

(Matthew) ch.24:12-25:13

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being in a state of readiness for the coming of the Lord, enduring in love to the end, and distinguishing between true and false ministries.

Duration: 59:35

Scripture: Matthew 22:37

Topics: "End Times", "Faithfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of taking our responsibilities seriously as servants of God. He warns against being lazy and not being alert to our duties. The preacher references Matthew's Gospel, specifically Chapter 25, where Jesus tells the parable of the ten virgins. Five of them were wise and prepared for the bridegroom's arrival, while the other five were foolish and unprepared. The sermon also touches on the signs of the end times, such as tribulation, deception, wars, and the cooling off of people's devotion to Jesus. The preacher urges listeners to be faithful and ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 24 and verse 12. Jesus, speaking here about the signs that would immediately precede his second coming, said, among other things, And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. This is going to be one of the signs of the last days.

The first thing, of course, he mentioned was deception, which was going to increase in great measure. And that is the one thing that Jesus felt the need to repeat a number of times. First in verse 5, he warned them against deception.

Again in verse 11, he warned them against deception. And again in verse 24, he speaks about deception three times. The other sign that he said was concerning wars and rumors of wars that we considered in our last study, in verse 6. Famines and earthquakes, in verse 7. Tribulation for the disciples of Jesus, in verse 9. Many falling away from the faith, in verse 10.

Many betraying and hating one another, in verse 10. And because sin increases, many people's love will grow cold, it says in verse 12. When sin increases, it is going to make people cool off in their devotion to Jesus, in their love for the Lord, and in their love for one another.

Jesus said that the whole law of God could be summed up in two commandments. To love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourself. And when sin increases, when open sin is prevalent throughout the world and people are no longer ashamed of sin, what will happen is that people will cool off in their devotion to the Lord and cool off in their love for one another.

And in this context, Jesus says in verse 13, But, in contrast, the one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved. There are many who feel that once we have accepted Christ as our Savior, there is no danger of falling away. This is a dangerous doctrine.

Scripture teaches otherwise. And here is one of those verses. The one who endures to the end will be saved.

When we are converted and we have received Christ as our Savior, we have merely come to the starting line of the race. There are many who start, who do not finish. And here it speaks about finishing the race.

The one who endures to the end. And in the context of verse 12, the meaning is the one who endures in love to the end. That when he sees sin abounding and increasing around him, he fights the battle and preserves himself in that wholehearted devotion to the Lord and in love for one another.

The one who endures to the end, he is the one who will be saved. Salvation means more than escape from hell. It also means salvation from the power of sin, from everything that is un-Christlike in our lives.

And finally, salvation from the very presence of sin when Jesus comes again. And in this context, this verse has meaning. I need to fight the battle to endure in love until the end.

When another person's sin increases against me, when he sins against me, that is the time when I am in danger of cooling off in my love towards him. And that is where I need to fight the battle and seek grace from God and the power of the Holy Spirit to keep myself in love, in the love of God towards him when his sin has increased against me. It is easy to love those who love us, who do not sin against us.

But when sin increases, then we discover whether our love can endure to the end or not. And then Jesus spoke about the gospel of the kingdom. Verse 14 shall be preached in the whole world.

Here is another sign of the last days, that this gospel of the kingdom, Romans 14 and verse 17 tells us, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. This gospel, this good news of the kingdom of God, of the government of God over our lives, of the total authority of God, of the Lordship of Christ in every area of our life, this gospel that brings righteousness in our life and in our thoughts and in our words, this gospel that brings peace in our mind and in all relationships, this gospel that brings joy, joy in the Holy Spirit, this gospel will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations. And then the end will come.

It is not merely the gospel that Jesus forgives our sins. It is more than that. It is the gospel of the kingdom.

It does not say here that the whole world is going to respond or that many are going to be converted. It says here this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness, as a testimony. And those who have ears to hear will hear.

It is to be proclaimed to all the nations. And that is why those of us who have come into an experience of this gospel have a responsibility to share that with others. For now we have seen many signs fulfilled

around us that indicate that the coming of the Lord is near.

