

Evergreen PCA
Beaverton, Oregon
Pastor Adam Parker
June 30th, 2024

Sermon Title: Be Prepared

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:1-30

Matt. 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Matt. 25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

Matt. 25:3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

Matt. 25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

Matt. 25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

Matt. 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

Matt. 25:7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

Matt. 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

Matt. 25:9 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.’

Matt. 25:10 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.

Matt. 25:11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’

Matt. 25:12 But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

Matt. 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Matt. 25:14 ¶ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

Matt. 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Matt. 25:16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

Matt. 25:17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

Matt. 25:18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

Matt. 25:19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Matt. 25:20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’

Matt. 25:21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

Matt. 25:22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’

Matt. 25:23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

Matt. 25:24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,

Matt. 25:25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’

Matt. 25:26 But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?

Matt. 25:27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

Matt. 25:28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

Matt. 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Matt. 25:30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Main Point: Jesus calls us to live expectantly and responsibly as we wait for his second coming.

Outline:

1. Living with Delay (v. 1-13)
2. Living with Responsibility (v. 14-30)

Introduction

Jesus is coming back. He is returning to judge the living and the dead and the sons of men. And yet what does that mean for us? Well it means we're called to prepare.

Jesus speaks today of the high importance of preparing for his second coming. We've already seen that his second coming coincides with the final judgment. So to prepare for Christ's return is the same thing as preparing for the final judgment. And we saw last week, this could happen at any time and will come upon us with great surprise.

The question is, what is expected of faithful people until then? What are we meant to do? Besides turning to Christ, which we spoke about last week, how can we live in expectation of the second coming of Christ?

What I'd like to do here is just take these two parables and open both of them up briefly. Rather than picking them apart for every possible meaning, here's what I'd like to suggest: the first parable is about living with delay. How do we live while we wait for Jesus to return? And with the second parable, we're faced with a slightly different question: what is our responsibility while the return of Jesus is delayed? So our first point is living with delay. Our second point is living with responsibility.

1. Living with Delay (v. 1-13)

The first parable teaches us about living with delay. How do we live while we await the master's return?

This is the theme of this first parable in verses 1-13.

In this parable, the groom was expected to show up just after nightfall. And so some of the bridesmaids underestimated how long the wait would be and didn't bring enough oil. In this parable, some of the women are prepared for a long wait, and some of them are not prepared for a long wait.

These women who think the wait will be short are the real object lessons of this story. Obviously the groom in the story is Jesus. And the young women in the story show us that being prepared for the second coming means that we might have a long wait ahead of us.

Having a longer view means that we might be preparing not only ourselves, but our children, or our children's children for the second coming. Jesus wants us to be prepared for a short wait, but also a long wait. Why? Why both? Well he told us already: even he did not know the day nor the hour.

So he wants us to prepare for a short wait, or a long wait.

I've mentioned the atheist Bertrand Russell before. He argued that the fact that Jesus has not yet come back is proof that Jesus was a false prophet. There has certainly been a period of time that *feels* long to us since Jesus' ascension.

So how do we cope with the fact that Jesus has not yet returned? How do we cope with the time between his ascension in the first century and his eventual return,

which is still future? Specifically how do we handle the wait? How are we *meant* to handle the wait?

Well people can try to cope with the delay of Christ's return in a few ways:

a. One way of coping: You can *deny* he's ever returning, completely. That's the Bertrand Russell way. I don't recommend it. And I will just say one thing in response to this: because of the long wait, it is a temptation to think he must not be returning at all. But our perception is just not trustworthy. For us it only *appears* to be a long delay.

And yet the Psalmist says of God, "A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past" (Ps. 90:4). 2 Peter 3:8 says it a bit differently: "Do not overlook this fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Relative to our sense of time, his return only *seems* to be delayed. But God knows the truth, and for him, the passage of time is virtually meaningless.

b. A second way of coping with the delay: You can *presume* that he's coming any moment. Usually people who do this tend to neglect longer-term commitments. This parable is actually written against this particular approach.

