

Matthew 25:1-13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 March 2020

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Good morning. I want to assure you this is as excruciating for you as it is for me.! We're going to look at Matthew 25, but before we do that let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are there and you are not silent. And we praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that you are the God who has created us, you are the God who has sustained us and the God who has blessed us in so many ways.

And we thank you that you've given us your word this morning, that it's living and active, that it's sharper than a two-edged sword. And we pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our heart will be pleasing in your sight. Forgive our many sins, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So I want us to look at Matthew 25. I heard a story recently of a couple that moved into a new home and a bunch of flowers was delivered to them. And on the wreath of flowers was a card saying, RIP. The couple obviously rang the florist to complain and the florist said, we're very sorry for what has happened. There must have been some sort of mix-up, but look on the bright side.

Somewhere there's a funeral going on with a large, bright bunch of flowers saying, with a card saying, welcome to your new location. And my aim this morning in this passage is that we get our location right.

[1 : 38] And that at times like this, we understand where we're going and how secure the future is. In these chapters, and we've seen them all the way through Matthew, Jesus is preparing himself to die and to rise.

And he's preparing his followers for when he is gone and how they need to be patient and faithful and focused. And that one day they will see him. There's absolute certain reality that everyone is going to meet Jesus.

Either he'll come to us quickly or we will go to him eventually. And if you know Jesus at all from the New Testament, we will know that Jesus will do everything possible to make that meeting with him safe and wonderful.

And that's why he does the most vital thing of all, to die on the cross, to deal with what would disqualify us, which is our sins. And that's why he says the absolutely vital things that we need to know so that we will be ready.

And the story we read from Matthew 25 is basically about telling bridesmaids. The stories of Jesus are very powerful. They're stories that Jesus told not just to make things simple.

[2 : 52] He's not treating his listeners as little children. Jesus told stories with a purpose, with a purpose of separating. So some people listen eagerly to Jesus' story.

They latch on. And some people are eager to get away from Jesus. They are confused by Jesus' stories. And that's the way these stories work. Jesus is walking to Jerusalem.

And he begins to say a lot about what his return will be like. And the first thing he tells us, we've seen it already, is it will be global. Jesus' return is not going to be local.

He's not going to just appear in Pitts Angle Park or Drayton Green. Everyone will see him at the same time. It will be universal. And then he tells us his return will be sudden.

Thousands and millions of people are just going to be living normal lives, filling up with petrol, going to work, or at the moment staying in, looking at their screen, wishing they were outside.

[3 : 52] And suddenly everything changes. And he also tells us that his day will be a day of reward and a day of recompense. For those who've responded to him, have we received him?

Have we done what he's asked of us? Have we done what he's told us to do? So it will be a day of reward. And he tells us in Matthew 24, the faithful will be richly rewarded and those who are unfaithful will be dealt with severely.

So we come to chapter 25. And the parables are not saying all the same thing. There are nuances. It's like a diamond looking at it from different facets. And so this morning, this first part from verses 1 to 11, are asking, are we ready?

And will we be steady? Are we okay with a long delay? Or will we lose interest? Are you losing interest? Will we lose interest and drift away?

And we know, don't we, that thousands and thousands of people began to live as Christians and then have given up. And the question that this parable is asking is can you believe and can you stay believing?

[5 : 02] So three headings. First of all, the gift of being ready to meet with Jesus. That's a wonderful gift. The second is the gift of being steady to the end. And then the third is the gift of being able to go into God's presence.

So first, in verses 1 to 4, the gift of being ready to meet with Jesus. That's the main point of the whole story. Ten bridesmaids, they're meant to go and escort the bridegroom into the wedding feast.

And they want to do that. The bridegroom in the story itself is Jesus. And that's very interesting that Jesus calls himself the bridegroom because in the Old Testament, the bridegroom was always God. God, the bridegroom. His people, the bride. But now Jesus steps up and Jesus is saying, no, I am the bridegroom. It's a very clear claim to deity. And the bridesmaids are basically people like us. Are we going to be ready with joy or not ready? Five of them in the story are able to meet the bridegroom and enter the feast. Five of them miss out completely. And the difference between the five and the five is not that five are rich and five are poor.

