



Special Music: “Keep the Candle Burning”

Point of Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do6OH7kUyjA>

Matthew 25:1-13

- 1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.**
- 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise.**
- 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.**
- 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.**
- 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.**
- 6 “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’**
- 7 “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.**

8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 " '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.'

10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

THE ORCHID

Tender, fragile,
The orchid is an agile
Testament
To the love and gracious
Tenacious touch
Of a gardener's hand.
In anticipation
Of elation
Dressed in silk
And spectacle,
With mist and nutrient
The plantswoman
Nurtures the root and stem
Of a sparsely dressed
And self-obsessed
Candid twig.
In silence
Amidst light and shadow
The hollow breath
And tempo
Of calm words
And tender touch
Entice the bud
To bloom,
Bursting forth
In vibrant color,

**A reward
From an ever-present God
For due diligence.**

**And so, it is
With Christ's return,
As we wait and yearn
For the coming day.
Busy hands
With tender touch
Nurturing the church
And her children
In anticipation
And presentation
Of the Son,
From out the gloom
A magnificent bloom,
Elation
And promised
Gratification
For our souls.**

I recently had a routine checkup with my primary care physician. It was early in the morning and my doctor was running behind. Without thinking about it, I answered emails and messages, and then played games on my cell phone while I waited for her. It took her over an hour to get to me. I played a lot of Words with Friends. When my doctor finally got to me, the battery on my phone was at 50%. I wasn't concerned because I knew I would be out of the clinic soon enough, and I could just recharge my phone when I got to the office. But things never really go as planned and my doctor didn't like the way my heart was behaving. She sent me to the ER. I still didn't believe this to be a big issue at the time. The ER cardiac team hooked me up to heart monitor, another nurse started an IV and the next thing you know, I was stuck in a hospital bed for the rest of the day while they ran tests.

Unfortunately, by the time they had be hooked up, my cellphone battery was at 25%. Now came the dilemma. Would I continue to play games on my phone? Listen to sermons? Find things to do on my phone until the battery gave out? Or would I cut off the phone and save what battery life I had left, just in case I needed it. I did not have a wall charger in the car. Why would I need a wall charger in my car anyway?

So, I sent out a message letting people know where I was and then turned off my phone for the duration. The ER room I was in did not have a TV. I generally use my Bible App on my phone so that was not an option. So, I prayed, counted the ceiling tiles, quoted scripture and poetry to myself. They finally let me go around 4:30 in the afternoon.

What was my takeaway on this? What lesson did I learn? I thought to myself that this was probably not going to be the last time that this happened, so I need to be better prepared. Now, I have a go bag in my car that has a wall charger for my phone as well as some other necessities that I might need if I happen to get stuck somewhere. If something happens, I will just ask someone go to the car and bring it to me. Problem solved.

Jesus tells this Parable of the Ten Virgins to teach us a number of lessons. The material here is so rich. It is a story filled with meaning and instructions. And sometimes we also try to find more meaning in a story than was intended. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

When Jesus tells us this story, we need to remember that it is a continuation of a lesson from the previous chapter, Matthew 24. Jesus has been telling His disciples about being alert and watchful for the coming of the Son of Man. He talks about the end of days and the time when He will return.

I want us to ponder the fact that this is Jesus speaking at a time before the cross. He's not talking about the resurrection after He is laid in the tomb. He's talking about an event down the road. An event that most believers believed would happen in their lifetimes. It is in Chapter 24 that Jesus says:

39b That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

Jesus is telling them that no one knows when that time will come. No one. He goes so far to tell the disciples that even he doesn't know. In chapter 24:36 He says:

36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

That's a lot to unpack there. I don't want to mislead you. There are a number of varying opinions on what Jesus means. And to make it even more confusing, some early manuscripts don't include **“nor the Son”** in that passage. What's the deal with that? Does Jesus know or doesn't He? If Jesus and God are one in the same, how could Jesus not know?

There are several places in the new testament that Jesus says He doesn't have all the answers, that there are some things that are hidden from Him. I believe that it has to do with His temporal presence in a human body, conditions that exist where access to certain knowledge just wasn't available to Him due to the nature of His purpose on earth. It's not that He is incapable of knowing, but there are some things that God keeps hidden Jesus during His ministry. It is not proof that He isn't God incarnate, but that the nature of His incarnation prevents Him from knowing certain things. I believe this is intentional on His Abba Father's part.

But the focus of our passage today is on, again, the Kingdom of God. The Parable of the Ten Virgins starts out this way:

1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

“The kingdom of heaven will be like...” Like what? “Like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”

This is a little out of our cultural context here, but we can bring it into focus. Today, we can think of the ten virgins as bridesmaids. In Jewish culture it was custom to have ten virgin bridesmaids.