The foolish ones didn't prepare for the long wait, because they thought the coming would be so soon that they wouldn't need to even take care of themselves. If you read the book of 1 and 2 Thessalonians this appears to be the situation there: some people were so convinced of the imminent return of Jesus that they checked out, neglected their lives, they wouldn't work, and they became a burden to everyone else in the church.

They were like the foolish young women in this parable, and Paul rebuked this attitude, just like Jesus rebukes this attitude. So assuming that his return WILL be imminent is also a mistake if it means you are so convinced that you stop preparing altogether.

c. A third way of coping with the delay: You can believe him that we truly don't know, and expect him all the time. This means living with an expectant hope, but with a plan for the future and a wise preparation and responsibility for yourself,

your family, your church, and your community. And by the way, this is the biblical picture that God gives to us.

How should we think of our lives right now in this in-between time? Well we should remember: we are not in the final state. We still await a better kingdom, and a restoration. We haven't arrived yet. We should not have an overrealized sense of where we are in time. We are still in this fallen world, and we're in that in-between moment. We're not in paradise, and we're not in the promised land. We're strangers and sojourners. To quote the old hymn, "This world is not my home/I'm just a passin' through."

Maybe the best picture of our lives right now is found with Israel when they were in Babylon. They were in exile. They were in a land that was not their own. They had heard from God that they would eventually be sent back. But what did he tell them in Jeremiah 29 to prepare them?

"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5-7 ESV)

It's really remarkable. God says, "This place isn't your permanent home, but invest in it anyway. You won't stay here, but if you seek the good of the place you're in, it will be good for you and it will bring glory to the God whose name you bear."

It doesn't glorify God for us to check out and engage in escapism. Instead, there is that balance: expect his return. Expect that our exile will eventually end. Jesus will return us to his new promised land in the new heavens and the new earth. But until then, seek the good of the city in which you're living.

One commentator does an excellent job of summarizing the real point of this parable.

"Presumption in the face of God's goodness, indifference to his call and unfaithfulness in his service place one in a position of danger. A terrible judgment had come upon Israel because of its failure to conform to the will

of God ... the covenant relationship had been revoked and they had been cut off from the blessing of God. The church is warned that it too is not exempt from judgment, but must face a day of reckoning when it will be called upon to present fruit befitting the call and advantage it has received.” (Blaine Charette, *Theme of Recompense*)

Let me mention one other observation from this parable: when it comes to responding to his gospel, and believing on the Lord Jesus, God will hold us personally responsible and none of us can point at someone else and pass the blame for our delay or unbelief to them.

I mean, think of what happens here: the foolish and underprepared young women in verse 8 realize they have failed, and they look at the wise ones who prepared, and they say, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are out.” Someone else will fill in for me. Someone else will pick up my slack. Of course, this isn’t realistic or possible. Everyone will be without oil if that happens in the story. The parable is telling us that *we* must prepare for Jesus’ return, and no one else can do that for us.

Ours is an age where people increasingly are less resilient, more sensitive, and quicker to pass blame to others. For some in this age who are used to looking around, finding someone to blame, and who are used to others such as their parents stepping in to absorb pain and difficulty, this will come as quite the shock: they are held personally responsible.

Their parents or grandparents will not answer for them. We can teach and disciple our children and raise them in the ways of God as we’re called to do, but we cannot step in and answer for our children, ultimately. We as parents have responsibility to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as our baptismal vows promised we would do. And those parents who fail to keep their vows will answer for their failures and sin as well. But none of us can point to someone else and say, “You believe for me. I don’t need to do this; you do it. Let me have some of your oil. You have plenty.”

All of us will have to give a personal account, and will not be able to say to the Lord, “They wouldn’t share their oil with me. If only I had more advantage. If only I had been given a leg up on life, it could have been different!”

In the end this is a parable that says to each of us: “you be prepared.”

2. Living with Responsibility (v. 14-30)

The second parable today in verses 14-30 teaches us about living with responsibility. We are meant to await the return of Christ. How are we meant to be occupied during the wait?

