

Be ready: Be Wise

Matthew 25:1-13

Introduction

To understand **Matthew 25**, we must realize its connection with **chapter 24**. These two chapters make up what's called the OLIVET DISCOURSE because Jesus is privately talking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, answering two questions they had at the beginning of **chapter 24**. These questions are, "*When will these things be?*" referring to the destruction of the temple and, "*What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?*" (v. 3). In **chapter 24**, Jesus talks about things leading up to the end – wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, tribulation, and persecution of the church. He concludes by saying, "*Concerning that day or the hour no one knows*" (v. 36) and "*be ready*" (v. 44). It's not about signs and knowing when things are going to happen but being ready for them whenever they do. That's what **chapter 25** is all about—being ready.

Wisdom and Folly

Proverbs 9:10 says, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* **Proverbs 1:7** says, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* The difference between being wise and being foolish is the same as the difference between the moral man and the ethical man. The ethical man **knows** what is right; the moral man **does** what is right. The beginning of this wisdom is the fear of the Lord. To put it in terms of the **Catechism**, the First Commandment means that *we should fear, love and trust in God above all things*. Every other commandment is how our actions are motivated by our fear and love of God.

The Virgins Compared

The wisdom of the wise virgins was that they were prepared in case the bridegroom delayed his coming for whatever reason. In Sunday School, I was told that in this story the foolish virgins were concerned with their make-up and looking good for the occasion and so were unprepared. While Jesus doesn't say this, the foolish virgins not being prepared with extra oil meant that they were focused on the present and not on the possibilities of the future. We prepare for our retirement. We prepare for vacations. We prepare for parties. But can we prepare for the coming of Jesus?

The Oil—Faith

To understand this, we look to the way the wise were prepared and the foolish were unprepared. It was the oil. When the oil of the wise virgins burned up, they had extra in their flasks. When the oil of the foolish virgins burned up, they had nothing. Oil is fuel. It is faith, the fuel of our lives. What causes our faith to burn up? How can we have "extra" faith? Every day, our faith is burned up by fighting against the attacks of the devil, the world, and our fallen flesh. We replenish our faith by the **WORD** and **SACRAMENTS**. God instills and strengthens our faith through the reading and preaching of His **WORD**. He instills faith at **BAPTISM** and strengthens it through the **LORD'S SUPPER**. One who deprives himself/herself of Word and Sacrament doesn't get their faith strengthened. I've heard it put this way: this person is like a hunk of ice that breaks away from the iceberg and, being lighter, is carried away by the current of the ocean. This causes him to melt and become nothing.

Seeking Faith in Wrong Places

Some, like the foolish virgins, try to get faith from other people, as they ask to “borrow” oil from the wise. They try to let others believe for them, to get in on the coattails of others. Politicians may win elections this way, but faith is a personal commodity. That’s why the Creeds say, “I believe” and not “we believe.” When the virgins go out to buy oil, they represent those who try to get faith from other sources, from other gods. They say that it doesn’t matter who you believe in as long as your faith is sincere. But these virgins miss the bridegroom.

Being Prepared

Notice, it’s not about “getting” ready. We can’t “get” ready. It’s about “being” ready. As I said before, we have been given faith at Baptism. Half-jokingly, I think, Martin Luther is said to have commented that he didn’t understand why God doesn’t take us immediately after our Baptism and spare us the suffering of this world. The point is that we **are** ready. But to **be** ready whenever He comes means to **BE WISE** and **keep** the faith. Don’t squander it; don’t take it for granted; and don’t give it up. Don’t be so focused on the present that you are unprepared for the future. Stay connected to the iceberg through the **WORD** and **SACRAMENT**. **BE READY: BE WISE.**

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
