

“Ready or not here He comes.” (20)

I heard a story about two neighbours who were talking in the back garden over the fence. One of them said, “I went to a wedding this weekend, but I don't think the marriage will last.” Her friend asked, “Why don't you think it won't last?” She said, “Well, when the groom said ‘I do, the bride said, ‘don't use that tone of voice with me.’”

And I guess the moral of the story is that relationships will last only if both parties look out for each other and treat each other right. In **Matthew 25** we find a series of parables by Jesus on the subject of preparedness. We find “**The parable of the Ten Virgins**” verse 1-13, which we are going to look at today.

In **verses 14-30** we find “**The parable of the Talents**”, which we are going to look at next time. And finally in **verses 31-46** we find “**The parable of the Sheep and goats**”, which we will look at another time. In **Matthew 24:1-35** Jesus has been talking to His disciples about a time, which is coming when the city of Jerusalem will be totally destroyed.

And from **Matthew 24:36-25:46** Jesus talks about His final coming. In **verses 37-39** He talks about “**As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.**”

He talked about “**Two men will be in the field**”, and “**Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left**,” in **verses 40-41**. Jesus also spoke of “**Faithful and wise servants who did their duty while their master was away**.” And He spoke of “**Evil servants who were thinking that their master was delayed and so because of this delay they were careless and positively wicked in their conduct**.”

And so Jesus says that when He does come “**These evil servants will be punished**”. In short He's telling them that He would arrive unexpectedly and He would find many people who weren't prepared for it.

You know on **Boxing Day of 2004** the whole world was shaken by the events of the **Tsunami**. It was devastating, people's homes were wiped out and many people lost their lives. It was a disaster on a global scale, to such an extent that people are still to this day trying to build their lives back together. Now I don't know if you were aware of this but a lot of the countries affected by the Tsunami were warned years ago to have some sort of warning system built, so that the people can have some sort of chance to get prepared. But sadly as we saw on our television screens, these countries didn't take the experts advice.

Now Jesus isn't talking about a **Tsunami**, which is coming, He's talking about His coming, but this time it isn't to dwell among us like He did before, this time He's coming to destroy this earth and everything on it. And it's not going to be a global disaster, it's going to be a time of universal Judgement, where souls will either live with Him forever or be destroyed with the devil and his angels in hell.

Let's read the parable together. **Matthew 25:1-13** “**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, 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. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don't know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”**

When I was younger I used to love playing a game called “**Hide and Seek**”. And the idea is that some of your friends would run and hide somewhere and whoever was in what we called “**The Den**” would count to **50** and then shout out in a loud voice, “**Here I come, ready or not!**” And then you would go off and spend hours hunting for your friends.

You see in a sense that's what Jesus says to His followers, “**Ready or not I am coming!**” Now Jesus isn't talking about how His followers were to be prepared for the “**Destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70**”, He's telling the whole world to be ready because He is coming back sometime in the future. So what I want to do this morning is look to see if we can learn some lessons about ways in which we can be ready for His return.

Jesus is going to share with us 3 things, which, “We cannot do.” And the 1<sup>st</sup> thing we cannot do is this, “We cannot neglect preparation and be ready at His coming.” Jesus wastes no time in getting straight to the point after sharing this parable.

He says in Verse 13, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” Now the key word in that verse is the word “Watch.” But what does it mean to watch? And in what way are Christians to watch for Christ’s return?

Well it certainly doesn’t mean what His disciples were doing in Acts 1:7-10 when Luke tells us that “Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight and the disciples were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.”

What did the two men say? Acts 1:11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” I think that is one of the most unfair questions in the Bible.

You see “watching” doesn’t mean intently looking up into the sky 24hrs a day, every day waiting for a first glimpse of His glorious appearance. It also doesn’t mean that we are to talk about nothing else but His coming.

Christians must “watch” with more than their eyes and their tongues. That’s what Paul meant when He said in Colossians 3:1+2 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

To “watch” is to have some forethought of the future. It means to make some prior precautions, to make some preliminary preparation, and to continue in that preparation. And why is this preparation so important? Well this was the very thing the foolish virgins failed to do.

Matthew 25:1-3 “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.”

Verse 8 tells us that after the bridegroom arrived, “The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’” In other words they had their lamps, they had their oil and they began to wait eagerly, but they didn’t have enough oil. It never entered their minds that the bridegroom might delay and it’s because of this that Jesus called them “foolish”.

