

“Ready or Not...” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 24 November 12, 2023

- I. **Matthew 25:1-13** – The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
- II. **We live in a distracted society...**
 - a. We just spent a few weeks with the grandkids, and it’s unbelievable how parents function at all – the distractions are constant!
 - b. If it’s not children, most everyone is distracted by their cell phones.
 - i. I’m sure you’ve seen people walk into water fountains or almost get hit by cars because they were looking at their cell phone rather than watching what was around them.
 - c. Between the internal and external distractions, we just don’t pay attention.
 - i. A while back, researchers studied something called “inattentive blindness”... and according to the study, inattentive blindness occurs when “people fail to become aware of objects unrelated to their current task,” even when those objects are “interesting or surprising.”
 - ii. So, the researchers decided to clip money on a tree and then observe the reactions of people walking by.
 1. The branch of the tree with the money on it was bent so that it hung right in the path at head height.
 2. Most of the people practically bonked their head on the money.
 - iii. Here are the results: overall, 396 people were observed walking down the path.
 1. Only 12 people failed to see and avoid the tree, but most people failed to see the money in the tree... especially those who had cell phones in hand – 94% missed the money.
 2. The authors ended the study with a rather obvious but important conclusion: “Becoming aware of an object is generally assumed to require focused attention.”¹
 - d. With focus in mind, I want to show an old video.
 - i. To set it up, they want you to focus in and count the basketball passes between people in white jerseys. (play video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-Dg-06nrnc>)
 - ii. I know that some of you have seen this video before, but it is amazing what we miss when we are focused on other things.
 - iii. Something can be right before our eyes, and we might be too distracted to see it.
 - e. The world is full of distractions that would take our focus off Jesus Christ and God’s will for our lives... but more than that, distractions take away from our readiness for Him to return in glory.
- III. **Jesus uses the example of a wedding in His parable today.**

- a. The idea of God being the Bridegroom and the Church as His bride is a consistent theme throughout the Bible.
 - i. For example, in Ezekiel 16, the LORD describes Israel as a bride whom He took as is His own, but she was unfaithful to Him.
 - ii. Also Paul tells us in Ephesians 5, ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:31-32)
- b. Weddings were an important part of the culture in Jesus’ day, and the people hearing this parable would understand the customs... just like we have certain customs for our weddings.
 - i. Typically, the wedding parties for the groom and bride were at their respective houses.
 - ii. The groom would leave his home, usually at night, and arrive at the bride’s home where the marriage ceremony would take place.
 - iii. After the ceremony, the whole group would go to the groom’s house to have a feast and celebration.
- c. To begin, Jesus says that, “the kingdom of heaven will be like...” to give the sense that God does things a certain way.
 - i. But don’t be confused and think it means only in the future... because what Jesus wants us to know is that the reign of God came with HIS presence – therefore, what we are doing right now with Jesus in our lives has a definite impact on the Day of His return.
- d. In this parable, Jesus sets the scene with the bride’s party waiting for the groom to come to the house for the ceremony.
 - i. The job of these bridesmaids is to honor the bridegroom with light and a welcome whenever he arrives.
 - ii. Half of the girls came with extra oil for their lamps, while half had only what they had inside their lamps.
 - iii. The bridegroom was delayed, so the girls fell asleep as they waited... until someone yells that the bridegroom is coming!
 - iv. After burning all that extra time, the unprepared bridesmaids could not honor the groom with their lights – so they were forced to go get more oil.
 - v. It seems they missed the wedding ceremony, and wanted to enter the banquet, but were told it’s too late.

IV. **A couple of big questions arise from this parable as it relates to us.**

- a. For example, what is this oil and how do we have enough?
 - i. It’s not exactly clear what this oil is, at least from Jesus telling us like He explains other parables to the disciples.
 - ii. Instead, we are left to consider what the oil does – it honors the bridegroom – and lights up His presence.

- iii. My old professor from the seminary, Dr. Jeff Gibbs explains, “the oil in the parable represents whatever it takes for you to be ready to honor the Bridegroom when he comes again in glory...this parable teaches us to desire these things.”²
 - 1. In other words, all the gifts that God gives us to walk in faith can be the oil that keeps us ready for the coming of our Savior.
 - 2. God helps us by the power of the Holy Spirit to have courage, patience, steadfastness, humility, and repentance to name a few.
 - 3. The Holy Spirit keeps calling us to worship, the study of God’s Word, staying connected with others in the Body of Christ, and taking in God’s grace found in the Word and Sacraments.
 - 4. All of these and many more things could be the oil that keeps us ready and looking forward to our glory.
- b. However, today we are often too distracted to focus on the most important things in God’s kingdom.
 - i. The truth is right in front of us, and we keep looking down at our cell phones and missing the money that bounces off our heads... or we see things we think are important but miss the Jesus right in our midst.
 - ii. In time, the oil runs dry... and in some cases, people completely walk away from the Lord because other things have taken precedence... no more faith, just living without God and rejected from the banquet.
- c. No, we should not fear losing our salvation over skipping church for a while or not studying our Bible enough – but Jesus wants us to focus in on the important things – especially honoring Him and looking toward His eventual return.

V. **Are you ready? Ready or not... He will come again.**

- a. Jesus came the first time to give us all the gift of forgiveness – He died on the cross to overcome all the idols and distractions that might separate us – and as He rose up from the grave, we have living proof that God’s promises are true.
- b. Not only that, but Jesus promises to return in glory to make all things new – our bodies, the world, and even heaven will all be made new... and we will dwell with our God forever. (Revelation 21:1-4)
- c. Jesus gives us the greatest gift of all – a faith and trust to follow Him through all the days of our life – and into eternity.
- d. Yes, the world might distract us from God’s blessings that keep our lamps full, but the Holy Spirit is working even harder to keep our focus on Jesus.
 - i. Our God will return in glory – and we are prepared and ready to welcome the Bridegroom – our Savior Jesus Christ whenever He comes. Amen.

¹ Source: Ira E Hyman, "Failure to see money on a tree," *Frontiers in Psychology* (4-23-14); Melissa Dahl, "People on Their Phones Don't Notice Free Cash," *Science of Us* (6-18-14)

² Gibbs, J. A. (2018). *Matthew 21:1–28:20* (C. P. Giese, Ed.; p. 1323). Concordia Publishing House