

# Matthew 25:1-13

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[ 0 : 00 ] Some words are the last words you want to hear. Back to school, flat battery, bedtime, or the ones that I've used quite a lot. Party? What party? The worst though are the words that come between friends growing apart.

! Words that bring separation. They can be so upsetting, can't they? So final. Goodbye. It's not you, it's me. Well surely in this passage this morning are the most awful separation words.

The words of the bridegroom, the words of Jesus to some knocking at his door. Verse 12. I do not know you.

Jesus warns those words that bring closure will be said one day. Make sure you're not the one hearing them.

This discussion in Matthew 24, 25, began in Matthew 24 in verse 3. As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately saying, tell us when will these things be and what will be the sign of the close of the age?

[ 1 : 26 ] When will the Lord Jesus return? What will happen at the end of the world? And this is part of Jesus' answer. This will be what will happen at the end of the age.

This might not be how you see things now. But verse 1. The kingdom of heaven will be like this. This will be what happens in the future.

This story of ten virgins and a bridegroom. Jesus returns a moment of reckoning for everyone. And he will speak words.

Words of welcome or of separation. A legal verdict. But not just a kind of cold distribution of mercy or of grace.

But a personal moment. The relational crossroads between you and Jesus. Jesus illustrates it with a social occasion.

[ 2 : 29 ] Of recognising and embracing. Or of distancing. Of familiarity and friendship. Or forgetting and forsaking.

Of joyful welcome or a closure of a relationship. And your experience of him then in that moment. Closeness or estrangement.

Will depend on how you see him and treat him today. Let's crack open this story. What will happen at the end of the age? Firstly the kingdom of heaven will be a delight.

The kingdom of heaven will be a delight. It will be like ten virgins who took their lamps. And went to meet the bridegroom. Jesus says. It's a simple picture.

It's a delightful picture. It's great being invited to weddings isn't it? When you get the posh card in the post. And your names are on it. It's done so well.

[ 3 : 32 ] And you feel really special don't you? You feel wanted. And when you get there. You look for your name on the reception table layout board thing. And oh I'm on table number two.

I'm with the family. How delightful. There's food. There's fun. There's friendship. And it was even more so in Jesus' day.

Weddings would have been the social highlights of the calendar. And it's this image Jesus chooses. Jesus' return will be a delightful grand social occasion.

There will be individuals in heaven. With our personalities and characteristics. As there are individuals in church. We don't all think exactly the same.

We don't all dress the same. Or act exactly the same. That is a cult. We are individuals. And yet there is no individualism.

[ 4 : 32 ] In heaven. Jesus says heaven will be like a wedding. Not an internet cafe. With each of us in our own little booths. In our own worlds.

Or a London tube train where no one makes eye contact. It will be the ultimate social occasion. Heaven will be a place of relationships blooming. A place of reception. Of being together. Of community. And these girls in the story have VIP invitations. Privileged. To light the way with their torches for the bridegroom. It's been said that loneliness is the ultimate poverty. And there is an epidemic. There is a disease. In London especially. And the disease is loneliness. For so many. We often think that the problem is lack of community. [ 5 : 31 ] Or lack of people in our lives. But you can be surrounded with people and still feel lonely. You can be surrounded with people and crave alone time. It's perhaps less about the absence of people. And more about the presence of sin in relationships. The presence of mistrust. Of pride. Of focus on self. And we need a friend who will love us. And accept us for who we are. And change us to make us right. Who will be the ultimate host. The ultimate maker of friends. And here is Jesus. And here is Jesus. Saying that in my kingdom. There is the delight that we all crave. Of true togetherness. Of real community. Of feasting and fellowshiping together. He is the orchestrator of the great gathering. [ 6 : 33 ] Bringing together people from all backgrounds. And all nations and languages. It's the delight we get a taste of in church. Isn't it? As we enjoy fellowship together. And that moment will come. Jesus says. In all of its delight. God. Just look around you for a moment this morning. These are the people that you will spend eternity with. Does that sound good? Don't answer that. But this wedding feast will not be like the parties. That we sometimes have to endure. Today. You can feel very lonely at a party. Can't you? But there will be no pretense. No grudges. Or hidden agendas. All forgiven. And forgiving one another. That's what we have in the church. And it's a taste of this great wedding feast. [ 7 : 30 ] Just pure friendship. With Jesus. The host. At the centre. Bringing everyone together. This is the delight. Of his return. But whilst there is delight here. A problem comes. Because that delight seems a long way off. Doesn't it? We don't feel that delight fully yet. All of the time. There is delight in the kingdom of heaven. But secondly. The kingdom of heaven will be delayed. The kingdom of heaven will be delayed. Now in the story. See what happens because of a delay. There are two sets of virgins aren't there? Young girls. And one set of girls. Takes no extra oil with them. They're thinking. It's going to happen. Soon. It won't be long until tonight. [ 8 : 29 ] They say. We've only got to wait a couple of hours. Till tonight. Then we'll be enjoying the delight. We'll be enjoying ourselves. But just look at verse 5. As the bridegroom was delayed. They all became drowsy and slept. In their minds. The wedding feast was due to start at 7.30. And they're looking at their watches. And it's nine o'clock. And he hasn't turned up yet. No one knows where he is. So they doze off into the night. The delay catches some of them off guard. Now notice it wasn't the fact that the bridegroom came. Was it? They were all expecting him to come. But that he delayed in coming. The first set of virgins weren't expecting the delay. They hadn't prepared for that. So they've run out of oil. They're not ready. This is the warning of the passage. It is be prepared for Jesus' return. [ 9 : 28 ] Yes. But more so be prepared for the delay of his return. The disciples. Matthew had to get their heads around that. Matthew as he writes this gospel. Is perhaps feeling that. A few years after Jesus has ascended. He said he would return. But where is he? Be delighted. Yes. But prepare yourself for the delay of my coming. And your delight in me will be tested by the delay. There's a great story of a husband and a wife.

