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While We Are Waiting...: Be Prepared

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TEXT: Matthew 25:1-13 (ESV)

“Then the kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 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.’ 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 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.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Dear friends,

Imagine this: it's late afternoon and you are supposed to host a dinner party that evening. You're not really ready. You're sitting on the couch thinking, “Well, I've got at least an hour, maybe a little more to get things ready before people start to arrive.” Suddenly, the doorbell rings. Who could that be? You look out the window and to your horror, your dinner guests are standing there. Apparently, there's been a mix up in communications on the time you were expecting them. You feel the blood running to your face as you look out the window, and the adrenaline kicks in. You're panicking

because you are not anywhere near ready to receive them into your home. You haven't changed into your good clothes yet. Your house still needs to be picked up. The guest bathroom is filthy, the table isn't set, and the meal isn't started. You're feeling embarrassed and you want to die. What a predicament! You're unprepared and it feels so awful.

For the next three weeks, we are going to be studying three parables that Jesus told from Matthew 25. They are a part of a talk that He gave to His disciples about the end times, and when He would return. They had just asked Him when would be the end of the age and His coming again. But instead of giving them a timeline, He gave them some guidelines for what to be doing while they wait. He said only the Father knows when the end is, but here's how to live.

As we wait for that ending, in today's passage He tells us it's important to be prepared. Now, we know the importance of being prepared in life, don't we? So much of our life is spent preparing for something or being reminded of the importance of being prepared in all matters of life. The student, for instance, in school studies to be prepared for a pop quiz or a test. A person buys insurance to be prepared for the worst. A person saves [money] to be prepared for lean times, rainy days. The athlete trains in preparation for the athletic event. You ever noticed the relief pitchers in the bullpen in baseball? They're watching the game thinking about what they would do if they were called into this situation, and they studied the hitters to come to the plate. And you'll see them stretching, maybe even playing some catch. They're getting prepared, just in case the manager calls upon them to enter the game. The musician practices diligently to become more proficient and prepared to perform for audiences. You and I take a flu shot to be prepared to face the flu season, which we know is coming, but we're not sure exactly when it will start. In other words, preparation really is very important.

And in our passage, Jesus talks of the eternal importance of preparation for His return in power and glory. He's come in again, you know. In our Apostles Creed, we say He will come again and judge the living and the dead. All of chapter 25 in Matthew speaks loudly and clearly about that truth in our creed, and tells us how we are to live until His return in power and glory. He uses a joyous occasion in today's passage from Jewish culture to teach us about being prepared. It's a parable about a wedding, and 10 bridesmaids that really wanted to go to it. He teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven, which means God's rule, will be like 10 bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to

meet the bridegroom who would soon be coming to pick up his bride at her house, and then they would process to his home for a ceremony and celebration. That's how they did things. The bridesmaids would accompany them with their lamps lighted, lighting the way to the celebration. Now, in this story, Jesus says that there were ten young women, and five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took no extra oil with them in case there was a delay – so, they weren't ready. The five wise ones brought flasks of oil along just in case there was a delay. And they sit and they wait and they wait. It's evening, and wouldn't you know it, the bridegroom was delayed. You know how that goes. The best laid plans, something comes up. Anyway, it gets later and later. Where is he? It got so late, they all fell asleep. At midnight, though, came a shout: "Here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him." So they rose and prepared their lamps for the procession, but the foolish ones' lamps began to flicker out right after they got them lit. They were out of oil. They asked the wise ones to share with them, but they said no, there wouldn't be enough to go around for all of them. They'd have to go to the village and find somewhere to buy oil. And while they're going to buy the oil, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast and the door was shut.

Now, the foolish showed up later, having missed the bridegroom's arrival, and they found that the door had been shut and they cried out, "Sir, sir, open the door to us." And the bridegroom said, "Truly, I say to you, I don't know who you are." The bridegroom statement reminds us, by the way, of another passage when Jesus said back in Matthew 7: "Many will call out 'Lord, Lord' to me and I will say, 'Go away. I don't know you.'" Then Jesus offers a commentary as the end of this parable: "Therefore, watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour." In other words, always be prepared. Live expectantly for my return, because I don't want you to miss out on the party.

I see good news in this passage, and some wisdom as well, being imparted by Jesus. First, the good news. There is a party that lies ahead, the kingdom of God is a party. Living with God under His rule forever and ever. It's like a wedding feast. Earlier, Jesus had been describing times of tribulation and troubles in this world that would come upon his own followers, and they shouldn't be surprised by all that. They should expect it. The world is broken. But look at the image he uses here to describe the end of it all: it's a wedding feast, a joyous occasion – partying with the bridegroom, Jesus Christ. You know, he is described in other parts of the New Testament as the bridegroom. There's no more suffering, no more sorrow, no more pain, no more death, tears will be wiped

away by God. There will be joy, perfection. That's God's plan. He's in charge, moving us towards that day.