And notice they weren’t ungodly or immoral, they weren’t even hypocrites, they were simply foolish because they didn’t allow for the possibility of delay. In short when the Lord returned they were unprepared. Now one of the most inescapable lessons from life is the necessity of being prepared. Practically everything that is done requires preparation.

It’s true of reading, writing and arithmetic. It’s true of buying and selling, sowing, reaping, winning and keeping friends. There are certain things in life, which cannot be done at the last minute. If you ever go on holiday you will understand just how much preparation is needed before you go. Preparation is essential for knowledge, just ask any teacher. And they would tell you if only the children studied and worked as hard throughout the whole year as they do the night before a final exam. In other words the time of examination is not the time of preparation.

When the foolish virgins realised they didn’t have enough oil, they asked the wise virgins for some of theirs and they answered in Matthew 25:9+10, “‘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.’”

You see loved ones it is necessary for everyone to make preparations for the greatest examination and the greatest journey in life. On Judgement Day it will be too late to make up for any previous neglect of previous preparation. Because as we know it would be foolish of us to think that we can buy oil after the shops are shut.

And that brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing we cannot do. “We cannot borrow what must be bought.” You know when you read this parable you can’t help but sympathise with the foolish virgins. I mean, why didn’t the wise virgins give to the foolish virgins? How could they be so heartless and refuse to share their oil with others at a time of distress?

Well the answer is quite simple; you cannot borrow something, which must be bought. Our characters are like that; our characters cannot be loaned from person to person, it is something that must be developed individually. And we cannot pass our character on to someone else when we die.

How many times do we hear people calling upon the faith of another person? You hear people say these things all the time. Oh my granddad was an elder of the church for 45 years. My mother was a godly woman who spent her whole life teaching Sunday school and giving to the needy. My dad was a deacon, and his dad was a deacon and my great granddad was a deacon before him. And people talk like this as though they have inherited some of their faith.

You see loved ones what Jesus is teaching us here is that obedience to God is another thing that cannot be borrowed. Hebrews 9:27 “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Romans 14:10-12 “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

You see each one is accountable individually. The husband can't stand for his wife and the wife can't stand for her husband. You can't appeal to God on Judgement Day that your mother went to church for 50 years. You can't say, “My father was a great man of faith.” All the faith and dedication in the world of parents isn't enough for their children. All the hope and enthusiasm of a child cannot suffice for an indifferent parent.

You know I hope and pray that our kids become Christians one day. I hope and pray that they will understand just exactly what being a follower of Christ means. But as a parent I realise that they can't stand before God on the basis of my faith. And if they get to the age of accountability they can't go to heaven and say to God, “Well my daddy was a preacher for many years”.

They have to have their own faith and they need to make decisions about what to do with God's commands. I can't make them understand, I can't make them do right and that's because God requires personal submission to His commands. Your submission to God is your submission; your faith needs to be your faith. You see it takes courage to become a Christian and it takes even more courage to stay faithful to God's commands.

And courage is not limited to the battlefield or when West Brom plays the mighty Manchester United. Courage is not limited to bravely catching a thief in your house. The real tests of courage are much deeper and much quieter. They are the inner tests, like remaining faithful when nobody's looking, like enduring pain when the room is empty, like standing alone when you're misunderstood.

Let's look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> thing we cannot do. “We cannot recall lost opportunities.” Matthew 25:10 “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.”

What a sad picture this is, isn't it? When the bridegroom came, the foolish maidens were out trying to buy oil for their lamps. And so on returning they found that the marriage feast had already begun and the door was shut. They missed their one chance. They didn't seize their one great moment.

You see loved ones everyday brings us opportunities that we must not neglect. Opportunities to help others are all around us. And these opportunities are not just in India or Africa, they are right here on our doorstep. Today we may well have an opportunity to enter an open door to do good. Galatians 6:10 “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

And loves ones if we fail to go through that door, it will be shut. It will shut us out from the joy of serving and shut us in with a selfish heart. The truth of the parable is that the failure of the foolish virgins was final. According to Jesus some came back even later, He says in verse 11+12, “Later the others also came.’ Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don't know you.’”

The door was shut and it was shut forever. How much those girls desired to enter. How long they had looked forward to the marriage. They were near to the reception, so near in fact that they could hear the inexpressible joy inside and yet they were so far.

Centuries later after this parable was told by Jesus and taught by many, the question always arises, “When will Jesus come again?” You see not only was it a sad picture back then, when thousands of people lost their lives in Jerusalem because they didn’t take Jesus’ advice, it’s also a sad picture, which is still to come. We shouldn’t be asking the question, “When will Jesus come again?” That’s the wrong question.

