

Matthew 22-07-31b

We are in Matthew chapter 25 and addressing ourselves to the parable of the Lord Jesus describing the ten virgins. We'll read it. Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened.

When is then? Then is at the return of the Master. Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise and five foolish.

Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry, Behold, the bridegroom is coming.

Go out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose 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, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you. But go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

And honestly, in which the Son of Man is coming doesn't hurt, but it's not in the original. I have it marked out in my Bible. So, wise and foolish virgins.

Here's one thing that is interesting about this parable. We do not discover that the virgins are partly wise and partly foolish by listening to the entire parable. Jesus states it up front.

And he emphasizes it. Why? As we saw in the first session, Jesus is making an issue out of wisdom and faithfulness. So what is wisdom? If we want to be wise, how would we do? The kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

They are not the bride. They are those who should be ready to celebrate the wedding of the bridegroom and the bride. They are specifically associated with the groom.

They are watching for the groom. They are going to illuminate the groom's path. Once again, if you review this parable from our study in 2013, this will be clear.

But just a quick review. There is an elaborate coming and going process in a traditional Jewish wedding. What has already taken place is the betrothal some weeks or months

earlier, which is the equivalent of our marriage ceremony.

But they didn't have the honeymoon as we used to do on the day of the wedding or the night after the wedding. Betrothal, you're basically married. But the marriage is not yet consummated because between the vows and the commitment and the fulfillment, there is a period of time.

During that time, the betrothed bride remains in her father's house. The groom goes to prepare a place for her. When that place is ready, he comes again and receives her to himself so that where he is, she may be also.

So once he has done this, he then returns to his place. The bride is in the new domicile. The groom has already come and gotten the bride and placed her in what he prepared.

She's already there. He then goes back to his bachelor pad or his father's house and prepares himself. He basically packs his suitcase, has his servants carry his stuff.

He moves her in first. Then he gets his stuff and he moves in. On the night of his move in, these virgins are waiting to light the way.

And there's going to be a glad procession of the groom with his friends, these virgins with lamps, not the little flat clay lamps you think of. These are torch lamps that were affixed to a pole so that they can be elevated and light the way. And this was traditionally done in the evening.

And this is going to be the honeymoon night. It's much more practical than flying off to some distant place. I mean, in the Jewish world, it was much more practical.

Anybody can do whatever they want. We're in the law of liberty now. But it was much more practical to attend to the needs of the bride first.

You're betrothed. You prepare a place. You go get her and take her to that place.

Then you get yourself ready as the groom, grab your stuff, and then you move in. That's the honeymoon night, and that is the beginning of the marriage. Your honeymoon is in the place you're going to live.

So this is the last stage of that complicated process. And these ladies are attached to the groom and have been asked to be a part of the glad procession to wait in an intermediate location. They're in an intermediate location between where the groom is currently located, which is probably the house of his father, his rooms in his father's house, and the place that he has prepared for his bride.

They are between and probably closer to the father's house than to the new married couple's house because they are supposed to light the way with these lamps. So I would imagine, and I'm adding a little bit here to the Lord's illustration, that they are within

sight of the father's house, the groom's house. And when he emerges from there to make his way to his new house with his bride, they see him coming out the door.

He's entering the courtyard. He's in the front yard. He has come out.

Here are his servants with his baggage and his belongings. And there is a watchman. There is someone who cries out, as you see in verse 6, at midnight, a cry, Behold the bridegroom.

And that's all there is in the text. If you notice your New King James text note, is coming, isn't in the best text. Behold the bridegroom.

There's the bridegroom. This is the shout. It is the voice that alerts these ladies.

Now, what is their status when the shout is heard? They are all asleep. Virgins, representing believers in Israel, whether they were wise or foolish, they are all asleep. The cry awakens them, just as you have in Thessalonians at the rapture.

There is a voice from heaven, the trumpet, the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, all of that noise, and the dead in Christ rise at that point. These virgins, representing Old Testament Israel saints, rise at the proclamation of the arrival of the groom. They are associated with him.

They are awaiting him. Not a part of the bride, not associated with the bride, don't even know the bride, perhaps. They know the groom.

They're attached to the groom. And they rise from sleep at the shout indicating his emergence and his imminent journey to collect his bride to enter into that new status. So, at the beginning, the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

This is their function. We just saw at the end of chapter 24 that there is an assigned function for servants. Some of them are rulers to provide food.

