

Session 6

May 29, 2022

STAY PREPARED AND READY

Matthew 25:1-13

As I am writing this study, I am back home in Maryland, where I await the honor of performing my niece's wedding. As you know, these events don't happen spontaneously! Months of planning culminate in a weekend of frenzied activities, frilly dresses, and frayed nerves. While I always offer to alleviate the stress by simply signing the proper documents (for a fee, of course!) and sending the couple on their way, I've never had any takers. Why? Because the joy and blessing of the wedding celebration (as well as the potential for new grandbabies) makes it all worthwhile.

In this week's focal passage, Jesus uses the traditional Jewish wedding events to illustrate once again the need for vigilance and preparation at the prospect of Christ's return. The story He uses is set in three scenes.

A celebrated evening (vv. 1-5). While there was some variety in the events surrounding a Jewish wedding in Jesus' day, the basic elements remained the same. Typically, there was an *engagement*, an almost contractual agreement between the families that established the couple's intentions. This was followed by a *betrothal period* that involved vows that identified the couple as a couple. Finally, there was a *wedding feast* that celebrated the ultimate joining of the husband and wife. This feast was initiated by a parade of sorts, as the groom was met by lighted torches and escorted into the ballroom. While much of the Olivet Discourse refers to the end times in general, this story seems oriented to Christ's second coming, following the tribulation period, when all hope of salvation is lost (see vv. 10, 12). The story is fairly straightforward, but there is clearly some symbolism involved. The *virgins* (v. 1) are essentially bridesmaids, awaiting the arrival of the groom. Notice the clear distinction between them. While none knew for certain the exact time of his appearance, only half of them were fully prepared with extra oil for their torches. The others were *foolish* (literally *dull*, *stupid*, or *absurd*). As the evening wore on, all became drowsy, and all drifted off to sleep (v. 5). For reflection: *In this parable, the virgins represent the church. What similarities can you see between the virgins in the story and today's church? How about in your own congregation?*

A startling event (vv. 6-9). In verse 6, the bridesmaids are suddenly awakened and called into service. Even though they were all acquainted with the groom, and they were all aware of the signs leading up to his arrival, the sudden appearance startled them into reality. But for some, their preparation for this event—and their commitment to it—paid off. Even when startled by the announcement, they were secure in their role. Notice the direct connection to salvation in verses 7 and 8. As much as they may have wanted to, those prepared with the oil could not give it away to those without. *They were all responsible for their own commitment to the groom.* For reflection: *What Bible verses can you find that reinforce the truth that all people—individually—are responsible for responding to the gospel for themselves?*

A sad ending (vv. 10-13). There is a subtle but important shift in the story at this point. Up until now, the emphasis of this discourse was on waiting and watching. Here, the focus moves toward the end results. Three important truths stand out. First, there is a *definite deadline* for salvation. Notice in verse 10, “the door was shut” (contrast this to John 10:9 and Rev. 3:20). Second, there are *no second chances* (vv. 11, 12. See also 2 Cor. 6:2). Third, those attendants left out may have been acquainted with the groom, but *they were not known by him*. They did not lose their salvation...simply put, they never had it (v. 12). For reflection: *Compare these verses with Matt. 7:21-23, from Jesus’ other major discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. What similarities do you see?*