

November 24, 2019

“The Parable of the Ten Virgins”
Matthew 25:1-13

FCF: Preparations needed for Jesus’ return

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has assured us of His return.
(magnet) We need to live in light of that reality.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Tough exams demand tough measures. The only time I’ve broken into a building was in preparation for an exam at Virginia Tech. I needed a quiet place where I could spread out. The final grade was based on two tests. So this one was a big deal and I knew I needed to be ready. “Why bother with the library if I can get a classroom?” So I pushed open a window in Williams Hall, crawled inside, found a room, and settled in. Now, please hear this disclaimer. I am not recommending what I did. The point is simply that tough exams demand tough measures.

Jesus spoke of greater things for which we must prepare. And He told a story to teach us.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 25:1-13](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Birds can sense a coming storm and fly away before it hits. Case in point, the golden-winged warbler. In April 2014, researchers realized that these little birds somehow knew that a massive storm system was on its way two days in advance. This storm brought 84 tornadoes and killed 35 people. But the birds had fled their breeding grounds in east Tennessee long before the it hit. Yet, when they fled, that storm was still hundreds of miles away, which means there were few detectable changes in air pressure, temperature, and wind speed. The theory is that these birds have the ability to hear sounds, infrasounds that humans cannot. It’s quite fascinating.

What does this teach? Not only the complexity of creation and the evidence of a Creator. But a reminder - the assurance of a coming event demands a response. We should take our cue.

Jesus tells this story. He is speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem just east of the city. It is Holy Week. This is the third in a series of parables Jesus tells on the subject of His return. This is a priority for Jesus. And it needs to be for us. The first parable was about a homeowner and a thief, dealing with those unconcerned about His return. The second was about good and wicked servants, making clear that, for some, His return will come sooner than they think. Yet this story makes clear that, for some, His return will come later. Here’s the point. Jesus has assured us of His return. We need to live in light of that reality.

What would that mean? You can discern the main points of any parable by picking out the main characters. That approach yields these three things. First, regarding Jesus’ return, we are to be patient. Second, we are to be prepared. And then, third, we are not to be presumptuous.

I. PATIENCE

First, we are to have patience. We see that as we consider the bridegroom.

A) The Imagery

Let's look at the imagery here. Jesus is tapping into common experiences of the time.

1. Jewish wedding customs

First, we have Jewish wedding customs. There were three stages to a wedding in those days. The first was the betrothal - a contractual arrangement in which authority and responsibility for the bride was transferred from the household of her father to that of the prospective husband. A bride price was paid. All of this had legal force. The second stage was the preparation of the marriage certificate, an agreement between the bride and the groom that would provide for her in case of divorce or the husband's death. At some point later came the third stage, the marriage ceremony and celebration. This involved the preparations of the bride and then a procession at night to the house of her new husband. This celebration and the feasting could last up to a week.

2. The bridegroom

The bridegroom was the man of the hour. He had many things to oversee so it was not unheard of for there to be delays in his arrival. And it could be difficult to let the bridal party know.

B) The Analogy

All of that is in the background to this story, things that Jesus' hearers would know well.

1. Jesus as the bridegroom

And He is saying that He is the bridegroom. This is rather shocking. The prophets of old spoke of the God of Israel as the husband of His people. And here is Jesus saying, "That's who I am." This is not the first time He has said as much but it's vital that we hear Him saying this.

2. The delay of His coming

He is the bridegroom and there is a delay in His coming. Not because of outside forces at work. Jesus does not get stuck in traffic or have to turn and go back because He forgot His wallet. No, it's only that it feels to us like He's been delayed because of how long we've had to wait.

The Lord may delay His coming longer than we expect. Which is a call to patience.

Application:

What would that look like for us? Think in terms of the opposite. What would a spirit of impatience look like? For starters, there can be a tendency to take things into our own hands. "He hasn't given me what I am sure I need - a spouse, a financial break, a higher grade, a heart change in this person I care for. Since He hasn't given that to me, I'm going to do things my way."

That's taking things into our own hands. The second way impatience can show itself is just in giving up, in throwing in the towel. "This is too hard, too much work, too much of a sacrifice. The cost-benefit analysis of discipleship isn't working. I've had enough. I'm done."

Jesus has assured us of His return. We need to live in light of that reality.

II. PREPARATION

Which means patience. And also preparation. We see that with the five wise virgins.