Other servants who are being provided that food have their own duties. Some of them clean house. Some of them empty chamber pots.

Some of them care for flocks or herds or tend the garden. Some of them cook. Some of them clean.

Some of them watch young children. Whatever their assignment is, there is a ruler servant that is charged with providing their food in due season. You may have to feed the servants in shifts in a large household.

You may have to wait and make special provision for those who are working in the fields and are going to work until the sun goes down and they come in late. The domestic staff

that needs to serve the food, maybe they need to eat before or need to eat after. And this ruler servant has to figure out who needs what when, giving them their food in due season.

In the spiritual application, those who are charged with dishing out spiritual food need to be sure that it is well prepared. They need to be sure that it is given at appropriate times, at appropriate levels, in appropriate quantities. If you have children in your group, that's a child's meal.

There's a different menu for children. There may be a different menu for the seniors, 55 plus, which just grinds me. Anyway, to be aware, to be aware, and to be attentive to the needs, to know the servants, and to be attentive to responsible execution of that duty.

And this is put for every gift, every assignment. Every servant needs to be faithful and wise in the execution of that assignment in due season. It's not always time to clean.

Interestingly, nobody is running a vacuum cleaner right now while I'm speaking. It's a wonderful thing to have a clean carpet. It's a wonderful thing to make food.

But the clanking of dishes and the thumping of oven doors and such isn't appropriate at every season, is it? Making a meal and eating a meal is not appropriate. We all have to figure this out. This is the function of wisdom.

Wisdom tells us when and how to do a thing. Faithfulness is the carrying out of that function in the light of wisdom, in the right time and in the right way. That's faithfulness.

You can know to do a thing, you can know how to do a thing, you can know when it should be done, and you just don't do it. That's the case with five of these virgins. So Jesus tells us right up front in verse 3, five of these virgins who are supposed to provide the light for this procession when the groom goes to the place he has prepared for the bride to take up his life with her.

Jesus says, these ten, five are wise and five are foolish. Interestingly, the groom and his wedding planning team of servants have chosen these ladies for this function. Evidently, it is known that five of them are foolish, but they're chosen anyway.

Here is a chance to not be foolish. It's known ahead of time that five are wise and five are foolish. This is emphasized by Jesus in verse 3. Those foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.

It becomes obvious on the journey to the predetermined spot where they are going to wait, probably just outside the courtyard of this large home. You can look and say, hey, where's your oil? They take no thought. And we're not told that the wise virgins exhort them and say, hey, where's your vessel? Where's your flask? The wise are attending to their own duties.

They are not micromanaging the virgin next to them. The wise make sure they are equipped. They are prepared.

They have what they need to fulfill their calling, their assignment. They're not busy checking to see if somebody else is doing theirs. And once again, a lot of what passes for modern Christianity would do well to tend to their own knitting instead of looking around criticizing and exhorting and crusading to get other people to do what they think other people ought to be doing.

We have our hands full making sure we are doing what we can and exploiting the opportunities that are in our immediate periphery. Instead of talking a great fight and talking to others about a great fight, let's fight the good fight of faith. If there's an opportunity in our periphery, let's concentrate on that.

That's all we can do. There's a reason why there are many servants and each of them has an assignment. We're not all supposed to do everything.

So foolish took their lamps and took no oil, but the wise took oil in vessels with their lamps. Their vessels and their lamps. These virgins have their own lamps.

The lamps don't emerge from the groom's house or the father of the groom's house. The groom doesn't come out and hand them lamps and say, light these and come on. They were instructed to be prepared for this and to bring their own lamp.

Let each one shoulder his own load. Each one should bear his own burden. Be accountable for his own readiness.

Have you ever decided that this happens to me frequently? I live in one spot and my parents' house is in another spot. And I'll say, okay, I'm going to perform some little piece of maintenance or repair down the hill. And so I'll think, okay, I'm going to need a drill and a bit and a screwdriver, and I'm going to go do this thing.

So I go down and I didn't really give it a whole lot of thought. I just thought, well, I know I'm going to drill a hole. I know I need a screwdriver.

And so I grab that stuff and I go. When I get there, I look at, by the way, I'm describing an actual happening here within the last 48 hours. I get down there and I'm ready to screw in this screw.

Well, I've got the wrong bit. I glanced at the screw. I thought it was a Phillips, but it's a painted screw.