[6 : 08] It's not that five are good and five are bad. It's not that five have been baptized and five are not. Five are religious or five are non-religious. It's none of that at all. The difference is in verse 3 and 4.

Can you see it? It's did they take something. And the something in the story is oil. So what is the oil? And the long and the short of it is this.

The oil is to take Christ, to receive Christ. Or maybe the grace of Christ. Or maybe the forgiveness of Christ. Or the salvation of Christ. Or the eternal life. But it is responding to Jesus.

That is what the oil is. Taking Christ is the key to the future. If you want to be ready to meet with Jesus, don't try and do something impressive.

It's not about what you do or what you don't do. It's about whether you've received Jesus himself. Christianity 101. Step one is to take Christ.

[7 : 09] The one who has died and the one who has risen. And those wise bridesmaids, they took oil. They all had lamps. They all looked pretty much the same.

But some had taken oil. And some were ready to meet Christ. And so the truth is, anyone who receives Christ here is ready to meet Christ there.

Or to put it in one sentence from another part of the New Testament, Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's the first thing of being ready to meet with Christ.

The second thing is in verses 5 to 7, and it's the gift of being steady to the end. And I suspect you're sitting there thinking how much longer is this going to go on.

But it's pretty simple stuff this morning, isn't it? Jesus is coming. Get salvation. I receive Christ. You may be thinking, tell me something I don't know.

[8 : 09] And so what is verse 5 all about? What does it say there? It says, isn't it, there is a long delay in the bridegroom coming. And the bridesmaids, all of them, the wise and the foolish, they get drowsy and they all fall asleep.

And what is all that about? Is it okay for them to fall asleep? Is it irresponsible that they fell asleep? Is there criticism in this story of them for falling asleep?

And I don't think there is. Does it endanger anybody that they fall asleep? So why does Jesus include this idea in the story that they fell asleep?

And I wonder whether the parable is actually saying something more to us than just be ready for the second coming. Because all of the parables, I've got extra little bits, remember that diamond?

And I wonder whether in this passage what we're seeing is loaded words. Stay with me as I try to explain that. And what I'm talking about in verses 5 and 6, I wonder whether the word sleep is loaded.

[9 : 17] I wonder whether the word sleep is a loaded word for death. All of them died. And we know that Jesus used the word sleep for death again and again in his teaching.

As he talks about a little girl, do you remember? And Jesus says, she has fallen asleep. And they laugh at him and they say, no, she's died. But Jesus says, no, she's asleep.

And he tells her, tell her, the coom little girl, get up. And she gets up. In the New Testament, Paul uses the word sleep for death. And I wonder actually whether the word midnight is a loaded word. Jesus speaks of the owner returning at midnight, a critical moment, the moment of return, the moment of the end.

And I wonder if the word in verse 6, that word of cry or shout aloud, that is a loaded word. Because Paul says, doesn't he, in one of his letters, that when Jesus returns, he will give a loud cry or shout.

[10 : 22] And it may be that this parable is not just asking you and I the question, are you ready to meet Jesus? Because so many of you lot who are listening will say to me, yes.

But I wonder whether the parable is asking, will you go to the end? Are you ready to meet Jesus and will you be steady to meet Jesus? Because that's a very different question, isn't it?

Can you stay right to the end, right up until you fall asleep? Right up until you breathe your last?

Can you stay a follower so that when midnight comes, when history is over and the great shout goes out and he returns, you've kept the faith, you've run the race.

And you're ready and you're steady. And I think that's a great question. It's a really wonderful thing, isn't it, that Jesus can make a person ready to meet him. Just think of this, you and I will meet the person who governs the universe.

Whatever your projects, whatever your successes, whatever your failures, whatever your buildings, whatever your grades, whatever your medals, they're going to look very small, aren't they? When you come face to face with the God-man who made the universe.

[11 : 35] And he is holy and in his presence sin cannot stand. And you will be in front of him. And yet he has made it possible for you and I to stand before him forgiven, spotless, joyful, loved, accepted.

