

Stories with a Purpose:

The Parables of Jesus

"The Ten Virgins"

Mt. 25:1-13

--NEFC 4/7/19;

In case you didn't have enough to worry about,

there's a new mental health syndrome breaking out all over.

It's called FOMO: F-O-M-O.

That stands for the "Fear of Missing Out."¹

You hear about FOMO a lot these days.

In fact, the word was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013.

Miriam Webster defines FOMO

as the fear of not being included in something

(such as an interesting or enjoyable activity)

that others are experiencing.

It's "the uneasy and sometimes all-consuming feeling that you're missing out –

that your peers are doing, in the know about, or in possession of

more or something better than you".

In one study, nearly three quarters of young adults

reported they experience the phenomenon.

As you might imagine,

¹ <https://psychcentral.com/blog/fear-of-missing-out/>

FOMO is especially associated with social media engagement.
 According to an [article](#) in *The New York Times*,
 one of the main culprits is “Instagram Envy.”
 That article refers to
 “[Anne Sage](#), 31, a freelance writer and [blogger](#) in Los Angeles,
 who follows 1,009 people on Instagram,
 and therefore has 1,009 opportunities to feel she’s missing out
 on the party on any given weekend.
 ‘It’s incredibly hurtful to find out via social media
 that your friends or colleagues are gathering for something
 that you’ve been left out of,’ Ms. Sage said.
 ‘And of course, these events always flood your feed simultaneously,
 with everyone sharing photos and hashtags at once,
 so it’s like pouring salt on the wound.’”²

FOMO leads people to check social media
 right after they wake up,
 right before they go to sleep,
 and every ten minutes or so in between.

Benjamin Voyer from the Institute of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics
 explains:

‘Fear of missing out is first and foremost a fear of **social exclusion**.’
 It’s driven by the dreadful thought that you might be left out in the cold,

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/fashion/instagram.html>

stuck on the outside looking in,
isolated and alone. /

I think there is often something very shallow about this FOMO phenomenon.

Social media presents a fantasy world.

It's an unrealistic highlight reel of other people's lives,
that can easy make our own seem rather dull and boring.

But on the other hand, there is something deep in our souls

that this FOMO feeling taps into.

We crave relationships,

we are social creatures,

we created in the image of a very personal God.

We naturally fear social exclusion—not being a part of the pack.

Loneliness is one of the main causes of depression.

And the Bible speaks of one event that we should all fear missing out on—

it's not just the social event of the year or of the decade—

it's the event of the ages—more precisely of the age to come.

It's pictured in the Bible as a great feast—

a magnificent wedding banquet,

full of joy and celebration.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of it this way--

“On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare

a feast of rich food for all peoples,

a banquet of aged wine—

the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy

the shroud that enfolds all peoples,

the sheet that covers all nations;

he will swallow up death forever” (25:6-8).

Matt. 22:2 Jesus uses this same image—

“The kingdom of heaven is like a king

who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”

And the last book of the Bible,

speaks of that glorious day

when Jesus Christ returns to this world in glory

in the same way--

Rev. 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

The messianic wedding banquet—

the time when the Lord will come to set all things right in this fallen world.

the time of great celebration when he will gather his people

in great joy and praise.

That is an event that we don't want to miss!

So FOMO--the fear of missing out on this event is good thing—

it is a good thing if it encourages us to listen to Jesus—

who alone can overcome that fear
by showing us the way to share in this joyous celebration.

Turn back with me Mt. 25:1-13—

as we conclude our series on the parables of Jesus
by looking at the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

The story pictures ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom,
and it's based on the marriage customs of Jesus' day --
for normally, after the formal engagement,
the prospective groom would go away to establish a home for his bride.
At some later date he would return to her parents' house
where the bride would be attended to by her unmarried friends--
that is, the virgins in the story --
who would correspond in some ways
to bridesmaids in our weddings.

After the bridegroom met the bride, together with her attendants,
they would go to his house for a week-long wedding celebration.