Who were. An American couple. Who were separated for 26 years. The husband was falsely in prison. For committing a crime he didn't commit. For 26 years. Now many would have given up on the marriage. Wouldn't they? But wonderfully both of them waited for the other. On his arm in the jail.

[10:27] He had a tattoo done. Which listed the days until the moment he was reunited with his wife. 26 years. 11 months.

4 days. 20 hours. 26 minutes. 8 seconds. The separation for that couple only proved their love. As someone once said. Homecoming means coming home to what is in your heart. And what was in their heart. It was the other person. And the separation confirmed that. The delay of reuniting showed what was truly in their hearts. He would say to her as she visited him in the prison. Just go somewhere else.

This is no kind of marriage for you. I'll give you a divorce if you want. But on his return she said. No I never gave up. All I ever wanted was for him to come home.

[11:27] And so the delay tested their delight in one another. She didn't just want his money. Or his things. Or his blessing. She wanted him.

As they parted she didn't bid him adieu. But bid him return. The delay will test the virgins. The delay will expose their feelings.

Their hearts will be exposed. And isn't it true that the longer the delay for something. The greater the surprise when it happens. You haven't heard from the dentist in a long time.

Subconsciously you start to slacken off don't you. A few more sweets and biscuits. When something is postponed. We almost automatically think don't we.

It's cancelled. And these virgins are delayed. The bridegroom is more than fashionably late. He's severely delayed. The delay is unexpectedly long.

[12:28] And those who get caught napping. Are the ones who stop believing he was ever going to return. They thought Jesus' return was cancelled. And here we are.

Two thousand years on from Jesus' ascension. He said he would return. But where is he? Perhaps a few hundred years ago. People were expecting it in this country.

But the delay has been unexpectedly long. And the longer the delay. The greater the surprise. And our delight will be tested by the delay. And the urgency has worn off for some of us.

It's been postponed. And so we think it's cancelled. He's been delayed. And you've lost your patience. Perhaps you're thinking actually you know I can start a friendship with Jesus later.

I can ask his forgiveness later. Even on my deathbed. I'll do it then. I'll want him then. But you don't know that. You don't know if you'll have the capacity or the faith.

[13:34] You don't know when that will happen. The story goes of the famous German World War I pirate pilot. They called him the Red Baron. Because he flew in a red aeroplane.

And he shot down more aircraft than anyone on either side of the war in World War I. But in April 1918 he began chasing a Canadian plane.

And in pursuit he strayed into enemy lines. He dived too low into the enemy lines. And missed another allied pilot coming up on his tail to help his comrade.

Now we don't know what happened to the Red Baron exactly. But one report at the time said the Red Baron came to his end. He had gone too long, too far and too low into enemy territory.

And maybe that's you this morning with Jesus. You've been going too long, too low and too far into enemy territory.

[14:39] And the delay today is showing what is in your heart. It's showing where you really stand with him. And you're being tested by the delay. And you're playing with Jesus.

You want to prolong the separation that is between you. Hoping to make a last minute adjustment. But the longer the delay, the greater the surprise.

So why is all of this important? The delight, the delay. Thirdly, in the kingdom of heaven there will be a division. There will be a division. And if you look at the passage, Jesus has already alluded to what is going to happen.

Right from verse 2, hasn't he? He splits these virgins up. Five of them were wise. Five of them were foolish. There are signs of division already in the story.

But when the bridegroom returns unexpectedly after the delay. The division is made clear. And it's made public. There's a panic in verse 7 and 8.

[ 15 : 44 ] One set of virgins get up, trim their lamps. And they're suddenly divided. There's pleading from one side of the room to the other.

