

Matthew 25:1-13

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Today's lesson is on preparedness and the consequences of not being ready, lack of preparedness. Matthew chapter 25 is one of my personal favorites. After Jesus had his last controversies with the religious leaders he takes his disciples to the Olive Garden and talks about the end of the age. The parable of Jesus is a lesson to original audience but it is also applicable to us today. These are hard lessons to understand because they relate to a realm of which we have no frame of reference to relate to. So, he puts in perspective that which is unknown to us in a realistic way that we can relate to.

Jesus used an example of ten bridesmaids that are responsible for greeting the groom when he arrives. Five of them are smart, they are prepared and have brought with them some extra oil. Five of them are foolish, they did not prepare for anything unexpected. The Groom is late and they all fall asleep. Finally around midnight the groom approaches. The foolish beg for oil from the wise but the prepared cannot share any or they will run out. The foolish have no choice but to go out and try to purchase some oil. While they are gone the groom shows up and the five that were prepared go in with the groom. The door is shut. The foolish make their way back to the party but they are too late.

It is time to get serious. Actually it is past time to get serious. The scripture lesson today is very serious. Jesus response to the foolish demonstrates just how serious it is "I do not know you." The disciples have to be ready for his departure there simply is no more time left to teach them. Jesus has given many lessons to his disciples but now the environment has changed there is a high degree of seriousness.

I will put the seriousness of the occasion and the contrasting attitudes in perspective. I have been dieting throughout many of my adult years. But it has always been a struggle. I have tried different things but the truth is that I lack discipline and motivation. The reason is that the pleasure of food is a stronger force than the desire to be thinner. A few years ago my family physician said that I was pre-diabetic. I didn't worry about it and honestly didn't think that much about it. I cut back on some of the sweets but that was virtually the only change that I made. Sometime later the doctor told me that I had diabetes and prescribed a medication. On the next visit he increased the medication to the maximum dose allowed. Then he prescribed another medication. My last visit with the doctor he said "your sugar levels are classified as out of control." This changed me. I suddenly (actually it was instantly) had a new attitude with a

mission and a sense of purpose. What changed was the degree of seriousness. Out of control sugar diabetes is blindness, loss of limbs, kidney failure, dialysis, and death. This is serious; deadly serious. I got a test kit, started testing my sugar levels daily. I cut my carbs down to one quarter of the daily average diet and got the numbers in line with where they need to be.

The situation that Jesus is in with his disciples is very serious; very urgent. Jesus is out of time. He is at the end of disciple training. He has to leave. Whether or not his disciples are ready, they need to graduate.

What do we know about heaven? If we took a survey, passed out pads of paper and pens we would all write down different answers. We know virtually nothing of heaven...only what we can imagine. In Matthew chapter 25 Jesus paints a picture with three major lessons; the parable of ten bridesmaids, the parable of talents, and the separation of the sheep and the goats. Each lesson is well known. Today's Scripture the parable of the ten bridesmaids the groom is Jesus. He is the reason for everything that is happening. He is the reason the ten bridesmaids are needed. He is the reason the lamps are needed. It is his party. The bridesmaids represent the audience. Their responsibility (calling) is significant. They are charged to provide the light until the groom arrives. I want to make sure we get this point. The responsibility of the audience is to provide the light until the groom arrives. The wise are ready. They don't just think they are ready, they are physically ready for the arrival of the groom. They are prepared. They are able to complete their mission. The unprepared, which are harshly labeled as foolish, are stuck. They are not ready, they have run out of time, it's too late to get ready. One key point I within all of this is that preparedness is not transferable.

The problem is not the delay of the groom. In the dynamics of the equation, the delay of the groom is not a variable. The difference is in the bridesmaids. There is a valuable lesson in here. They thought they were ready. They thought they were right. They realized they were wrong when it was too late. Take time to reflect on this. All of the people there know who the groom is. All of the people there think they are ready. All of the people there know the Lord is coming. All of the people there think they are safe. But of all the confessed believers' only half are actually ready. Half do not provide the light for the Lord. They start off providing the light but they have stopped providing the light. Our responsibility is to provide the light until the groom arrives. We are not the light; Jesus is the light. We are to provide the light; show the light to the world.

The Scripture speaks to us today. The charge of bridesmaids is to provide the light. The bridesmaids represent the audience. We are the audience today. The word was spoken by Jesus to the disciples. They are the original audience. But that information was written down and passed through the generations. We are the audience and we are charged with providing the light until Jesus arrives. Most think they are ready. But the hard words from Jesus are "I do not know you." This makes the assumption too risky because they thought they were ready but when the time came it was too late to realize they were not ready. They stopped shining the light. That's what this Scripture is all about. All believed and all thought they were ready. Take a look around you and you will see the reality of the Scripture today. The absent majority are confessed believers that think they are ready but in reality they have stopped shining the light. When the time comes, you have to be ready. You can hear "well done good and faithful servant" or "I do not know you."