In this parable Jesus tells the story of a man who left his finances to others to manage while he was gone. We don’t know the exact weight of a talent in the NT period, but in the OT it was approximately 75 lbs. Jesus doesn’t say if these talents are gold or silver talents, but in either case each person in the story receives a massive sum of money and expected to be productive with it during the owner’s absence. I won’t repeat the entire story, but notice some put these funds to great use. And some just hide them away and do nothing with them. And we can tell by the end of the story, Jesus has no patience for the person who just buries what he gave them.

The parable of the talents, instead of being about the master’s return, is more about us and what we’ve done during his absence. How will we live with the responsibilities we’ve been given? What will fill the space of the delay of Christ’s return? What will you do with the time that you have before Christ returns?

One important lesson of this parable is that everything we have, including gifts and opportunities is *actually the property of the Lord*, not ourselves. We’re all just managers, really.

This past week, we as a church received hard news, as did the McGuire family, that our brother, father, deacon, Dave McGuire passed away and went to be with the Lord.

I think that any who knew him, or who served alongside him as a church officer would describe Dave McGuire as someone who saw himself and his

gifts as the property of the Lord. I remember, we as a session would have a difficult topic in front of us, and often in the midst of our discussion, an elder would say, “We should ask Dave about this.”

Dave was someone who was *wise*, practical, and godly. His instinct was to pray. His instinct was to be wise. He was imminently useful. He would pray. He would give financial advice to any who needed it. For the last four years that I was Dave’s pastor, he always struck me as the man who turned his five talents into ten. I really believe that.

Our church is poorer for no longer having Dave in it. He is with the church triumphant now. Now, Dave is no longer beset by sickness and pain and physical suffering. He is beyond that now. But I also believe, that – as happens with the man with the five talents in this parable – I believe Dave has heard the very words of this parable, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Dave was just a manager of the Lord’s things, and he was faithful in his work, and he was a good deacon. We need the service of men like Dave, but we also need the example of men like Dave McGuire: those who lived their life as if it was not their own, because for Dave his life belonged to Jesus.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.” Even your very *self* doesn’t belong to you. It is the property of God. How will you use your very self as we await the master’s return? Will you be burying your talent and just getting by – just surviving? It’s so sobering to remember that each day and breath you draw really belongs to the Lord, and he will one day seek an accounting of how we used these things.

We must shake off self-pity. We must shake off temptations to wallow. There is too much important work to do. Life is too precious and important for us to merely survive it. Life is meant to be a battle. A battle for joy. A battle to love the Lord and neighbor. A battle to remain vital.

These are words of confrontation. This parable is meant to confront us. All of us. How will we cope with living with the in-between time while we await the second coming of Jesus?

Many of us are tempted to bury the talent God has given to us. We do this in a few ways.

One way we bury our talent is that we set our sights low. We just make it our goal to survive. I mentioned this already, but let me say a bit more. We bury our talent by setting our sights very low. “Keep your nose down, hide over here. Don’t evangelize. Don’t draw too much attention. Just privately gather and hope that people don’t notice you. Wait for the storm of life to pass.”

Years ago Arryn’s family took me hiking in a canyon in New Mexico. And while we were in this canyon, the family found a cabin their grandmother had made and prepared. This cabin was where she planned to hide out when the end times came. It was her end-times cabin. Now, her grandmother loved the Lord, and I don’t speak ill of her, but this plan, was for them to go into the middle of the wilderness and live in a cabin while the world burns down waiting for the end to come. Again, I know this sound hypercritical, and I don’t mean it to be. But this is an excellent picture of the mindset of some Christians. I think this is a “burying the Lord’s talents” scenario.

Many of us may not have an end times cabin. But we might also have “lay low and just survive” plan.

And yet we saw this when Israel was living in Babylon, didn’t we? Jeremiah 29 again:

“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce...Seek the welfare of the city to which I am sending you in exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7).

Right? Don’t just survive. Be *useful*. Make things. Make beautiful things. Be creative. Be fruitful. The church – and yes, individual Christians – is called by the Lord to be something more than just a bunch of survivalists.