And therefore there is an urgency about proclaiming this gospel of the kingdom of God to all nations. And each of us have a part to fulfill in that. For he has called every one of his children to be witnesses unto him to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And then he goes on to say further about the signs that would precede his second coming. Therefore, verse 15, when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, and in parenthesis it says here, let the reader understand. The Holy Spirit intends that we should understand what is written here.

We should not be ignorant about this. This is a reference to Daniel chapter 9 verse 27 which speaks about the Antichrist making a covenant with the Jewish people for seven days, each day symbolizing a year. For seven years, Daniel 9, 27.

But in the middle of that seven year period he will put an end to the sacrifice and grain offering, put an end to that covenant. And then will come this abomination of desolation that makes desolate until a complete destruction. One that is decreed is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

We do not know right now what exactly that abomination of desolation will be. But Jesus spoke about it standing in the holy place. And if you compare this with 2 Thessalonians in chapter 2, we read there about the Antichrist who will sit in the temple of God, verse 4, 2 Thessalonians 2, 4, displaying himself as being God.

That could be the abomination of desolation that is spoken of, where the Antichrist sets himself up as being God. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. He is referring to that which will take place in the city of Jerusalem.

That is a sign, he says, that the covenant is going to be broken and then it will no longer be safe to be there. Persecution will begin. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

And let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. These verses seem to indicate that at all times we should be in a state of readiness. As we see these signs around us, there should be no need for us to go down to the house or to come back from the field.

We could apply it in a spiritual way, too, even today. That there should never be a time in our life where we have to set something right with someone before we are ready to be taken up to be with the Lord or ready to leave this earth. We should be in a constant state of readiness that we do not have to go back from our field or office to settle something.

If we have done something wrong, it should be settled immediately at the very first opportunity so that we live in a constant state of readiness. We could apply verse 17 here also in a spiritual way in the sense that my attachment when I am on the housetop should not be to the things that are in my house. There should be a detachment in my spirit from the things of earth to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

But these have literal applications, too, in that time when the Antichrist sets up the abomination that makes desolate. And woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days, because it will be difficult to flee from persecution with nursing babes. But pray that your flight may not be in the winter,

which will make flight more difficult, or on a Sabbath day, when he is referring to those Christians who are living in and around Jerusalem and in Israel, where everybody is at rest, and then one who is fleeing or traveling on the Sabbath day will easily be spotted.

Pray that it will not be on a Sabbath day, for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world. There it speaks of that great tribulation, which Christians, too, will have to face at that time, such a tribulation that has not occurred since the beginning of the world. But it will not be endless, because it says here, For the sake of the Lord's children, verse 22, those days have been limited, and the Lord has cut short those days.

He will not allow us, even at such a time, to be tested beyond our ability. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24, continuing our study on the signs that Jesus gave in relation to his second coming. He spoke about many things.

We are now at verse 21, where Jesus spoke about great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. When we look at the teaching of the New Testament and everything that Jesus spoke to his disciples, we do not find a single verse or any teaching that indicates that escaping tribulation from men, persecution from men, is a reward that God gives to the faithful, or that God desires that the disciples of Jesus should never face tribulation. On the contrary, when we look at the words of Jesus himself in John, chapter 16, in verse 33, he said, In me you will have peace, but in the world you will have tribulation.

But be of good courage, for I have overcome the world. The apostles also understood it in the same way. They said to others in Acts, chapter 14, and verse 22, Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

The apostle Peter said, Don't consider it something strange when you go through a fiery trial, as though that was something that you were not meant to face. 1 Peter 4, verse 12. So we see that persecution and tribulation and opposition was something that Jesus and the apostles taught that every Christian who is wholehearted will have to face.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy, chapter 3. He says, You know the persecutions that I faced, that I endured. 2 Timothy 3, verse 11. And verse 12, he said, Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

It's not might be, it's not maybe. They will be persecuted. Persecution is certain for those who seek to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.

A person who is a compromiser or a diplomat who seeks to please men will avoid persecution, but not the one who obeys. Many people have the idea that if we obey the Lord we shall escape difficulties. It is actually exactly the opposite.

