

Kingdom Readiness

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[0 : 00] How's everyone doing? Good, good. It's good to be back. We just finished, or we got back from our two-week vacation that we typically do in the summertime with family and just got to have a lot of fun.

It's also our oldest son's last bit of time with us before he ships off up to Liberty University up in Virginia. So we're proud of him, but also sad for ourselves, very selfishly. But it was a really rich time.

And, you know, just listening to the sermons from here, just checking, not checking in to make sure everyone's doing a good job, but just really like feasting on the grace that comes through what God is doing here.

While I was away, I was super rich, hearing Elliot and then Kirk and the messages they brought. I was just so thankful for this church. And not just for those guys, and I'm very thankful for those guys, but every single one of you.

You know, we really build this church not around personalities. We are appreciative believers. Everybody comes ready to minister. Everybody comes ready to be used by God to be a conduit of grace to one another and to glorify him.

[1 : 10] And I feel like, man, when I'm in the room with you guys, I'm just like, yes, this is such a good place to be for my soul. And so it's good to be back. Deeply love you all.

And, yeah, that's all I want to say about that. But if you've got your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Matthew 25. We're continuing on in our series on the parables of Jesus.

We, like I said, we went on a vacation. Those of you who don't know of our family, we have four kids all on purpose. And so four kids, that is four deliveries, four hospital trips.

And, you know, when you're pregnant and you kind of know you reach that window when it could happen at any moment. The labor could be coming. And so you've got to be ready, right?

And so the conventional wisdom is you've got to have a hospital bag ready to go with clothes and toiletries and baby stuff. You've got to make sure you have the new car seat, like, you know, connected, all that.

[2 : 07] Because you don't want to be caught, not ready, not prepared. Now, imagine you've got all that, all that ready to go. And then the moment hits, you throw the bags in the car, you check, the car seat's in there.

You get your wife into the car and she's already huffing and puffing. And then you turn the key and nothing happens. And you realize, oh, man, no gas. We don't want to be that guy.

We don't want not to be ready for that big moment. Today's parable draws our attention to that same kind of readiness. But with Jesus' kingdom and some eternal consequences in mind.

And so Matthew 25, 1 to 13, it says this. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish and five were wise.

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

[3 : 13] Then all those virgins rose 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, since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.

And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with them to the marriage feast and the door was shut. And afterward the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered, truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This is God's word to his people. Now, before we get the wrong impression here, I want to make it clear this isn't like an episode of Sister Wives.

These ten virgins aren't jockeying to marry one guy, the same guy. Some historical context is helpful. Back in Jesus' day, marriage was done in two stages.

[4 : 12] First, there was the engagement. They called it the betrothal. And it's very different to how we kind of think of proposals today. The potential bride and groom back then, they would come along with their fathers together.

And if all went well, the bride and groom are vibing with each other. And they think, hey, we want to do this thing. The family, the fathers affirm it. Then they would enter into a legally binding contract.

A bridal dowry would be paid. A meal would be shared as a sign and seal of this covenant of marriage. And at this point, the couple is now legally married, but it's not what we think.

They don't get to live together yet. Or do the other fun stuff that married people get to do. And so now what would happen is the groom would go away for a period of time, and often this would be a year, and he would go away to prepare a home or a bridal chamber.

And when he was finished with that, the next stage of the marriage would begin. A day was set when he would come to fetch his bride from her family home to bring her to the new home that he had prepared for them.

[5 : 21] And upon arrival, the wedding feast would begin. And often that would last for several days, and then they would consummate the marriage. Now, Jesus' parable is drawing our attention to that part of this marriage, this whole marriage pathway, where the bridegroom returns with his bride.

And that was typically done in the evening time. And as they approached their new home, the groom's friends would go ahead of them, announcing the bridegroom approaching. That's why Jesus says in this parable, they're shouting out, the bridegroom is coming.

And as they approached, the bride's friends would be there waiting, and they would hear that announcement.

And in this story, it's the ten virgins. They would run out with lit lamps to escort the bride and the groom back to their new home, and the wedding feast would then begin. It was a joyful, exciting part of the transition from betrothal to a fully consummated marriage.

Now, think about this. If you are there, you're doing this, and you're a good friend to the bride and groom, you'd want to do that part really well. Which brings us to the first point about kingdom readiness. Our readiness is affected by what we consider to be important.

[6 : 40] These wise virgins, they took their role seriously. They would have grown up hearing about this, seeing this done repeatedly, how much joy and meaning it added to the occasion.