Some of the lamps are running on fumes. It's like batteries in a torch when they run out, isn't it? And it's moments before they go out. And they shout, give us some of your oil.

Give us some of your spare batteries. It's one of those slow motion moments. They're fumbling around. They've had all this time to get ready.

And you know, I'm always doing this. They've had all this time to get ready. But the longer the delay, the more likely the surprise. And something crops up and you're late. They're messing around.

And in the meantime, those who are ready, it says, went in with him to the marriage feast. And the door was shut. The others get back. They speak to the bouncers on the door.

[ 16 : 43 ] They beg the bridegroom. They give him a sob story about the lamps. They're locked out though. It's serious. Jesus' return.

Heaven will not be an all-inclusive party. He will not let all and sundry into his party, into his wedding feast. And what kind of host does that?

No one wants gate crashes, do they? People who shouldn't be there. And they hear those words, Truly I say to you, I do not know you.

This is Jesus closing down the relationship. He's not saying, I never knew you. He's not saying, we've never been introduced.

He's saying, goodbye. It's over. This delay has shown who you really are. Gate crashes.

[ 17 : 42 ] They have shown themselves to be charlatans with no real relationship to the host. And the host says, I don't know you. Truly I don't know you, he says.

It's a judicial statement. It's a sentence. It's his verdict upon them. Now they call him Lord, Lord, don't they?

They know the right things to say. And perhaps they call themselves Christians even. Maybe they go to church. But when it comes down to it, they haven't got that relationship.

Their actions don't match the privileges that they've received. They've been invited. They've got the golden ticket. But they haven't invested in a life of waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus.

And once he comes, nobody else can sort them out. They ask for oil from the others. But they can't get into the party on the back of others.

[ 18 : 46 ] Their family's faith. Or the pastor's faith. Or anybody else can get them in. Luther said, there are two things that man must do alone.

His believing and his dying. His believing and his dying. And it's our own responsibility. And these foolish virgins haven't thought it through for themselves.

They were delighted at first. But their delight is tested by the delay. And there is division. The party goes on without them. Jesus is saying here, isn't he?

I won't give you a kind of sign at the end. Or just before the end. There will be no last minute turning over a new leaf. Prompted by a warning sign from me just before I come back.

No, what I'm asking for is a life of constant readiness. Of waiting for me. That cannot be done with a last minute adjustment. I don't know to believe this.

[ 19 : 50 ] But statistically, it's said that you're far less likely to become a Christian. To come to Christ after the age of 50. A man came to a minister once and said, I want to become a Christian.

Why? The minister replied, I'm 50 tomorrow. He said. So when the time comes, there will be those of us in this room now who will be ready.

Having delight in the return of Jesus. Looking forward to it. Coming home to what's in your heart. Is it a bad thing that Jesus delays his return?

That he isn't here in body now? Whilst he is in spirit? Well, yes and no. We want him to return and to return quickly.

Jesus tells us to pray for that. So that justice will be done in this world. We long for that delight. Of that wedding feast of fellowship with him and one another.

[ 20 : 53 ] But we know that when he does return, there will be division. So at the same time, we are glad that he has delayed. For the sake of our work colleagues.

For the sake of our family who don't know him. For our own sakes. We're glad that he's delayed. And he still does. His delay is not a sign of forgetfulness or of slackness.

But of mercy. There will be division. One side of the room and a frenzy of panic. And the other ready. And the question is, which side of the room will you be on?

Perhaps there is something in your life that is causing you to lose patience. Waiting for Jesus' return.

Or compromising in some way. We are all sinners. We're not saying that we should be perfect. This side of heaven. But perhaps we've stopped believing that he will ever return.

[ 21 : 54 ] Or perhaps we've been coming to church week after week. Even for years. And this morning your heart. If you're honest. You know that you're not really living in relationship with Jesus.

Well Jesus comes to us, doesn't he? Before his return. He comes to us now. In his word. And he says, If you're a gate crusher this morning.

It is not too late. It is not too late to get to know me. Before I return. And to meet me today. So that when I do return.

You will become welcome at my marriage feast. I long to welcome you. And if we have come to know the Lord Jesus. Patiently waiting for him.

Well we can be ready. To go in with him. Because that is the Christian life after all. Isn't it? It is to long for his return.

[ 22 : 52 ] To wait for him. It is to tattoo on our arms. The years. The months. The days. The very moment of his return.

To long for it. That is why the Bible ends with those words. Come Lord Jesus. And as we wait for his return. We have not bid him adieu.

But we have bid him return. Amen. As he sat on the Mount of Olives. The disciples came to him privately saying. Tell us when will these things be.

And what will be the sign of the close of the age. He replied. The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins. Who took their lamps. And went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise.

And five of them were foolish. Watch therefore. For you know neither the day. Nor the hour. Let's pray together.