It is by compromising and disobeying the Lord that we escape a lot of difficulties on earth. What happens to the person who obeys the Lord is he faces difficulties, but in those difficulties he experiences the Lord in a way that he would never have experienced otherwise. So it is character that develops through tribulation.

And this is also the teaching of Romans, chapter 5, after having spoken about forgiveness of sins and justification by faith in the previous chapters. He says, Now we exult in tribulations. Romans 5, verse 3.

Knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance proven character.

So it is with the purpose of giving us character rather than comfort that the Lord allows tribulation in our lives. And so when Jesus spoke about great tribulation, there is no need for any of us to expect that we shall escape it. Jesus himself, when he prayed to the Father, he said, The world has hated them, in John 17, verse 14.

But I am not praying to you, John 17, verse 15. Jesus said to the Father, that you should take my disciples out of the world, out of all this tribulation. No, just keep them from evil.

Keep them from sinning. Do you know that the only thing the Lord is interested in is to keep you from sinning? Everything else will fall into place if that desire of the Lord is fulfilled. Seek the kingdom of God first in his righteousness, and what is necessary will be added to you.

There is no promise in scripture that he will protect us from persecution. There is a promise in scripture that he will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability. But with every trial, he will give us grace to overcome so that we do not sin.

And so when it says here that there will be great tribulation, this is for those who are the disciples of Jesus. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved, because the persecution is going to be so intense. Many Christians have accepted a teaching which seems to indicate that they will escape tribulation.

But if we read the words of Jesus without prejudice, it is difficult to find him teaching that. We have to ask ourselves whether it is not our love for comfort and ease which has made us absorb such a doctrine. It says here that for the sake of the elect, those days will have been cut short, which means that the elect are not up in the air or in heaven.

They are right here on earth. Otherwise, there would be no need to cut short those days for the sake of the elect. And the elect spoken of are the elect of God, those who have been elected by God to be his children.

And then, if anyone says to you at that particular time, he says, this is obviously not referring to the Jews, if anyone says to you, he is speaking to his disciples, behold, here is the Christ. Oh, there he is. Do not believe him.

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Again, he speaks about the elect who will be there, who are going to be attacked by Satan through deception as well, not just persecution, but deception. And that deception is going to take the form of signs and wonders done in the name of Jesus, but which do not lead people to a godly life of overcoming sin.

And we see the beginnings of that even today. A ministry of signs and wonders that does not lead people to be free from sin has to be considered suspect. Because Jesus said, many will come to me in the last day of judgment and say, Lord, Lord, we did miracles in your name.

We prophesied and cast out demons in your name, and the Lord will say to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice sin. And so, we see there in Matthew 7, verses 22 and 23, that the important thing in the final day is not whether you did signs and wonders, but whether you lived in sin or didn't live in

sin. That's the thing that's going to determine your eternal destiny.

And so, if we are taken up with a ministry which is merely showing signs and wonders, we could say that that is an indication of the immaturity of our own Christian life. The important thing is, does a ministry lead us to be free from sin? It's not sickness that's going to send people to hell, it's sin. It's not sickness that separates man from God, it's sin.

It's not lameness or blindness that hinders a man's fellowship with God, it's sin. And so, Jesus said, Beware of false Christs, verse 24, and false prophets, who will use great signs and wonders to deceive the elect, who will think that because of these signs and wonders, this man is a man of God. One of the clearest marks of immaturity among many Christians is when they call a man a man of God merely because he does signs and wonders in the name of Jesus.

They don't understand Matthew 7, 22 and 23, which are clear, that there are many people who will do signs and wonders in the name of Jesus who are not men of God, who are deceivers because they're living in sin. In the case of Jesus, he did more signs and wonders than any human being has ever done, or any of his disciples have ever done. But that was not the main thing in his teaching.

His teaching, as we read the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Matthew 5, 6 and 7, was to lead people to a godly life. Jesus didn't preach merely the forgiveness of sins and heal the sick along with that. He preached a godly life of obedience to him, of loving one's enemies, blessing those who curse us, hating money, not being anxious, not judging others.

Many things like this, speaking the truth always of a holy life, this is what Jesus taught. Coupled with it, there was a ministry of signs and wonders. It is exactly the same with the apostles.