Like, I've been to weddings where the flower girl was too young to really care and understand about the nuptials that she was being forced to participate in. You've probably seen that too.

Their displeasure manifests in tears. They're standing frozen in the aisle with parents going, come on, you've got to come down, come this way. I remember a particular flower girl, she might have been like three or four, she made her feelings known by stepping out into the aisle, getting the basket and going, and all the flowers just kind of dumped down there, and then she walked off, you know.

But that's what you expect from the young and the foolish. They don't understand the significance of the occasion, nor do they appreciate the privilege that they get to be a part of it.

They only really are thinking of themselves. And when it comes to kingdom readiness, the foolish haven't grasped the significance of the day when the bridegroom returns. Will he find us ready and prepared?

[7 : 49] Or will our lamps have gone out? And by the way, what does that even mean? See, there's a correlation Jesus is making between wisdom, wise living, and kingdom readiness.

The wise live with that day in mind. And so they keep their lamps well stocked and burning bright. And that speaks to another important aspect of kingdom readiness. Our readiness is impacted by our desire to glorify Jesus.

The role of the ten virgins can look to us just a small and unnecessary thing, kind of like what a flower girl would be like at a wedding. But take that away, and you lose an important piece of what magnifies the moment for the bridegroom and his bride.

See, the virgins are friends of the bride and groom. There are people that know them. There are people that care about them. There are people that are excited that they have the privilege to participate in and be a part of celebrating in their joy.

And so the virgins' role is much like ours. We want our lamps to be shining to glorify Jesus and to glorify his bride, the church. What we see in this parable is that the wise virgins were diligent to be sure that they didn't run out of oil.

[9 : 06] Most commentators, they liken the oil in those lamps to God's grace and to be being filled with God's grace. His grace is the fuel that we need to shine to glorify Jesus.

And I've said this many times before, and I'm gonna keep saying it because I think it's important. When we think about God's grace, we need to understand it means that he has extended himself to us, and he continues to extend himself to us because he does that of his own sovereign choice, and he does that to bestow his favor and his blessing upon his people, upon his disciples.

And God's grace is arguably synonymous with God's presence, the Holy Spirit. You don't get grace without the Holy Spirit. Another way to say it is that God doesn't send his grace from afar, he brings it with him.

God the Holy Spirit works in us many things, but a major one that he does is to glorify the bridegroom, Jesus. John 16, Jesus is saying this about the Holy Spirit's ministry.

When the spirit of truth comes, he's telling his apostles, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

[10 : 23] Now listen to this. He will glorify me. The Holy Spirit's job in you and me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Just as Jesus came and he said, I came to glorify the Father, and the Father is glorified in me, the Holy Spirit loves to glorify Jesus. That's what he does.

And he does it in you and in me. And because he abides in Jesus' disciples, his love and desire to glorify Jesus becomes our own.

It is worked out in us and through us. And this suggests a very interesting correlation. Those who persevere in glorifying Jesus have a faithful desire to continue to keep glorifying him.

And these wise virgins are those disciples of Jesus who understand the importance of God's abiding presence, his abiding grace in their life. And his presence is his grace, and his grace is his presence.

[11 : 27] And this affects how we live today. Excited anticipation manifests by way of our joyful preparation. Joyful preparation looks like doing those things that fill you more with God's grace, that bring you into his presence.

It's like the virgins filling up extra flasks of oil for their lamps so that they will keep burning. Some practicals. Man, when we sing praises, songs of worship to God, when we pray to him and listen to him and spend time with him and meditate on him and fill our mind and our hearts with his scriptures, his words to us, when we serve on his behalf and for his glory, when we walk in the spirit obeying his commands, these are ways that we fill up our flasks of oil with the grace of God.

They're grace-filling habits. They're ways we connect with God. And I want to say this. There are ways that we learn to enjoy God. And I want to say this. Those who glorify God best are those who enjoy him most.

The more you practice these things, these means of grace, those things will fill you with God's grace. And the more that happens, the more you're filled with God's grace, the more you will delight in him.

And the more you delight in him, the more you will want to glorify him. Not because you have to, because you get to. It's a privilege. This isn't some kind of like cleverly disguised, works-based salvation that I'm pitching to you today.

[12 : 57] Trying to earn your salvation is a fear-based, pride-based, relational attachment to God that he's not interested in. This cycle of joyful preparation, which is really just a life of grace, can only happen with loving attachment to God.