And the paint was sort of obscuring the fact that it's not a Phillips screw. It's one of those square jobs with little grooves coming off of the four points of the square, four corners. And a Phillips bit is totally useless for one of those.

And I'm driving these into something hard. And it's just bouncing. The thing is just and not doing the job.

I know how to operate a drill. I know how to pick the right kind of screw. I know what these screws are supposed to do.

But I did not fully prepare because I didn't meditate and think carefully about the task and ensure that I had the right bit for these screws. I was actually looking for some other screws that I knew I had the right bit for. I couldn't find them because I left them out in the rain.

And I found this other little package. And because I was not fully organized, I had not put the other screws back where they belong, I couldn't find them, so I grabbed other screws that weren't quite as appropriate and for which I didn't have the right bit. So long story short, I made two subsequent trips up and down the hill before I finally got this task accomplished because I did not anticipate what might be required.

I did not check to be sure that the bit I had fit the screws that I had. I did not look ahead. This would have been wise, right? These virgins that are foolish didn't put themselves in the position of what is it going to be like after dark? Will I be ready when the call comes? Let me just check my equipment and be sure that not only do I have the rifle but I've got the bullets.

Not only do I have the lamp and a source of fire but I've got fuel. Not only do I have the printer but I've got the ink. There are supplies that go along with many things that we use and they all need to be appropriate.

I will tell you this, if I go to work on a piano in Bartlesville, I very carefully check to be sure I have everything I need or might need because I can't just walk 750 feet back up the hill to get something I failed to plan for. Bartlesville is an hour and 15 minutes away, and I can't make a two-and-a-half-hour round trip to come back here for a repair spring that I failed to put in my toolbox. So this is the attitude we should have, common sense would say, in anticipating the return of the Lord.

Now this is Israel, but as goes National Israel, Old Testament days, so goes the individual believer in the church. Are we ready? Have we thought ahead? The Lord Jesus is absolutely coming back. Think about Peter.

What kind of persons ought we to be knowing the certainty of the future? Remember when he talks about how people say, the Lord delays His coming. That's what the servant's mistake was in our preceding context. My Master delays His coming, so I'm not going to worry about Him coming back.

I'm going to raid the larder and hang out with the drunkards. And the Master came back in an hour He was not expecting because He wasn't even thinking, much less expecting.

So, that is the lesson here.

Five are wise and five are foolish. We want to be wise, and the part of wisdom is to think ahead. The judgment is absolutely coming, just as surely as the Lord Jesus is absolutely coming.

Will we be ready when the shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God sound? Will we have in the past anticipated that day and provided ourselves in the past with oil? People have tried to make the oil the Holy Spirit based on Zechariah and other things. The oil is not the Holy Spirit. The oil is our preparation.

Hope is the motivation for faith and faithfulness. Looking ahead to the certainty of the return of the Lord Jesus, we prepare ourselves now. He that is faithful in that which is least, faithful in the small things, faithful to clean up our attitudes, to check our motivations, to change our minds when we are under testing or temptation.

And remember, as we saw in the Review Wednesday Night study, that challenge isn't a hardship. Challenge is an opportunity. How can we invest in the future if we are not given investment opportunities and the knowledge to invest wisely? That's what hardship is.

That's what trial is. That's what adversity is. This is God calling up on the phone saying, I've got an investment opportunity for you.

I'm going to send some hardship your way. I'm going to send you a setback. I'm going to send you a shortfall.

I'm going to send you a rough, rocky road, and I'm going to flat one of your tires because this is an investment opportunity. If you will look at this for what it is, and operate in faith and hope and love, this is going to accrue treasure in the kingdoms which are to come. If there is no challenge, there's no investment opportunity.

Have you ever had cash? Maybe you had a \$20 bill and you stuck it in a pocket or in a purse or in a backpack or something, and weeks, months, years later you find it. That \$20 bill did no good. It's like the parable of the talents that is upcoming.

You've got to do something with it to multiply it. Well, the time that we have here, the Word of God that we have in our souls, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit doesn't actually grab anything out of the future unless it is challenged. Anytime we have an adversity, we can feel sorry for ourselves.

We can go wrong nine different ways. We can veer off the path through subjectivity, through weakness, through giving in to the temptation to sin, and so on. We can carp.

We can get into blame and shame and all the rest of it. Or we can say, Aha, challenge,

adversity, this is the phone call. I've got an investment opportunity for you.