When you read the Epistles, you find what the apostles taught, a godly life. And signs and wonders accompanied their ministry. But when, today, we find signs and wonders accompanying a person's ministry and he does not preach the same godly standards that Jesus and the apostles preached, but he only preaches forgiveness of sins, we have to suspect that ministry.

It's a substandard ministry. It's not following in the footsteps of Jesus, and it is quite likely that there's an element of deception in it that can lead astray. It says here in verse 24, if possible, even the elect.

If the elect are not careful and watchful to compare any man's ministry with the ministry of Jesus, they will be led astray. Remember, dear friend, the standard is not what your reason tells you or what good people around you tell you. The standard is the ministry of Jesus.

And so Jesus said in verse 25, Behold, I have told you in advance. And we would say the same thing to you as well. We have told you in advance and we have pointed out the Scriptures to you.

If you are still deceived, you've got nobody to blame but yourself. If, therefore, such people who show these signs and wonders say to you, He is in the wilderness, the Lord is in the wilderness, don't go forth, don't believe them. Or they say He is in the inner rooms.

They say, Jesus came to my room and spoke with me. Do not believe them, Jesus said. No, He doesn't come to inner rooms.

When He comes back to earth, it will not be to somebody's bedroom that He comes privately to speak to him. No, it will be, as Jesus said in verse 27, Just as the lightning comes from the east, flashes to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. And where the corpse is there, the vultures will gather.

So the coming of the Lord is not going to be in some secret way. That's exactly what He was saying, that He is in the wilderness or He is here or there. It's going to be from the east to the west.

Like the lightning shining, everybody will see. And then, just like vultures gather to the corpse in the same way, the body of Christ will be gathered up to the head so that we shall be forever with the Lord. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24 and verse 29.

We were considering in our last study how Jesus spoke about the great tribulation that was going to come upon the earth in the last days, just before His return to the earth. And then He warns His disciples not to believe those who would teach that Jesus would come in some secret way where nobody but a few would know. But He says, as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, in verse 27, even so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

And then, in verse 29, He says, immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened. Here it speaks of a short period. Immediately at the end of that period of tribulation, when the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heaven will be shaken, all of which could happen even within the period of 24 hours.

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. And here it says that this is going to take place immediately after the tribulation, in verse 29.

Then the Son of Man will appear in the sky. There are many things in Scripture that are very different from the way we have understood them from childhood. It is very easy to approach Scripture with a prejudiced mind, to believe that Scripture teaches something which we have always believed.

And then when we come across a verse that seems to contradict what we have always believed, to twist that Scripture to fit our understanding, this is extremely dangerous. This is an indication that we do not love the truth, that we are not humble enough to acknowledge that our previous understanding may have been in error. And this is how many remain ignorant about the truth.

But, if only we would accept Scripture as it is, and change our understanding accordingly, then it would be easy. For here it says, immediately after the tribulation, and these signs in the heavens will be there, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear, verse 30. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn.

And then He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds. His elect, the elect of the Son of Man, are not the Jews, they are the ones whom He has chosen, His disciples, those whom God has elected to be His children. It's referring to the disciples of Jesus who will be gathered together immediately after the tribulation, which means that the disciples of Jesus would have gone through that tribulation and been faithful to the Lord in it as His witnesses.

And then the Lord will come. And this great trumpet that's spoken of in verse 31 is the great trumpet that Paul speaks of in 1 Thessalonians and chapter 4 in relation to the second coming of Christ. He says in

verse 16, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first, and we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. And so we see here that this trumpet is going to sound when Jesus comes and everybody is going to see Him. This is going to be no secret coming.

Jesus said it clearly, as the lightning shines from the east to the west, verse 27, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. And when He comes, every eye will see Him, and He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, verse 31, and they will gather together His elect. We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at that time when He comes, when everybody sees Him, immediately after the tribulation, verse 29.

And then we shall, along with the Lord, descend to earth, and the dead in Christ would also rise and meet the Lord in the air, and together with Him come to establish His one thousand year reign on this earth. There we find all the indications of His second coming. And then He says, Now learn a parable from the fig tree.