Coming at the end of his teaching about his future return,
Jesus uses this story to answer a central question--
Who will be welcomed into this great wedding celebration?
Who will be included in this magnificent messianic feast?

As we look at the story I want to highlight three simple observations

which help us to answer that question
and then I will address three points of application to our lives.

Mt. 25:1--

"At that time--

[that is, at the time when the Son of man comes in glory
to gather his people]

**At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins
who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."**

**I. Notice, first, that it is clear that both the wise and the foolish virgins
were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive.**

Clearly, they all hoped to share in the wedding banquet.

They all thought they were ready

and would be included in the festivities when the bridegroom arrived.

And only at the end does the wisdom of the one group

and the foolishness of the other

become evident.

Only then is it clear which ones will be received by the bridegroom

and which ones will not.

The lesson is simple--

knowing that Christ is returning

or even hoping to be received by him when he does come

is not enough.

Something more is required.

As Jesus tells it, this story is not about arrogant sinners--
 the foolish virgins don't represent those
 who are vehemently anti-Christian.

No, they are obviously sympathetic to the Christian faith--
 they may be church-goers,
 and they may know all about Christian things.

They may look just like Christians—
 but they're not.

They may even think they're Christians—
 but they're not.

Only when it's too late, does their foolishness reveal itself.

Jesus begins with this warning--

Both the wise and the foolish virgins
 were waiting for the bridegroom to come,
 but that was not enough.

II. Second, notice that

For all, the time at which the bridegroom came was unexpected.

Look at v. 5-- "They all became drowsy and fell asleep."

If they had known when he was coming,
 surely, they would have been awake,

but Jesus teaches us that when it comes to his return

such knowledge is not important.

In fact, elsewhere he makes it quite clear that such knowledge is impossible.

I think of Jesus' words in Mt. 24:36—

**"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father."**

We mustn't be led astray.

Jesus makes it quite clear that he will come at a time

when his people do not expect him (24:44).

He hasn't given his followers some secret insight into this question.

No one knows,

and you know what?--- it doesn't matter,

for such knowledge is of no consequence

when it comes to determining whom Jesus will call his own

when he returns.

So, all the virgins were waiting for the bridegroom.

None of them knew when he was coming--

what was it, then, that separated the foolish from the wise? --

Look at vv. 6-12—

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom!

Come out to meet him!'

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish ones said to the wise,

‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you.

Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived.

The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet.

And the door was shut.”

III. The third thing I want you to notice about the story is this:

Only those who were ready,

only those whose lamps were burning when the bridegroom arrived,

shared in the wedding banquet.

The others would be missing out.

With this we come to heart of the story--

the primary truth this parable is intended to teach.

Jesus sums it up in v. 13—

"Keep watch [be ready], because you do not know the day or the hour."

Jesus is calling each one of us who would claim to belong to Christ

to be continually and constantly faithful until he returns.

"Keep watch [be ready], because you do not know the day or the hour."

Whether it's the time when Christ comes again in glory,

or when we face him at our time of our own death—

we must be ready.

Our lamps must be burning—

our light must be shining?

What could that mean?

I think it means that we must exhibit a living faith.

Isn't that what he wants from us?—

a dependence on him,

a trust in him,

an abiding allegiance to him that results in a new kind of living—

a life of spiritual fruit.

Doesn't Jesus ask in Luke 18,

“when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:8).

With that in mind, let's consider three points of application that emerge here.

1) First, when it comes to our standing before God--

we must not depend on the faith of others.

Now let me say that in interpreting parables you have to be careful

not to find meaning where there is none--

not every little detail of the story

has to carry some great theological truth.

But I think a fair reading of the story assures us that

in not offering to share their oil with the others,

the wise virgins aren't being stingy--

they are illustrating a point.

The oil that keeps the lamps burning (that is, living faith) is not transferable.

Your parents may be Christians,

and you may have grown up in a Christian home.

Your husband or wife may be a Christian,

or you may attend a very good church that is on fire for Christ--

but is your lamp burning?

for if your lamp is not burning when he comes—

(or when you come before him)

Jesus will not recognize you.