And he doesn't want us to miss the party. Tragically, though, some will miss out, according to this story Jesus tells. The 10 young women in the story all appeared to be ready. But five of them weren't, and they missed the party because they had to run out and get oil and they showed up late. We don't even know if they found oil for their lamps, but now the door was shut to them and it was too late. How sad, if only they had been prepared, prudent.

Now, along with this good news about the Kingdom of God that's coming – the party – with this emphasis on wise and foolish bridesmaid, Jesus is imparting some wisdom to us. He says it's wise to keep watching. That means being prepared for my coming. Yes, it could be a long delay. In fact, it has been 20 centuries so far, but still treat each day as if it were the last because it just might be. You never know when the bridegroom will arrive.

So we need to ask, what's it look like, then, to live expectantly and be always prepared for this ending that God has planned? To sum it up, my big idea for today is it means to receive Jesus into your life and then keep watching for the rest of your days for Him. First, receive Jesus Christ in faith. There is eternal salvation offered to those who will place their trust in Jesus Christ, and that is not something to be put off. That would be absolutely foolish. According to our story. You don't know your future. You don't know when your last breath might be – and then it will be too late to receive Him. We should keep in mind the death is as final as the second coming and as unpredictable. For some people, death comes swiftly and unexpectedly in the prime of life. And when it comes, that's it. No more time for preparation. We're either prepared or unprepared, admitted to the party or facing a closed door. There's no middle ground.

So I ask you: if you were to die today, would you be prepared? Have you committed your life to Jesus as your savior and Lord so that when He returns for you either personally with death or in great glory to contemplate His eternal purposes in this world history, you will be ready? If the answer to my question is, “No, I haven't gotten around to that in my life yet. I've been waiting on that,” my appeal is to receive Him now. Don't squander the opportunity.

To believers in Christ, we're told, after you've received Him: keep watching. I can't help but be reminded of Psalm 130 where the psalmist says, "I wait for the Lord more than watchman wait for the morning." I wait for the Lord. Like watchmen, watch expectantly every day, desiring and preparing for His coming. That means keeping your eye on the big picture. My wife and I like to listen to Alistair Begg on television. He's a wonderful preacher. Just last week, he said, "Now, next week, we'll be studying chapter 2 of this book of the Bible, God willing." He has his eye on the big picture. You see, there is so much more than just this life as we know it. You keep your eyes on the big picture like Alistair. We do that in prayer. Prayer is wonderful for keeping our eyes on the big picture. Kingdom praying – "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," is the first thing Jesus put as his petition. In the Lord's Prayer, God's priorities and His plans are at the forefront of prayers – the consummation of all things. We pray come Lord Jesus with your new Heaven and new Earth. And we pray that His kingdom might come today, but while we're waiting, that His will be done in people's lives today, that His kingdom enter into the lives of people, His rule over them, as we wait for His reappearing. That He rule over even more people's lives than he does now, so that they'll be ready for His reappearing and be welcomed into His kingdom. That they hear the gospel and they repent and believe in order be welcomed by Jesus in the end.

I pray also that His kingdom come and His will be done in my life personally right now. That he rule over every area of me and use me to bring others to Him right up to my dying breath. (Unless Jesus returns before that.) I think of how Jesus prepared for His atoning death on the cross for our sins, He prayed, "Thy will be done." Carry out the plan. And He told the disciples for their own ministry, "Watch and pray not to enter into temptation."

Besides Kingdom praying, there's another important way of keeping our eyes in the big picture, you know. You study your Bible. You keep reading it and studying it and reminding yourself of the big picture of God's purpose for this world and for your life, and you allow the Holy Spirit to shape you into the image of Jesus through the word, and you'll be you'll be prepared to see Him face to face some day.

So the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids serves as a call to self-examination for us. Where am I in my relationship with Christ? Are my priorities aligned with God's priorities, or am I getting so distracted with secondary, earthly concerns that I risk missing what's

most important in these days God has given me, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Good question.

In our communion liturgy, we proclaim, “Christ has come, Christ has risen, Christ is coming again,” and that is our joy and hope for the future. Oh, what a party. A wedding feast awaits those who have loved Christ's appearing and longed for His reappearing. Such joy. You really don't want to miss this, so get prepared.

Amen.