When its branches already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, He said, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Now here are two things.

One is that the exact day and hour of the second coming of Christ is not known to anyone. And when Jesus was on earth as a man, even He did not know the exact date of His return to earth. That was something that was hidden even from His understanding when He was on earth.

That is the meaning of verse 36. Not even the Son. But now, of course, that He's gone back to that place at the right hand of the Father, now, of course, He knows.

So He's not referring to that time, but when He was on this earth. No one knows the exact day or hour, not even the angels of heaven. No created being knows it.

No man knows it. And it's useless to try and predict the day or hour. But, He said, you will know when He is near, verse 33.

So there are two facts here. One, we do not know the exact day or hour, but we shall, if we are spiritually alert, we study the scriptures, we shall know when He is near. When you see these things begin to happen, the fig tree that Jesus spoke of in verse 32 refers to the nation of Israel.

We read that Jesus came into Israel and He came near a fig tree once we read in scripture, looking for fruit. And He did not find fruit. He found only leaves.

And He cursed that fig tree. And it withered up a little while later, not immediately. That is a picture of Israel into which Jesus came, looking for fruit that would glorify God.

And He didn't find it in Israel. What did He find in Israel when He came? He found religion. He found religious activity.

And that nation was cursed. They had turned against the Son of God, crucified Him, and finally, not immediately, forty years later, they withered up as a nation. And they were scattered to the ends of the earth.

But that fig tree which Jesus cursed, we read here, is one day, verse 32, going to put forth its leaves again. Not fruit, its leaves. It's going to come back into that nation.

It's going to be a nation again and start its religious activities again. And we see that that's happened in our day and age. In 1948, the nation of Israel came back into the land which God had given to Abraham.

Then, He said, just like in the natural world, when the fig tree puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near, even so you too, when you see these things, recognize that Jesus is near. The Lord is near. He's at the door.

He has come right up to the door. The door hasn't been opened, but He's come right up to there. And then He said, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Now we see, in 1967, the city of Jerusalem as well has come back into the hands of the Jews. And we know that these are indications that the coming of the Lord is near. Today, God's people are the children of God.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile today. All are the same to Him. But Jesus used these signs to warn us that when you see these things happening, remember that the coming of Jesus is near.

And so these things that are happening right in our day and age are something that are a warning to us that the coming of our Lord is near and that we should be ready for it. And then He went on to say, this generation, this generation that sees these things, and we're seeing these things, will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

And so from that time, we could say, when the nation of Israel has come back to the city of Jerusalem in 1967, we can say that that is an indication that now the coming of the Lord is very near and we are to be ready for His coming. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. We do not know the exact day or the hour, but we do know that His coming is near.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24, and verse 37, continuing our study in the signs that Jesus gave in relation to His second coming. We read here, Jesus said, The coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For in those days, which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark.

And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So shall the coming of the Son of Man be. We know what happened in the days of Noah.

People were particularly evil in the realm of sex and violence. These were the two predominant areas where sin flourished openly, as we read in Genesis chapter 6. And in the last days before the coming of Christ, it will be exactly like that. There will be open sexual evil and an increase in violence.

And we see that happening in our day and age, along with all the other signs that we have considered in this chapter. But we also know that in the days of Noah, there was a godly remnant, headed up by Noah. It wasn't a very large number.

In fact, it was only eight people. It consisted just of Noah's immediate family. His three sons, their wives, and his own wife.

Just eight people. And as far as we know, God gave Noah 120 years to preach to others and to prepare the ark. He gave them ample opportunity to repent.

Second Peter 2 says, Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He did not lower that standard of righteousness. And there is a great need in the last days for people like Noah, who do not lower the standard of righteousness.

Noah didn't lower the standard of righteousness. He kept it where God kept it. And the result was that very few people were willing to join that little remnant that stood for God.

And it will be like that in the last days too. The way to life is narrow, and few there be that find it. And if we proclaim the narrow gate as narrow as Jesus said it was, and if we proclaim the narrow way as narrow as Jesus said it was, we shall find that there are very few who really join us and want to become a part of it.