And that is amazing that he has made it possible for you and I to stand before him. And he is able to make us steady right at the end.

Even though we are very weak and we're very worldly. But the life that he gives to people is life eternal. and the world that he begins in us, the work that he begins in us, he is going to finish.

And the rough material that he is going to work with ends up perfect and sinless. Now I know you reasonably well. And some of you are very rough material indeed.

And the fact that Christ is going to turn you into his character is unbelievable. But the fact that he's going to turn me into his character is even more unbelievable.

[12 : 47] But that is what he promises. So do you remember Philippians chapter 3? We eagerly await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies and so that they will be like his glorious body.

And that is amazing. And right now there are serious pressures, aren't there, to give up Christianity. And the air that we breathe is full of unbelief.

you've seen and I've seen people chuck their faith away. And people live successfully without Christ. But you know what they do when they do that?

They live successfully without Christ and then they just rewrite the end. So in our culture they say Jesus is irrelevant but I'm on my way to heaven. They're in a better place, aren't they, Vicar?

And it's a big mistake to think that you don't need him. And we who are holding on to the Bible and the Bible's teaching we look so stupid, we look so backward because it all looks like, doesn't it, for them it's working perfectly.

[13 : 52] The number of details that we have to deal with, the number of difficulties that come to us every day, there's a swamp of them at the moment, aren't there? And we wonder whether joyful and peaceful Christianity is possible.

many of you dealing with so many details, so many difficulties that you actually wonder whether the Christianity you've signed up for is the right Christianity. Is it the Christianity that people sing about so triumphantly on those YouTube videos?

Is it the Christianity that people sometimes testify of? And you say to yourself, like I say to myself, my life is such a mess. And the global information that comes to us, which we're expected somehow to absorb and explain what is happening in the world.

So why are people suffering like they are? I don't know. What is God doing in this coronavirus? Why is Christianity so non-existent in that part of the world?

Why are so many people far from Christ? It's a swamping, global, overwhelming information. And Jesus said there will be lots of dangers for those that follow. He said some people, they're going to build on sand.

[15:03] And the foundations will be removed. Some people's faith, they'll be eaten up by thorns, worldly warriors, treasures, idols, false gods, and they'll quickly give up.

Jesus says there be lots of false prophets, false Christ, who will deceive many people in this battle for souls. And yet the truth is this, that when a man or a woman or a boy or a girl takes Christ and receives him as saviour and lord and king and shepherd who is forever, the new life that Christ gives you is forever.

forever. The grip that he has on you this morning is forever. The promises which he gives to you are forever. The man or woman or boy or girl who takes Christ is going to be sustained to the end.

And he is able to make his people steady. Right up to the time where they sleep and midnight comes and the cry goes out.

And in 25 verse 6, either they come or go to meet him. You've got lots of time on your hands and so read good books. Maybe read Pilgrim's Progress.

[16:23] If you go to Ligonier, here's a little advert. Ligonier, I've got a course by Derek Thomas on Pilgrim's Progress, little 20 minute videos. They're okay, the book is far better, but why not read it?

There's a great picture in Pilgrim's Progress. A pilgrim is taken into a room, into the house of interpreter. An interpreter shows him a big massive fire in the middle of the room, in a fireplace. And he marvels at this fire, but there's a man in front of the fire with buckets of water, pouring buckets of water onto the fire, trying to put it out. And Pilgrim asks the question to interpreter, why is the fire not going out with this guy throwing water on it?

And the interpreter takes him around the back. And interestingly, in Pilgrim's Progress, there's a man who is piping oil into the back of the fire. And that is what sustains the fire.

There's a guy in the front pouring water over it, but there's a guy in the back putting oil into the fire. And that is what sustains us. And God is able to sustain us so that we're steady to the end.

[17:31] The gift of being ready to meet with Christ. The gift of being steady. And of course, God calls on us at this time to be steady, but he gives us the gift of being steady.

Third thing, still with me? The last thing is the gift of being able to go into God's presence. In verses 18 to 13. And we see there, don't we, that there's a serious separation that takes place.