Have you said Yes to Christ in your life?

Have you received the Lord Jesus as your own Savior?

Is it your heart's desire to please him—

to see his face and to be received by him?

This is what does it,

this is what it takes—a living faith.

That's all.

But without that, don't expect to be welcomed into the wedding banquet.

We must not depend on the faith of others.

2) Second, the parable teaches us that

we must not be complacent about our faith.

Remember that the lamps of all ten virgins were burning at one time.

When Christ returns the question will not be

were you ever faithful at some time in the past,

but are you faithful now.

Jesus told his disciples that before he returns,

the love of many will grow cold,

but the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. (24:13)

You may have been baptized, or confirmed,

you may have prayed a prayer, or walked an aisle,

you may have been a Bible study leader,

a Sunday School teacher, or even a church Elder--

but what are you doing now?

The fault of the foolish virgins is not wickedness,

but lukewarm-ness.

It's not atheism,

but apathy-ism.

They took their participation in the banquet for granted,

and as a result, they made no preparations.

Their hope was real,

but foolish,

and it did not influence their conduct.

We mustn't be complacent.

So what are you doing to keep your lamp burning?

You are here today, and that's good—

you are hearing the word of God preached,
 you've come to have your soul nourished at this communion table—
 that's good.

But there are other means of restocking the oil—

reading of the Bible, the word of God-- that increases our faith.
 communicating our hearts to God in prayer,
 and listening for that quiet voice speaking to us.

Serving others as a means of serving Christ,
 and actively obeying his commands in our dealing with other people.

These are the ways we can keep the flame of faith alive,
 so that you will be ready when he comes
 and not miss out on that great gathering.

3) Finally, we must not procrastinate in our response to God.

We procrastinate all the time, don't we--

tomorrow, tomorrow, I'll get around to it tomorrow...

but when it comes to our response to God, we put it off at our own peril.

We do not know the day or the hour when our time will come--

and when it comes, it will be too late for those caught unprepared.

What a comfort it was just last Sunday evening
 at the bedside of Susan's mother in her final hours,
 knowing that she was ready—
 her lamp was burning brightly.
 Is yours?

In vv. 11, 12, we read that later the foolish virgins finally came to that closed door –
 and they cry out, “**Lord, Lord, they said, ‘open the door for us!’**”

But what does the bridegroom say?--

"Oh well, I was hoping you might come back.

Come on in. Better late than never.”

We might expect that;

That's what we might have said.

But No, as Jesus tells the story,

the door was shut

and it would not be opened again.

The bridegroom says to them,

‘Truly I tell you, I don't know you.’

These are ominous words.

There is no second chance.

It's all over--

"I don't know you."

Could you imagine hearing those words?

C. S. Lewis makes the interesting observation

that the Apostle Paul promises those who love God,
not, as we would expect, that they will know God,

but instead that they will be known by him (1 Cor. 8:3; cf. Gal. 4:9).

“It is a strange promise,” Lewis writes.

“Does not God know all things at all times?

How could he say “I never knew you. Depart from Me.”

“In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings,

we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere

and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all.

We can be left utterly and absolutely outside –

repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored.”

Yes, that fear of being left out ought to be very real to us all.

Left out forever—

in that darkness which no light can ever penetrate,

experiencing an unrelenting loneliness.

“We can be left utterly and absolutely outside –

repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored.”

“On the other hand,” Lewis writes,

“we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged.

We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities.”³

We must not say, “I’ll attend to it tomorrow.”

³ from “The Weight of Glory.”

for tomorrow may never come,
 And if it does, the Spirit of God who is at work in your heart today
 may have moved on, and you may find yourself trapped
 in a lethargic apathy from which you may never escape.

Now is the time of God's favor.

Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

We must never presume upon the grace of God.

There were two criminals who were crucified alongside Jesus—
 One turned to Jesus in faith and was promised paradise—
 to remind us that we may always have hope.
 The other was hardened in his unbelief—
 to remind us that we must never be presumptuous.

We must never put Jesus off.