And this is where the temptation comes for many preachers to be ticklers of people's ears and to make the gate wider than what Jesus made it, to make the way broader than what Jesus made it, so that many more people can come in. But these many who come in will not be people who want righteousness. They are people who want heaven, of course, when they die.

Any sensible person would want that. Even Balaam said, Let me die the death of the righteous. But you've got to live the life of the righteous in order to die the death of the righteous.

Few there be that find that true way. The counterfeit ways are many. And so there will be a need, and there is a need, in our day, for people like Noah to stand for the truth, to preach righteousness, and to be content with a small number of people who stand with them for righteousness.

And around us in the world, it will be just like in the days of Noah with sexual evil and violence and many other sins like that. And we have to warn people about the coming judgment against sin. But like in Noah's day, most people laughed at Noah's preaching.

Most people will laugh and ridicule what we say. They will say, That's impossible that God can save only a few. Well, that's what they told Noah too.

But Noah did not bother about them. He did not change his message to suit any of their opinions. Neither should we.

And one day, the judgment came. All of a sudden. The warning was through the preaching of Noah.

They didn't listen to that. And one day God said, The time is up. And Noah was taken up, taken into the ark, and the judgment fell.

And that was the end of that world. And Jesus said, It will be like that in the last days too. That the judgment of God will fall upon the earth and God's people will be taken up to escape that judgment of God.

In that time, there will be two men in the field, verse 40, working together. One will be taken to escape that judgment. Another will be left behind and will face that judgment.

Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken to escape that judgment. The other will be left behind to face the judgment and the wrath of God.

It will only be a short period in which the wrath of God falls upon this earth. Just immediately after the saints are raptured up, after Jesus has come in the air, like the lightning from the east to the west flashes, and then that will be the end of this dispensation of this world. And then Jesus will come with the saints from heaven to establish His kingdom on the earth.

What shall we do then, after having heard all these things that Jesus has said? What did Jesus say to His disciples? Did He tell them to be careful, to understand prophecy more accurately? No. He said, Be on the alert. It is spiritual alertness that is more necessary for us to be ready for the coming of the Lord than intellectual understanding of prophetic truth.

An intellectual understanding of prophetic truth can stimulate our souls, but not necessarily edify or build up our spirits, not necessarily prepare us for the coming of the Lord. Satan knows all the prophetic details about the coming of Jesus Christ, but that's not going to take him into the Lord's presence. He is still going to be cast into that lake of fire.

We read in 1 John chapter 3, verse 2 and 3, that we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And if you have this hope, John says in 1 John 3, 3, you will purify yourself as He is pure. This is the mark of all those who have this hope as a living hope, that they purify themselves as Jesus is pure.

And so we see here, be on the alert, he said, because you do not know at what hour and what day your Lord is coming. But, he said, be sure of this, if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason, you be ready too, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

We may think that it is still a long time and take it easy in our life and He will come when we are not ready. But the one who is always ready, the one who is purifying himself as Jesus is pure, for him, the coming of the Lord will not be like a thief. He said here that if the head of the house had known what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert.

And we know, we do not know the exact day or hour, but we know when He is near. And even if His coming is not immediate, every Christian must seek to purify himself even as Jesus is pure. In relation to the second coming of Christ, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and said, You brethren, verse 4, are not in darkness.

Earlier on, in verse 2, he said, You know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying peace and safety, then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child and they shall not escape. But, you brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you like a thief.

Why should it overtake you like a thief? If you are ready for His coming, then it will not surprise you when He comes. You are all sons of light and sons of day. Therefore, let us not go to sleep spiritually as others do.

And that is the point of the parable of the ten virgins. To be spiritually alert with oil in our vessels. That is the meaning of spiritual alertness.

That we have a life before God in our hidden part. Be on the alert. And then His coming will never surprise you.

Even though it will be sudden when people are saying peace and safety. And that is what many people in the world are saying today. And that is what the Antichrist will also say.

Peace and safety. But He will come suddenly upon them. But those who are ready for the coming of the Lord, they will not be surprised.

For them, it will not be like a thief coming in the night. And then Jesus went on to say in Matthew 24 and verse 45 Who then is that faithful and sensible servant whom his master will put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? The Lord wants servants in these days who will give food to His household. There are many believers around the world.

