

# 2022.08.14 - Parables Of Jesus - The Missing Bridesmaids

**So What?** Jesus challenges us to prioritize procuring the oil of intimacy.

**Feel What?** Contemplative

**Now What?** How much oil is currently in my lamp? What practice or commitment do I need to make to gain more?

## VISION CASTING

**The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.**

## INTRODUCTION

We are nearing the end of our summer message series through the parables of Jesus. Today, we're going to look at a story Jesus told in response to a specific and weighty question his closest followers asked him. During the final days of his ministry, Jesus is doing a kind of farewell tour as he prepares to go to the cross to provide forgiveness and redemption for humanity. And he is also preparing his apprentices to continue his ministry without him physically present. He takes them to Jerusalem and as he is looking out over the temple and the city, he says great destruction is going to befall it.

**Matthew 24:3-6, NIV: As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."**

This simple question, "When will this happen, and how will we know that you're coming back?", develops into two chapters of response with five parables throughout. And these stories are punctuated with this command:

**Matthew 24:42, NIV: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."**

You see, throughout Church history, Christians have been asking these same questions: When is Jesus coming back? How do we know it's him? And how do we get ourselves ready?

There have been differing schools of theology crop up to answer these questions. Some believe key events have already happened. Some believe that most of the chaos remains in the future. Some believe we'll be spared from any hardship, while some believe Christians will go through extreme difficulties. And there are even those who say studying events of the end times is confusing and a waste of time.

But there is no dispute among these schools of thought that Jesus is the rightful King of the earth and that every nation will bow to his leadership. God the Father has made his Son the one true King because he is good, humble, and wise and he will reign with perfect justice and love.

The questions remains, though, when will this come to pass and how do we ready ourselves?

**Transition:** Jesus' answer to that is the same to us as it was to his early disciples:

## **SOLUTION**

**Matthew 25:1-13, NIV: "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' '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.' 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. Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."**

Jesus tells a story here about a familiar celebratory situation, and yet changes key details that mismatch cultural expectations. In the Ancient Near East, the young, single bridesmaids, here referred to as virgins, would be met by the bride and not the groom.

And they would be let in to the feast, not shut out as here. Jesus is a master story teller, so he changes details to cause his listeners to perk up their ears and pay attention to the misalignment. It's like referring to the spots in a pack of zebras or that one Taylor Swift album about all the great boyfriends she had. Everyone knows zebras have stripes and everyone know if you take her scarf, TSwift is going to write a song about you.

In Jesus' story, the groom is delayed and the wise bridesmaids had a contingency of oil to fuel their lamps. But when the excitement of the groom's arrival stirred everyone, the foolish bridesmaids, who didn't plan accordingly were left to scurry and get more oil. Their lack caused them to be shut out of the party and a dismissal from the groom.

And Jesus returns here to an earlier point he made for dramatic emphasis: Keep watch because we don't know when he will be coming. Be alert and plan accordingly lest we be caught unaware and be shut out of his kingdom.

We feel the tension of this command. Like the bridesmaids left on the outside, we wonder, "How could this be? How could Jesus left anyone out?" You see, the foolish bridesmaids assumed they could come just as they were—no preparation, no effort and the kindness of the groom would cover for them. But they assumed wrong. There is a presuming upon that looks like faith, but is actually a covering for immaturity and laziness. The result is that our hearts grow distant and cold while we still use all the right language and display the correct behaviors. The cross is a forgiving tree, but it is also one that produces fruit that is real, not plastic.

**Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*: "The Christian life in Matthew is a life of tough discipleship (chaps. 5-7), of persecuted mission (chap. 10), of practicing joyous demands (chap. 13) and of exercising self-denial for the sake of others' salvation (chap. 18). The Christian life in Matthew is not [a kind of] faith that believes a conversion experience is all one really needs; when the devil, pressures, and temptations come to "conversions only" people, they are deeply embarrassed by the gospel and its requirements and make as quick an exit as they did an entrance. Discipleship is a life of patient listening to the Word and of constant repenting under the conviction of the Word. [Martin Luther has said] 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "repent," he intended for the whole life of believers to be a life of repentance.' One-shot Christianity is misleading and finally fatal. The lamp oil of experiential Christianity, without the reserve oil of disciplined Christianity--that is to say, an experience of Jesus without obedience to**

**his teachings--betrays unbelief and will not find entrance into the end-time kingdom.”**

The crux of the parable is that those who follow Jesus must be active in their sober awareness of when they stand in relation to Jesus. This awareness will be made manifest in what he refers to in the parable as oil. What is this oil? I think Bruner is correct to encapsulate it as experience plus obedience. In other words, it's the living relationship with have with God and the follow through that shows up in our behavior. Oil, in other words, can be summed up as intimacy.

Intimacy is deep connection with and commitment to another. There's an opening of one's self through vulnerability. And there is a protection of that relationship through adaptation and personal growth. One large step of growth in maturity is moving past what's right or wrong in a relationship to a place of doing what's necessary in protecting the connection.