If he is calling your name today,
 if he is inviting you into his wedding feast,
 you better respond,
 for we do not know the day or the hour. /

The admonition that comes to us all this morning is very simple--

"Keep watch"

"be alert"

"be vigilant"

"be faithful".

We are to maintain a living hope,
a living faith,
a living relationship with Jesus Christ
and we will know that they are alive
by the impact they have on the way we live.

Whether you have been a Christian for 30 years
or you are considering Jesus Christ for the first time this morning
His call to you is this--
"Follow me."

"Hear my words and act upon them
and you will be like a wise man who builds his house upon the rock—
the rains will come down, the streams will rise
and the winds will beat against that house
but it will not fall for it is built upon the rock."

A day of reckoning is coming--
Is your lamp burning for Jesus Christ?
Do you know Jesus Christ?
Or, better, are you known by him?

Will he welcome you into his wedding feast?
May none of us miss out!

In preparation for this communion meal,

let's pray as our servers come forward

Communion—

This table is for those who are actively waiting for their Savior,
for those who want to be faithful when he comes.

It's for those who want to be followers of Christ,
and are not afraid to profess that allegiance to their Savior—
which is what baptism is about.

We are not perfect,
we are not righteous in ourselves—
not at all—we know ourselves to be without hope
if we appear before the throne of God's judgment alone.

Our hope is in Christ,
we want to be joined to him—
He says come, take and eat, take and drink—
and so in faith and obedience we do—
as sinners in need of a Savior.

This is the Lord's Table—
which he offers to all who come to him in faith.

Here is a pointer that great banquet to come.

Stories with a Purpose:

The Parables of Jesus

April 7, 2019

"The Ten Virgins"

Mt. 25:1-13

"Are you ready?" Those words suggest a sense of urgency. Which is just what Jesus wants us to feel when we think of how we ought to live. In this parable, Jesus uses the uncertainty of a returning bridegroom to point us to the need to be ready for that critical moment when we must give an account.

Three Observations:

I. Both the wise and the foolish virgins

were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive.

II. For all, the time at which the bridegroom came

was unexpected

III. Only those who were ready,

only those whose lamps were burning

when the bridegroom arrived

shared in the wedding banquet.

Three Applications:

1) When it comes to our standing before God,
we must not depend on the faith of others.

2) We must not be complacent about our faith.

3) We must not procrastinate in our response to God.

"Now is the time of God's favor.

Today is the day of salvation" --2 Cor. 6:2

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April 7, 2019

"The Ten Virgins"

Mt. 25:1-13

- What was Jesus' central purpose in telling this story? What does the "oil" signify that is so important to our final destiny? What is so foolish about the foolish virgins?
- What significance do you see in the unwillingness of the wise virgins to share their oil with the foolish ones? What is it that can't be shared? How people depend on the faith of other people?
- Reflect for a moment on the terror those words of the Bridegroom to the foolish virgins: "I don't know you." What does it mean to be "known" by the Lord?
- How do you maintain a readiness for the coming of the Bridegroom? How do you keep your lamp burning?
- What kinds of "foolishness" are you prone to?
- How does this parable convict you and point you to Christ?

Preaching outline—

Teaching--tests

Judgment—what matters?

Does Jesus claim you as one of his own?

Mt. 25:1-13

**I. v. 1-- Both the wise and the foolish virgins
were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive--**

II. Second, notice that

**For all, the time at which the bridegroom came
was unexpected**

v. 5—

Mt. 24:36

what was it, then, that separated the foolish from the wise?--

vv. 6-12

**III. Only those who were ready,
only those whose lamps were burning
when the bridegroom arrived
shared in the wedding banquet.**

Application—

**I) when it comes to our standing before God--
we must not depend on the faith of others—**

2) we must not be complacent about our faith.

Remember that the lamps of all ten virgins were burning at one time

he who perseveres to the end will be saved. (24:13)

3) Finally, we must not procrastinate in our response to God.

vv. 11,12—later they come to the door

Now is the time of God's favor.

Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)