And they need shepherds. They need teachers. Not those who serve for money.

Not those who are seeking their own, seeking their own honor. But those who want to give food to the household of God. Blessed is that slave whom his father finds so doing when he comes.

If God has given you a gift with His word, you have a tremendous responsibility to be a servant who gives food at the proper time according to the need of God's household. And that you will be found doing that and not having buried your talent or having used your talent to make money for yourself or having used your talent to get honor for yourself, but that you have used it to give food to God's people. When the Lord comes, He will put you in charge, verse 47, of all His possessions.

You will get an abundant reward from Him. But, He says, if that evil slave says, My master is not coming for a long time, and instead of feeding his fellow slaves, he beats them. And there are many preachers like that.

They do not feed. They beat with their messages. And they live a sensuous, self-centered life, eating and drinking, in gluttony, enjoying themselves, instead of being concerned about feeding God's people.

Then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect Him. He will come suddenly. And He will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites.

Here is a person who was a servant of the master, but he was cast out because he took it easy. He was not alert. God gave him a responsibility and he did not take it seriously.

It is a serious thing, dear friends, to have had a gift from God. It increases our responsibility. May we all be found faithful.

Let us turn today to Matthew's Gospel in chapter 25, verse 1. Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish and five were prudent. Or wise.

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent, or the wise, took oil in flasks along with their lamps. This is a continuation of Jesus' answer to His disciples who had asked Him

in Matthew 24, verse 3, concerning the signs that would precede the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. And in this context, Jesus not only gave them the signs that we studied in Matthew 24, but He also showed them how they could be ready for His coming.

It's no use studying prophecy if we don't understand how to be ready for the second coming of Christ. And we can say that Matthew chapter 25 is dealing with being ready, just like Matthew chapter 24 was dealing with the signs that would indicate the second coming of Christ. The prophetic details are in Matthew 24.

The spiritual preparation and the way to it is described in Matthew chapter 25. And so, if we stop with Matthew 24 and have no interest in understanding Matthew 25, we will not be ready for the coming of the Lord and we shall certainly not be taken up if we are not spiritually prepared. And so, Matthew 25 is very important.

It's a very important part of our study of the second coming of Christ. Unfortunately, most believers are interested more in the prophetic details. And they would read books and go to lectures that explain the prophetic details.

But the very fact that they don't have much interest in being spiritually prepared for the Lord's coming shows that they are immature. And it also shows that those who are teaching them are immature too. For Jesus never stopped at the end of Matthew 24.

He continues to tell His disciples how they can be ready for His coming. And so we see here in Matthew 25, verse 1, Jesus spoke about ten virgins. Now, whenever we study a parable, we can only get the spiritual truth out of it and not try to be dogmatic, trying to interpret every detail.

Many people get into a lot of false theology and wrong doctrines by trying to interpret every little detail of a parable. Very often, a parable was meant to highlight one or two main truths. And we need to see a parable like that and not allow our imagination to run riot and to begin to interpret every detail because a man with a wild imagination can interpret it in so many different ways.

We don't get our theology from the interpretation of parables. It's very dangerous to get theology by the way you interpret a parable because another clever person may interpret it in another way. We can get spiritual truths out of it that can give us a spiritual readiness in our heart.

But doctrine is more clearly laid down in the plain statements of scripture. Here we can say that these ten virgins are a picture of those who outwardly have a good life. A virgin, we can say, is one who has a good testimony on the outside.

And the lamp speaks of the same thing. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. And all ten had lamps.

It speaks of Christians who have a good external testimony. Men think highly of them because their lights are burning, their good works are seen. And they go out to meet the bridegroom.

It is obvious these are Christians because they are going out to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, their bridegroom. The Jews did not go out to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. They crucified him.

Nobody else goes out to meet the Lord. These are Christians going out to meet the bridegroom. The only difference was that five of them were foolish and five were wise.

It didn't have anything to do with their external testimony, which was very good. But the difference was that the foolish did not take lamps, oil in their lamps. The wise took oil along with their lamps.