We see that the foolish bridesmaid have said, no, I don't need this. And suddenly they find that they cannot enter the wedding feast. And they discover that the oil that the wise bridesmaids have is non-transferable.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? I can't give salvation to you. I can't give it to another person. I can't give my eternal life to another person.

I can't save another person. The saviour is Christ. And the desperate suggestion is made in verse 9. Can you see it? it says, since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.

[18:44] Of course, that will never work. Then in verse 10, Christ comes and the day of opportunity is over. The door shuts and the tragic cry goes out.

now we realise our mistake. Please open the door, but it's all over. And I hope that as you listen to this parable, you don't think that God is terribly unjust.

Because this is a word remembered to people who have had a lifetime of opportunity. Think of the millions of people in this city who are going to get to the end of their life and wish that they just lifted the Bible off the shelf.

Or read what was given to them. Or listened to what was said to them. I hope you won't think that this is a problem or some far off person somewhere and how the whole plan is corrupt.

Because we know that on the last day when Christ comes again, everyone will say to God, you've done everything right. There will be on that day no complaints and no objections.

[19:52] There will be lots of regrets and lots of joys, but no objections. Bishop J.C. Ryle, who again is a great man to be reading at this time, said this is a humbling picture, especially for preachers and pastors.

Because after all our preaching and after all our praying and after all our missionary exertions are broadened at home, many will be found at last to be lifeless. So many who seem to be wise will be shown to be fools.

And so many who seemed as believers to be fools will be seen to be wise. when that door is shut. And I don't think that I can put into words the absolute delight of that day being found inside by the goodness of God and the kindness of Christ.

To be inside that wedding feast. I don't think that we can put into those words what it is going to be to be found inside Christ. to be open to the door has been shut on sadness and on evil and on sin. And that on that day there will be no more burdens to carry, no more heartaches to experience, no more scars, no more worry, no more anxiety, no more tension, no more sinfulness, sadness, no more driving each other mad cooped up in the house, no more waiting rooms to sit in, no people to avoid, no more funerals, the door is going to be shut and all that.

[21 : 37] And that door is going to make the people of Jesus Christ secure and thankful, being part of a wedding feast. that Jesus who is the genius behind the universe has planned for unworthy people like us, but he's made it possible through his death on the cross and his resurrection.

And he's planned a perfect feast. And this Jesus is able to make you who are listening and watching to me today ready, wonderfully ready.

to make you steady right to the end. And he is able to make you go in. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray again.

Our loving Holy Father, we praise you for your word. We praise you that it speaks to us of reality. it reminds us of what is true.

You are a loving Father. We thank you for what you've taught us this morning. We pray that you would help us to live in the light of that day, to rejoice in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to make us ready to meet with him and who will keep us to the end and who will bring us into his presence.

[23 : 07] God, we pray that you would help us to reflect much on this today, to use the time that you've given to us wisely. We thank you Father that you will keep us.

Lord, we want to pray for our community. Your providence is often a mystery to us and you ordain things that are hard to bear.

And there is sickness and there is sorrow. There is great anxiety in our world. And we pray that, Heavenly Father, you will help us to remain steady.

We pray that you would be with those in our community that are anxious and fearful, for those particularly who are unwell. Thank you for health services, for doctors, for nurses, for the hospital. We thank you for our government and those in authority. We pray, Heavenly Father, that this virus would not be as bad as it potentially could be. We pray that you might use this time to turn our nation back to you.

[24 : 18] And, Heavenly Father, we thank you that we look for a day and we long for a day when there will be no more sin and there will be no more suffering. and Christ will come again.

And we pray that there would be many that are brought to be ready for that day through this. Help us, Heavenly Father, to love our neighbours well, to show the love of Christ.

Meet with us at this time. Bless us on this through your day. Bless all your people, wherever they meet. We pray, Heavenly Father, not only for our own community and our country.

We pray for those other parts of the world, particularly for Italy and Spain and other areas which have been so hugely affected. And we think of parts of the world struggling with other issues for this terrible swarm of locusts in East Africa.

and we pray, Heavenly Father, that you would draw near to your people and comfort those who mourn. Bless us and our families, we ask.

[25 : 23] We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.