And to get an idea of this cycle of joyful preparation, it kind of looks like this. So God comes and he fills us with his grace. You can't do that. He initiates. He's the sovereign one. He comes and he does that.

And when we get to filled with his grace, he extends himself to us. We get to know him. We get to experience him in such meaningful ways. And what that happens, we are filled with delight and on him. And then what happens next is we respond by saying, that was amazing.

That was good. I want to know him more. And I want to glorify him more. And as we do that, guess what happens again? He fills us with more of his grace. And the cycle goes on and on and on.

Let me speak from my own experience. As a fellow disciple of Jesus, God's grace, which he freely gives, fuels my delight in him.

[14 : 09] And that makes me, that motivates me to want to know and to glorify him more. And that motivation is worked out in what I do. I make sure that I spend time in prayer and in scripture and fellowship with other disciples of Jesus and praising him and sharing Jesus with others and serving and all of those things.

And when I do those things, man, God fills me with more of his grace. And I've come to realize those are integrated. Grace, delight, intimacy with God, glorifying him.

They're inseparable. And that's kingdom readiness that we can live now. And if we're gonna take Jesus at his word, then we have to say that, man, that's kind of an important thing.

Because the kingdom will be open to those who are found prepared. Look how Jesus closed his parable, which is the main point of his parable. Verse 10, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast and the door was shut.

Afterward, the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, truly, I say to you, I do not know you. There's a legit warning here that you can make inadequate preparation.

[15 : 31] An old reformed pastor who's bent is a lot like mine, dependence on God's grace, nevertheless put it this way. The foolish virgins had their lamps and they lit them.

There must have been some oil in them, but there was no further supply. If the bridegroom had not tarried, if the bridegroom had not delayed, all would have been well. It was his delay that was so fatal.

The foolish virgins are like the rocky ground on which the seed sprang up quickly, but on which the green plant only endured for a short time. They represent persons of brief, temporary religious experience.

These people have no stores of grace to fall back on. Time reveals their shallowness. We may have grace to live passably for a short time, but the requisite is to endure to the end, to be shining in the light of God whenever Christ shall come.

Charles Spurgeon, preaching on this passage, made this point. Even the consecrated lamps that shone in the tabernacle in the Old Testament could not give light without oil.

[16 : 47] They needed to be fed. It reminds me of the warning God gives to the seven churches in Revelation that if they don't change their ways and wake up and he gives them warnings, he's gonna remove their lampstand.

No more light. And perhaps, I've always thought of like God just coming up and like snuffing it out, but maybe it's less of a snuffing out and more that the oil of God's grace just kind of runs out. Because they chose not to remain in him, but became dependent on themselves or began to love the riches and pleasures of this world or they'd just become lukewarm in their affections toward God.

The God who sovereignly saves us is also the God who calls us to persevere in our salvation to the very end. And we have to remember that.

Because what God begins in the spirit, we cannot finish in the flesh. That was Paul's warning to the Galatian church, wasn't it? You might argue, Jesse, man, that sounds like you are trying to scare people into religious action.

No, I want us to reckon with God's redemptive work and the pattern of his redemptive work and live in that truth. God brought me to a life-changing reckoning at the age of 23.

[18 : 09] I grew up in church. My dad was a pastor. I knew all the things about Jesus and salvation and the Ten Commandments. And I was converted at eight. I confessed Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

I was baptized at 16. But up until that time, for years, I had been living life, believing all the right things about Jesus, but living for the pleasures and riches of this world.

And then around 23, God in his grace nudged me. Jesse, go pick up a Bible. Why don't you start reading the Gospel of Matthew? Just a little inception in the mind. I was like, cool. I haven't done that in years.

Why not? In reading Matthew, I came to verses like these. Lord, Lord, I've done this and I've done that. Lord, Lord, I know you.

Well, that's too bad. I don't know you. It's hard to explain, but there is a godly grief and fear and soberness that grabs your heart and shakes you and says, hey, Jesse, you may say all the right things, but where you're at right now, you won't be found ready.

[19 : 18] And I knew I wasn't ready in that moment. Despite my ability to confess Jesus as Lord and know that he had died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin, I knew all those things.

I was just living like none of it mattered. And the oil in my lamp was all but dried out and yet, I can say confidently that it was God's intervening grace that made the difference at the age of 23 for me.

It wasn't my intellect. It wasn't my efforts. I have nothing to boast in. I read those scriptures and they exposed me.