A) The Imagery

1. The wise bridesmaids

The imagery here is worth understanding. Different customs can obviously mean different roles. In this case, the bridesmaids are all unmarried women waiting with the bride at her house for this nighttime torchlit procession to the wedding celebration at the groom's house. There they are.

2. The preparations

The five wise bridesmaids are prepared. Given that no one knew when the procession would be, they had brought extra oil for their lamps (likely torches with oil-soaked rags). They are wise. Now their refusal to share their oil is not license for selfishness. It simply reflects the fact that there wasn't enough to go around and the procession would have been ruined without lit torches. One other thing. They are not criticized for falling asleep. Did you notice that? The reason is that watching does not mean staying awake. It means being ready, prepared. Which they were.

B) The Analogy

Again, Jesus' hearers would have understood all this. What then was He trying to say?

1. The wise ones as Jesus' true followers

These wise bridesmaids are meant to represent Jesus' true followers. They are patiently waiting, longing and ready for His return. And this has been true throughout the history of the church.

2. A point repeatedly made

Wisdom means being prepared for His return. This is a point repeatedly made (**READ Matthew 24:48-50, 40-42**). Clearly Jesus sees this as something of such a priority that He repeats it.

Wisdom means considering the possibility of His delay and being prepared for it.

Application:

But what does that mean for us? There's no simple answer here for at least two reasons. First, Jesus is not given to "Here are five quick steps on being prepared for my return. And you can find it in chapter 64 in my book, *Discipleship for Dummies*." That's not how He works.

The second reason there is no simple answer here is that being prepared, being watchful and ready, is not a thing we do. It's a way of living. We have to preach the gospel to ourselves daily and live out of it. Which means spending daily time in the Word and prayer. And regular time with His people - not only here on Sunday mornings but throughout the week as well.

Jesus has assured us of His return. We need to live in light of that reality.

III. WITHOUT PRESUMPTION

Patience, preparation, and all without presumption. This brings us to the foolish virgins.

A) The Imagery

1. The foolish bridesmaids

They are there with the others, all part of the same activities right up until that critical moment when the bridegroom arrives. Sadly, they are anything but prepared (**READ Matthew 25:5-8**).

2. Their presumption

Why are they unprepared? Because of their presumption. They figured they had enough oil, they didn't need to prepare, and the bridegroom wouldn't be long. Understand that it was a great honor to be invited to a wedding. And a great insult to come unprepared. So when they arrived, the door was shut. Which helps us understand the events at the end (**READ Matthew 25:10-12**). He didn't "know" them. There was no bond. This relationship had been so small in their eyes.

B) The Analogy

1. Some things do not transfer

What does Jesus want us to learn? There are some things that do not transfer. There are some things you simply cannot borrow. You have to possess them yourself. That's part of the lesson.

2. There comes a point

But the other part is that there comes a point in which it's simply too late. What we've put off has now gone by. The exam is today. The job's lost. The children have grown. The marriage is over. And there is one more that will come. Jesus will have returned. Then it will be too late.

There comes a point when it's too late. And so we dare not live the lie of presumption.

Application:

Jesus is making clear that to do so is to do damage to your soul - both now and forever. There is an irreversible judgment that awaits those who masquerade as His followers. That's not to say you can't have doubts. That's not to say you can't raise questions and take time to really wrestle with them. That is to drop the mask and be real. No, Jesus is speaking of the danger of pretending, of masquerading, the terrible danger of presuming upon Him with His return in view.

Jesus has assured us of His return. We need to live in light of that reality.

CONCLUSION:

An assurance of a coming event demands a response, a change in our perspective and in our behavior. Imagine that you are a prisoner of war. You have been living with your fellow POW's for some time. You have no outside contact so none of you is quite sure how the war is going. But you've noticed that the guards seem distracted and are starting to look worried. You know that your comrades-in-arms, wherever they are, will not stand for you to be forgotten or left behind. And the explosions you've been hearing in the distance seem to be getting closer.

What sort of effect would that have upon life in the camp? Despair shifts to hope. Fear gives way to courage. Your feelings of drudgery change to anticipation. Why? You know what's coming. And who. That certainty and assurance, cannot help but have an effect on you.

This story is about the gospel of the kingdom and the return of the King. He has come once and He is coming again. It may seem like it's a long time in coming but, as are all things, it is according to His good and wise plan. Which means we must be prepared, ready and waiting.

Jesus has assured us of His return. We need to live in light of that reality.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has assured us of His return.
(magnet) We need to live in light of that reality.