forgiven and set free from our sin through the love of our Savior, let us stand watch, lamps well-trimmed and burning, waiting eagerly for Christ’s return and praying together, “Come quickly Lord.” Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.