They revealed me wanting. And God brought me into a new integrity that I just didn't have before and it massively changed me from the inside out. You may call it fear or soberness or whatever, but all that I knew is that I was suddenly aware that the way I was living was folly.

And I knew I had to change and so began the second act of my life in following Jesus. Now I know that's not everyone's story. That's my story. Maybe it's yours.

[20 : 30] People like you and me need Jesus to tell parables like this, to wake us up from our stupor and warn us. It's really important because life in Christ is just that.

It is life. It's not a moment. You can't just say, well, I did. I walked down the aisle and did the altar call thing.

I prayed the sinner's prayer. I got baptized and that's what you're hanging your hat on. That's it. Salvation is a life change that carries on after having tasted of the grace of God that brought you to that first confession.

that is what Jesus is warning in this parable. He's saying, man, there's a lot of people that profess faith but they actually don't possess it.

That's a scary thing. And again, this is not a contradiction with the grace of God that seals us in his salvation. This isn't a go out, do better, try harder message.

[21 : 32] We can hang our hat on the truth in Ephesians 2, 8, and 9 that says, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast.

We can't earn salvation by anything we do. It is a gift that God freely gave us in Christ Jesus that can only be received through faith in him and acknowledging him as Lord and Savior.

And even that faith, it says in this passage, is a gift from God. But to quote Martin Luther, who's a champion of grace, he says, we are saved by faith alone but it is not a faith that is alone.

Look at the very next verse in Ephesians of what we just read. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

It's the full grace package. It comes to us freely. It comes to us from him. And it comes to us with works, good works, prepared beforehand by him that he is going to lead us into.

[22 : 43] You know, the longer I follow Jesus and the more I've come to know of God and his redemptive work, the more I am convinced of this. His redemptive ways are often more and than or.

We like things to be this or that. Makes things a lot more simple, a lot more easy to grasp. But more often than not, God's redemptive ways are this and that.

Most errors come from applying an or where God has ordained it to be an and. So the free grace that opens your eyes to Jesus as Lord and Savior is the same free grace by which we remain watchful and ready.

It's not an either or, it's a both and. So remain watchful and ready because the bridegroom will return to bring us into his eternal joy.

Let's not forget that. These friends of the bride and bridegroom, they had the privilege to participate in this parade and this celebration.

[23 : 53] and this welcoming of their friends. They had the privilege to be those who were invited into the wedding feast to get to be a part of it. To enter into the joy of the bride and her groom.

And we look forward to that. That is what eternity is. Jesus is coming and joining with Jesus in his great wedding feast for all eternity.

So the question for you and me is are we ready to meet him? Are you ready to meet him? And are you living to be ready to meet him? In a moment we're going to be taking communion and if you're here and not yet a follower of Jesus, I'm going to say to you, don't come to the communion table.

you have to come to Jesus first right where you are at. You know one day you're going to stand before the king of heaven and earth. The almighty.

Will you be ready? That's the question. Will he say I know you and welcome you into his joy or will you be shut out in eternal punishment, outer darkness, where there is great sorrow?

[25 : 16] And here's the good news for you today is that you can come to Jesus right now and be saved. You don't have to wait. Come to him right now. There's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray. And I encourage you to do that.

Now if you're here and already a follower of Jesus, we are coming to the communion table. And it's many things but one of the things that also is, it's a sign that points us to this and reminds us of this great wedding feast that is to come.

So let's remember that. Let's remember the amazing privilege that we have in Christ because of what he has done. Let us remember that Jesus is returning one day and what he began in us by the spirit, the spirit will bring to completion.

We eat the bread and we drink the cup which is the body of Jesus broken for us, the blood spilt for the forgiveness of our sins. This sacrifice that it points to paid the penalty of our sin and frees us from sin's power.

And as we come and we partake in communion today, this is one of the things that we get to do that fills our lamps with the grace of God so that we can keep a burning bright as we come and we take it in faith.

[26 : 41] Our lamps are filled with fresh oil, new oil. Receive that from him. Let me pray. And you can go to the table nearest you when I'm done. Father in heaven, we come to you.

Jesus, our amazing Savior, in your presence, Holy Spirit, we want to acknowledge that you are Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, that you are our salvation, that without you we are without hope.

But we get to come to you. We get to come to this table in a moment and some of my friends in the room that are being stirred for the first time to believe in you, they get to come to you right where they are at.

And I pray that you would meet us in profound ways. Fill us with your grace today as we respond to you. Amen.