Now, there's a danger in our culture to automatically sexualize all intimacy, which puts us at odds to understand how often God uses the language of intimacy to describe the relationship we are to have with him. The obvious example is Jesus representing himself as a groom here in this parable. God represents himself as a husband, and his people as his wife, but not to have us imagine a sexual union, but to describe the deep relationship he has created us to have with him to find our fulfillment and flourishing.

So a lamp with reserves of oil is representative of a Christian's life that has not only declared his or her intent to follow Jesus, but expresses it in the daily commitment of living a life align to his Kingdom's values and the practices that form us according to his character. Oil in the Scripture is often a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, so this is a reminder to us that it takes God the Spirit to empower us to go deeper in relationship to God.

**Mike Bickle:**

**“The oil of the Spirit touches our hearts in different ways including the following:**

- 1. It tenderizes our heart, enabling us to feel more of God's desire for us.**
- 2. It enlarges our desire for him by encountering his desire for us.**
- 3. It illuminates our understanding with growing insight into God's beauty.**
- 4. It imparts zeal for righteousness, which helps us to overcome various temptations.”**

In the partnership God desires for us, there are things that we are unable to do, such as procuring redemption which required God's intervention, but there are things that he is unwilling to do for us, such as force a deep relationship with us which requires us to yield to him and ask for more of the oil of his presence.

**Transition:** How do we keep watch over our stores of oil? How do we get more oil to fuel this life for God?

## APPLICATION

### 1. Be Saturated With God's Truth

- **Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack*: “The focus of your thoughts significantly affects everything else that happens in your life, and evokes the feelings that frame your world and motivate your actions.”**
- Two of the most simple practices for attuning our heart to God is through prayer and Scripture reading. Opening the Bible and using it as a launch pad for a conversation with him fuels us. Psalms contain every dimension of human emotion. You have permission to plumb the depths of God's Word and explore the answers to any tough questions you may have. God is not afraid of tough questions and he welcomes you to wrestle with him.

### 2. Trust The Leadership Of Jesus

- Career will let you down. The Church will let you down. Family will let you down. Each phase of disillusionment is a gift to help you return your focus on Jesus and see more clearly the path he has you on. It could be that for every hope that crashes down it's another reality check that he is jealous for your heart—not in some weird jealous boyfriend way—because he has created you and knows what will make your heart soar according to his will and good plan.

### 3. Be Skeptical Of Anyone Who Promises Fulfillment (especially at a discount cost)

- We live in an age of deep suspicion and disdain towards institutions. From government and education to church and family, the bedrock institutions are crumbling, and often for good reason. Trust has been given to outsiders who have a populist rhetoric about how following them will lead to a better life.

- Think of all the social media influencers who often lack formal training in the area, but have huge followings. The Kardashians are famous for being famous, and they can sell makeup and a lifestyle so you can maybe even develop your own brand. It's been going on for a long time—I even remember being told that if I drink Gatorade I could be like Mike, which never seemed to actually happen. It's incredible, and it's also dangerous. To keep watch means to be aware of who we're looking to for the promise of fulfillment and our idea of human flourishing. Only Jesus can truly provide those things.

#### 4. Practice The Way Of Jesus Together

- There are pressures in this life where we will be unable to withstand their temptation if we do not have the proper connection with Jesus and his people. And where many of us are the most susceptible is where pressures and temptations work to isolate us and take us out of community. What is one of your first reactions to pain? To wall yourself up and reject the person who hurt you out of self-protection and avoidance of further hurt.
- Yes, we want you to be safe and free of harm. But there's a difference between hurt and harm. I think of my high school football coach who used to ask when we complain if we were hurt or injured. He said, "You can play hurt. We do it all the time. But if you're injured, we need to get you to a doctor." Without minimizing anyone's pain here, hurt is inevitable when there's a deepening of connection in community. But you need to keep showing up and being a part. But if there's harm, real trauma and injury, then we will take evasive maneuvers to see that you get immediate care and attention.

### INSPIRATION

Martin Luther once said, "**There are only two days on my calendar: this day and that Day.**" We all have an appointment to stand, one day, in from of this Man who is King. He is full-on love and he is full-on justice. What he says goes and what he says is good. On that day, there's no comparing ourselves to others. There's no, "My parents always said," or, "The president said," or "My pastor said." It is only about him and him alone.

And my hope for you is that you use every day up and to that day to get for yourselves oil. You press into his presence and you right yourself when you stumble and go

wayward. My hope for you is that with all your might, leaning into all his grace that is available for you, is that you watch and you pray.

**Transition:** I want to leave you with a question that will, hopefully, guide you towards Jesus and practicing his Way.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Next Step:**

- How much oil is currently in my lamp? What practice or commitment do I need to make to gain more?

### **Prayer**

### **Invitation**