What have you got by way of capital? I've got some oil for my lamp. I have listened to the Word of God. I've thought about it.

I've taken it on board. I am ready for this moment. These are small tests to be ready for the big moment when the groom is on his way for Old Testament Israel.

And when the groom arrives at the bride, what if he gets to the house and the bride is not ready? What if she's wearing workout shorts and flicks and it's time for the celebration. She's not dressed. She's not prepared.

She doesn't recognize the groom when he shows up. She doesn't understand the sequence or what's supposed to happen. She doesn't know when they're going to do what at the celebration.

She's completely flustered. Maybe she cracked into the wine and she's half drunk and she's totally not ready to be presented at the celebration. That's our part.

But we get a lot of application from these virgins. So the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamp. The wise, previous to this moment, previous to this arrival, already spent some time.

They got a vessel. They went to those who sell oil in the daytime and they bought oil. They filled their vessels.

They remembered to bring their vessels and they brought their lamps. They are on site with all the equipment they need to perform their assigned function. They are wise in preparing and they are faithful in showing up when they're supposed to and executing their function when called upon.

So while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. It gets later and later. They did not know at what hour the groom would come.

At midnight the cry, Behold the bridegroom, go out to meet him. All those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. They all got the matches.

They got their butane lighters out. Somebody had a source of fire and they lit their lamps. But the foolish, if there's any oil in their lamps, it's just damp.

Maybe the wick still has a little bit in it, but they're lighting their lamp and it won't stay lit. So the foolish said to the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out. They had a little bit.

They've got enough to try to light the wick, but it won't stay lit. So give us of your oil. But the wise answered saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you.

When asked, the wise are wise enough to say, I cannot do that for you or I will not be able to do my own job. Important principle of application. Unless we are fully prepared, supplied, and able to do our own assignment, we should not be trying to help others do theirs.

You cannot give from what you have, whether it is your time, your energy, your resources. You cannot constantly be trying to help somebody else out and fail in your own efforts. This is the difficult dilemma illustrated in the lifeboats when the Titanic and other ships have sunk.

You have a lifeboat that is designed for 12 people. You cram 18 or 20 into it. It is just barely floating.

And here are four or five more people who want to climb in. A kind-hearted, unwise person would say, Grab them, pull them in, and sink the entire raft. You can't do that.

There is a time where you can sympathize, and you can empathize, and you can feel sorrow for someone else's predicament, but you are not in a position to fix it. The wise virgins, maybe one of the foolish is their sister. Maybe it's their cousin.

Maybe they know them well. They would love to help them out, but if they help them at their own expense, this is the blind leading the blind, and they both fall into the ditch. Blind people should not try to lead other blind people.

You can't do that. Right? Wisdom is wise enough to know when you cannot and should not help others. There is a time and a season for every purpose, and this is not the time to give oil to foolish virgins.

And they state it. There will not be enough for us and you. Go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves.

And so they go to buy. In verse 10. Do you notice anything about this? Go to those who sell and buy for yourselves, and while they went to go buy oil for their lamps.

What's wrong with this picture? Have you ever gone to a store after it closed? What time is it? Look at verse 6. How many oil sellers are open at midnight? The foolish virgins don't grasp this. Why should we leave? If they were wise, they would hold up their torch and act like, well, it blew out. I've got a defective torch.

They actually leave to go buy oil at midnight. Who's selling oil at midnight? People are asleep at midnight. Anybody that they might know is probably at the celebration, waiting for the groom.

There's not going to be anybody they can buy oil from, but they leave to go buy oil, thinking that they are going to succeed and be back in time. Somebody has already said,

there's the groom. How long is it going to take him to cross the courtyard, emerge from the gate, and be on the path where the virgins need to light his way? The foolish don't understand the season.

They don't understand that there is no longer time, and there is no longer opportunity. They foolishly think they can go buy oil and come back in time. Not having the wisdom of God makes you dumb.

You know the word for foolish here is moros, moron. It doesn't have quite that negative, abusive tone in Greek, but the root of it means to fail. If you review our study from 2013, we talk about, and we spend some time looking at the use of this word, moros, moron, mori, in Jesus' words about salt losing its savor.

If the salt has lost its savor. Lost its savor is this word, mori. It means the salt fails.

Moros, moron, means your brain is not working. Your logic fails. Your common sense fails.