The foolish did not take that extra flask of oil which the wise took. And this was the thing that made the difference. It says here that the bridegroom delayed and they all began to be drowsy and to sleep.

That did not disqualify them. That was physical tiredness. But at midnight there was a shout.

Behold, the bridegroom come out to meet him. This is the signs that we have seen. You know that his coming is near, that he is at the door.

The shout that we hear from the signs that are happening around us. The bridegroom is coming. Get ready to meet him.

And then everybody woke up. And they trimmed their lamps, which indicates that all the virgins had lamps that were burning. It was not that the lamps of the foolish were not burning.

They were burning too. It says they all trimmed their lamps and the foolish said give us some of your oil, they asked the wise, because our lamps are going out. So they did have some oil in their lamps, but they did not have an extra flask of oil.

And their lamps were dying out. And they came to the wise and said give us of your oil. But the wise replied saying no, lest there be not enough for us and you too.

Go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves. Here we see some things. One is that one brother cannot give his oil to another.

It is impossible. It is an inner life that the oil speaks of. A life in Christ that we have come to through faithfulness.

It says here that it is something we have to buy, verse 9. Something that we don't get free like forgiveness of sins, but something that we have to buy. Something that we get from the dealers, from the circumstances and trials of life. Those are the dealers where we get oil, content in our inner life.

And each one has to get for himself. One cannot buy for another. We know that one brother cannot pass on his life to another.

We can pass on the word of God, but the life of Jesus we have to acquire ourselves. Second Corinthians 4.10 says, if we are faithful and bearing the dying of Jesus in our body, then the life of Jesus also will be manifested in our body. In the trials of life, if I am willing to take up my cross and deny myself and take up my cross and follow Jesus and die to myself, I can receive the life of Jesus.

Second Corinthians 4.10 tells me, and that is the oil. The life of Jesus that gives me a spiritual content. And it says here in verse 10, while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came.

What was it that exposed the emptiness of these foolish virgins? It was the delay of the bridegroom. He who endures until the end will be saved. The one who has a life that carries him through.

The one who doesn't merely have a form. We can say that the five foolish virgins had a form. They were religious, but they were not spiritual.

The five wise virgins were spiritual. And there is a vast difference between religiosity and spirituality. There is a vast difference between having the form and having the life.

Many people have the form, very few have the life. In the final day, what will matter is not whether you have the form or not, but whether you have the life or not. That is going to be the thing.

If you have the life of Jesus, you will have sufficient oil to carry you through till the very end. If you have acquired that oil and not been content merely with a form. So we can say that it is very dangerous to merely have a good testimony before men, to have our lamps burning before men, to have a testimony that we are virgins, and men thinking highly of us.

And all the while we don't have this inner life. In other words, our private life is not like our outer life. Our outer life appears much bigger and greater and more spiritual in the eyes of men than our inner life.

This is an extremely dangerous condition to be in. It says here that because the bridegroom delayed in verse 5, the oil ran out. And that was what exposed them.

And then when the bridegroom came, those who were ready, verse 10, went in with him to the wedding feast and the door was shut. This is not merely referring to those who live in the last days. There have been foolish virgins even in the first century and second and third and fourth and all centuries whether they lived in the last century before the coming of the Lord is irrelevant.

The principle applies in all centuries. Later, the other virgins also came saying, Lord, Lord, open up for us. He answered and said, I do not know you.

I have not had a personal relationship with you based on life. You were taken up with a form. And then he went on to say, Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day or the hour.

How shall we be on the alert? By making sure that our emphasis is not on the form of godliness but on the power of godliness. We could look at this verse in 2nd Timothy and chapter 3 and verse 5 in this connection in connection with this parable where Jesus said, where Paul says to Timothy concerning the last days, many in those days will hold to a form of godliness and deny its power. There is a difference between the form of godliness and the power of godliness.

The foolish virgins had the form. The wise virgins had the power. The power is the life of Jesus.

Do we need the form? Yes. For the wise virgins had that too. But within that vessel was oil.

And that is the important thing. Our outer life must correspond to our inner life and our inner life to our outer life. Then there is the form filled with the power.

And this is how we shall be ready for the coming of Christ.

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