We are also called to be lights. We’re called to fruitfulness and service. We’re called to care about the city where the Lord has sent us. Simply by being lights where we are, we are shaping and blessing and changing the place where we live.

Just as an example, I don't even need to argue this: this neighborhood would be a very different place if there was a weed shop here instead of a church and school. Right? Don't you think that's true? By being here and being faithful, we do make a difference like a city on a hill. By testifying to the gospel and proclaiming the message of Jesus, the light of the gospel is shining from this place. That's the call: We are to be in motion and not sitting inert waiting for the end to come and wash over us like a tsunami.

But that is one way many Christians live: bury the talent by just planning to survive.

Another way that we bury our talent is that we live like Jonah in the in-between time. You remember how reluctant Jonah was to preach to his great enemies in the people of Nineveh. We all know the story of Jonah, I think. But do you remember that ending? After Jonah reluctantly preaches to the city, and the people repent, Jonah goes and sits on a hill overlooking the city, hoping he still might see the fire and destruction rain down on it. He hopes that their repentance won't be accepted, and God will bring the pain.

I think Christians may be tempted to be like Jonah. Jonah had become such an escapist that he would rather have this whole city of people wiped out than see them live. He grew bitter and learned to hate his neighbors. He despised the people instead of loving them. Is that how God intends us to live? You know it isn't.

Remember the last verse of the book of Jonah. It's God asking Jonah a rhetorical question, and it's a gut-punch to Jonah where God says, "Should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?" (4:11).

God asks him a moral "ought" question. God says, "What do you, human, say that I (God) ought to do and be like?" "Ought I to be different than this?" Think about how crazy it is. Jonah is thinking and even saying, "I wish you weren't merciful." Really Jonah is thinking fundamentally, "I wish I was God. And if I was, I would flatten this place."

We may be like Jonah, and think that we are holier than God. “God, it’s time. Strike them down. Bring down the fire. Start over. Spare me, of course, please.”

What will the in-between time be like while we await his return. If our hope and prayer is, “God I want you to show your wrath to these people,” then we need to go back to the Scriptures and see the compassion of God again, because we live and move in it. When we do this we’re dictating to him that we wish he was different. And we need to look at our own hearts and remember that by nature, apart from God’s kindness, we belong more to this corrupt earthly city than we do to the heavenly one.

Many Christians today, as they think of the way the world is turning, have a very reflexive sense that we need to protect ourselves. “There are fewer Christians. We’re out numbered. We’re becoming powerless.” They think of circling the wagons, battening down the hatches, getting into the shelter, protecting themselves. We think persecution is coming. Maybe it is. Maybe it isn’t. God knows. But we’re paranoid about it.

These parables ask us to reflect: how will we live? How will we wait? How will we use the time that has been given to us? Will we bury our talents, and then at the end when he returns say, “See? We made it! We survived! We have nothing but ourselves to show for it, but we’re alive!” That’s the man who buried the one talent. “You came back and here we are!” But you see what happens here: in the end the one talent Christian becomes a no talent Christian.

Let me suggest this: instead of burying our talent and making *survival* the goal, we lift our eyes higher. Let’s use what we have. Let’s share what we have. Instead of sitting on the hill and waiting for the fire to come down from heaven, we love this world that we’ve been called to. Instead of engaging in escapism, we live in this place, and we live faithfully, and we remember that God has us. He will protect us while we live as his people. And that protection might not look like wealth and worldly expansion and power and politics and success. That protection might be more modest and less triumphal. Less power, and more plodding. But that’s okay. It’s the way the Lord has chosen to work!

Let's abandon plans for mere survival. God is with us. God will work through us. Don't just aim at survival. That's burying the one talent. Jesus hates that plan. He told a parable condemning it as a terrible and unfaithful idea.

Christian – Church: you were made for more than just to survive. You aren't in charge of making that happen anyway. Christ has already promised that of all those given to him by the Father that he would lose nothing. Paul says, we can be persecuted, or struck down, but we can never be destroyed. Your survival is already guaranteed.

Let's pray.