I need to paint a picture for us here, because how we view weddings today and how weddings were viewed at the time of Jesus are not equivalent. To the Jews, the wedding was not so much a religious ceremony, as it was a celebration of the betrothal contract between the father of the bride and the father of the groom. The parents chose the future spouses for their children. This was a legal process of merging two households. It was a contract where the bride was basically purchased from the father for an agreed upon amount (money, livestock, land, etc.). This “dowry” was paid by the groom or the grooms family to the bride’s father. While there were often religious overtones and rituals, it had more to do with culture than religion. Remember, God is in the temple behind the veil and doesn’t come out to attend weddings. I know that it may sound off the wall when we talk about it, but this was a business transaction and based on the

contractual merging of families. Love, emotion, and other things that we associate with marriage today had little or no consequence.

The wedding itself generally lasted 4 to 5 days and it started with a procession led by the groom and his attendants as they marched to the bride's dwelling to collect her and bring her to her new home. This often happened at night and the bridesmaids would wait for the groom's party. Once the bride had been collected, they would then fall in behind with their lanterns held high to light the way to the wedding banquet. It was common for the bridesmaids to carry extra oil to keep their lamps burning.

Jesus uses this allegory of a wedding because it is something that is embedded into the culture of His disciples. They understood how weddings worked. They did not understand the Kingdom of God. Jesus gives them a path to comprehension regarding what heaven is like, something they can relate to.

Unlike other parables, Jesus doesn't break this one down for us. There is a great deal of theological conjecture that occurs around this story; Jesus as the groom, the church as the bride, the bridesmaids as believers. But I am afraid that when we start to read too much into the story, the main point often gets lost.

In the story, we have the ten bridesmaids. Only five of them bring extra oil for their lamps. For whatever reason, the groom and his attendants are late. They don't get to the bride's house until midnight. Well, the bridesmaids have been waiting for hours, lamps lit. They get so bored waiting that they fall asleep. Suddenly, they hear the noise of the approaching groom and his party, so they

arrange themselves and get ready to participate. Those bridesmaids that forgot their extra oil, find themselves short of oil and the other bridesmaids are unwilling to share. The ones who don't share send the others off to find a place that will sell them some oil, like Jonathan's Lamps & Oil is open 24 hours a day. The story doesn't tell us if they found oil or not, but we do know they didn't get back to the parade in time to enter the banquet with the others. When they do show up, they find the door is locked and no one will let them in. As a matter of fact, no one will even admit to knowing them.

There are so many things that can be implied from the story, from questions to implications. Here are a few:

- 1) If the bridesmaids are believers, why didn't they share with their oil with their sisters?
- 2) Even if they were late to the party, why didn't the lord of the house let them in?
- 3) Why did the bridesmaids fall asleep? Was that a responsible thing for them to do?
- 4) How callous was it for the prepared bridesmaids to suggest that the unprepared bridesmaids go find an oil vendor at midnight?

Jesus' explanation of this story starts at the beginning and ends with a moral. He tells us what the story is about:

1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

And the moral He shares with us is:

13 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

What is Jesus telling us? He’s telling us that this story is about the Kingdom of Heaven. This parable is to help them understand His discussion with them about “the end times.” When he said “At that time” He is referring to the end times. The time of His return. And He is telling us through this story what “the kingdom of heaven” will be like in that moment. It’s going to be like a wedding banquet and those who are ready, will get to enjoy the banquet. Those who are not ready will be locked out. That all seems pretty straight forward.

He then goes on to say that we all need to pay attention and keep watch. We need to be alert and ready. We need to make sure we have everything that we need. Because we have no idea when He is going to show up.

40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Okay preacher, we get that part. We’ve heard it all our lives. And seriously, it’s been 2000 years. That’s a lot of oil for our lamps. If we don’t know how long we are going to have to wait, what can we do to stay prepared?

That all goes to purpose. The purpose for the bridesmaids was to attend the bride and light the path. They could hardly do that when they ran out of oil. They lost their purpose. And, in the end, they got locked out. If the lamp goes

out and we have no way to refill it, we are pretty much going to lose our place in line, as sad as that might be.

The point here is that Jesus has told us our purpose. He's told us what we need to be doing. He's told us how to keep our lamps filled. We are servants of our God. Our purpose is to be His hands and feet in this world, serving the children of our creator. If we are His children and fulfilling our purpose, how can we not be ready? By surrendering to His will and allowing Him to work through us, we will achieve His purpose for us, and we will be ready when He comes.

This week, I want us all to think about ways to keep our batteries charged, how we can stay prepared, how we can best serve those around us. Are we reading our Bibles every day? Are we studying our devotionals? Are we looking for opportunities to meet the needs of the people around us? Are we allowing others to keep us accountable? Here's a simple thing, are we finding ways to give away our coins every week without judgment or trying to figure out if someone is worthy? These coins are not rewards, they are just opportunities to bring a little joy into someone's life.

I beg us all to remain diligent in our service. There is no need to worry about when Christ returns. We just need to concern ourselves with being ready. We do that by serving His children.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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