The real question we should be asking ourselves is, “Are our lamps trimmed and burning?” That’s why Jesus says in **Matthew 25:13**, “Therefore keep watch.” Jesus is coming loved ones and I know that some religious groups use His coming as a form of scare mongering people into becoming followers of their ways. But there’s no denying the truth, He is coming and **when is His coming going to take place?**

Now again many religious groups have tried time and time again to predict His coming and time and time again they have been made to look foolish, but still they go on predicting. But Jesus tells us in **Matthew 25:13** “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour”. Nobody knows when He is going to return, so it’s not even worth the effort to try and figure out when He is coming back.

Because that’s not the question of the Bible, the question of the Bible is, **are you ready?** Because if you are ready, then you will be willing to be patient and you will be willing and ready to stand firm until He does return. **James 5:7+8** “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”

When I was in America for a month a few years ago, I found it really hard because it was the first time I had ever spent a month without the kids. And to be honest with you I was really homesick. I was aching inside because I missed them so much. I desperately wanted to get back home and hug the kids and tell them how much I missed them and loved them.

Now let me ask you, **do you ever get homesick?** Paul did and he talked about it in **Philippians 1:20-23** “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”

**Do you ever get homesick like Paul did for heaven?** Because Paul goes on to say in **Philippians 3:20** “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” You see loved ones the world began with the Word of God and when Christ returns this present world will end with the Word of God. Now that’s the truth and that’s a promise, but it’s not my promise, it’s God promise.

**1 Thessalonians 4:14-18** “We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

You’ve probably heard the story about the day that finally arrived when **Forrest Gump** dies and goes to Heaven and he is at the **Pearly Gates**, met by Peter himself. And so Peter says, “Well, Forrest, it’s certainly good to see you. We have heard a lot about you. But I must inform you that the place is filling up fast, and we’ve been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short and you have to pass before you can get into heaven”. And so Peter asks him the 1<sup>st</sup> question, he says, “Forrest how many days of the week begin with the letter T? Forrest says, “How many days in the week begin with the letter “T”? That one's easy. That’d be Today and Tomorrow.” So Peter’s eyes open wide and he exclaims, “Forrest, that's not what I was thinking, but I’ll give you credit for that answer.” He says here is your 2<sup>nd</sup> question, “How many seconds are there in a year?” “Now that one’s harder,” says Forrest, “But I think and guess the only answer can be twelve.” Astounded, Peter says, “Twelve? Twelve? Forrest, how in Heaven’s name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?” “Shucks, there’s got to be twelve: January 2<sup>nd</sup>, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, and March 2<sup>nd</sup>.”

And Peter interrupts him and says, “Hold it, I see where you’re going with this, and I’ll have to give you credit for that one, too. Let’s go on with the next and final question.” “Can you tell me God’s first name?” “Sure” Forrest replied, “Its Andy.” “Andy!” Peter shouted, “Ok, I can understand how you came up with your answers to my first two questions, but just how in the world did you come up with the name of Andy as the first name of God?” “That was the easiest one of all,” Forrest replied. “Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me I am his own.” And so Peter opens the Pearly Gates and said, “Run, Forrest, run.”

I guess we all have our own ideas about what Judgement Day will be like, but God tells us there won’t be a test but there will be an examination. Any examination starts with preparation, it’s entirely up to you about how much preparation you’re willing to put in. 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

There is really only one way to be sure that we are ready for the Day of Judgement when Christ returns and that is to be ready everyday. You see if you’re a Christian this morning, I don’t know how much oil you’ve got left burning in your lamp, it’s not for me to judge.

But if your oil is running a little low then maybe you need to ask God to help you. Or as the children’s song says, “Give me oil in my lamp keep me burning, give me oil in my lamp I pray, give me oil in my lamp keep me burning, burning, burning, keep me burning to the end of day.”

But if you haven’t obeyed His commands, then you’re not prepared, need to get prepared. You need to study His word and do what His word tells every one of us to do. You need to repent and turn from your ways and turn to God and follow His ways.

You’re here this morning, which tells me you have some belief in God but you also need to believe the Bible where it says that Christ was who He claimed to be, which was no less than the Saviour of the world. You need to confess that Jesus is Lord and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins. And after you’ve obeyed all these commands and you continue to obey His commands, which is called faithfulness, it’s then that you are starting the preparation process, which is required for His return.