Your wisdom fails to kick in, if you have any. And it is failure. If the salt fails to be salt, what are you going to salt it with? So, the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

Verse 8, the foolish said, give us some of your oil. The wise answered saying, no. We can't do that.

And here's the wisdom that dictates why we are not going to help you. My wisdom tells me I'm not going to hand money out the window to somebody with a cardboard sign at an intersection. Wisdom tells me some might think this is helpful, but it's not.

God has given me resources and a specific means, motive, and opportunity to employ those resources. And a guy with a sign on a corner is not that time. I am encouraging illegal behavior.

It is illegal to panhandle on street corners. And if you participate, you're an accessory after the fact. You know nothing.

You're not applying wisdom. You're not glorifying God. Hand him a 20 and a tract, as some people try to do.

You don't know whether this person is asking or seeking or not. You know nothing about them. Our resources are given to us to employ in situations where we can apply wisdom.

We have knowledge. We have understanding. We have discretion and discernment.

Not random acts of kindness. Any unbeliever can do that. Anything an unbeliever can do is not reflecting the glory of God.

In and of itself, it has to come from a place of power, the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the wisdom to know when to be charitable and when to refrain. These wise virgins are completely uncharitable to the foolish. They don't give them anything.

They know the truth that's in James, but there is a season. This is not the season to be generous. This is the season to be faithful.

Wisdom tells us when faithfulness dictates stiff-arming those who come to us proclaiming their need. The wise answered, So while these others go to buy, which is a foolish endeavor, they're as foolish in leaving as they were in coming unprepared, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready, notice, those who were ready, went in with him. Be ready, Jesus says in verse 44 of the preceding chapter.

Be ready. Those who are ready are going to go in with him and celebrate and enjoy blessing and future opportunity. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut.

We have done several studies on the shut door. You know the door of the ark was shut. Jesus in Luke talks about when once the master of the house rises up and shuts the door, and others come knocking, what does he say? They say, Lord, in your name, we did all these things.

But they did it foolishly. And he says, I do not know you. What does he say here? The virgins came in verse 11 also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

What is his answer? Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. How is it that he knows the five wise virgins and he does not know the foolish virgins? I do not know you. Is he choosing not to recognize them? Does he want foolish virgins in the house with his bride and with the wise and with those who responded to the invitation? You think about the other parables of the wedding feast.

Those who have put on the right garment, who were prepared ahead of time. So much of what Jesus says is about preparation. Redeem the time.

Invest it now. When hardship comes, invest. When wisdom is proclaimed, when food is brought in due season, digest it.

Take it on board. Act in its light. Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal.

It's foolish to get too much in this world, spend too much time chasing the material, whether it is for our own possessions or trying to fix the material problems of others. There is a time and a place. There is a season for charity.

James talks about it. Notice that it is a brother in James who is in need, not the world at

large. And it is a brother in your midst, a brother in your fellowship.

It's not any old brother, any old place on any old street corner with any old cardboard sign that's got a cross on it saying, God bless you. We have to do these things with wisdom. Wisdom is based on knowledge and understanding and a grasp of God's heart, God's purpose.

So, he says, I do not know you. What is the conclusion of this first parable, the parable addressing wisdom? Watch therefore. The very same thing he said back up in verse 42 of the last chapter.

Watch therefore. You do not know what day your Lord is coming. Watch therefore.

You know neither the day nor the hour. And so preparation is ongoing. This is the good side of the doctrine of imminency.

If you treat the Lord's coming as imminent, then you will, if his coming could be at any moment, then we should be ready at any moment. And we should be thinking about that possibility all the time. Not forgetting, not getting drunk, not raiding the larder and enjoying the materiality of this world.

Why am I here? I am here to light the way. I am here to participate in the purposes of the Father and the Son. I am here to implement wisdom.

I am here to be faithful. Well, that was the wisdom parable. We'll pick up next time in verse 14 of chapter 25 and look at the faithfulness parable.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the Lord Jesus and his words and his works that are so helpful to us even as he ministers to your people Israel. The principles and the divine wisdom and understanding that come from immersing ourselves in them is so critical to our function as members of the body of Christ.

As we look toward our own visitation from the bridegroom, we pray that as we reflect on these things that your Holy Spirit will help us to see how best to apply them in our own situation, our own circumstances. And that in so doing, we will be both wise and faithful and as a result reflect your glory. Others will see that light and be drawn to you.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.