

## **Matthew 24:42 – 25:46 sermon Tregear 19.12.2021 – Coming – ready or not!**

We wait expectantly for Christmas. We look forward to Christmas Day. Even if we see it as a busy, crazy period of activity and celebrating – it is a period of celebrating, celebrating the greatest gift ever – God himself come into the world as a baby.

In the same way let us wait expectantly for Jesus and his second coming. Ready and waiting. Jesus has been preaching for three years now, calling people to come into his kingdom. He's said it won't be easy; he's said that the lifestyle is different from those who reject God. But he continues to call, "Follow me" he says. And now as he is about to go to the cross he is warning. Last week we heard Don't follow the Pharisees, they're hypocrites – they preach one thing and do another. And in this last chapter before he is to be captured, put on trial and crucified there are these five parables or truths about being ready – "Keep watch" (v.42); "Be ready" (v.44, 24:13). I've called you to come; now be ready. In all of these 5 parables if you are not ready you will be left outside the kingdom. There will be a judgement and you won't escape it. In the 2 parables that Glen read what happens

- The ten virgins, young women, with their lamps – 5 are prepared and 5 are not. All fall asleep; bridegroom comes very late. Foolish women ask for oil; they have to go to the shops. While they're away everyone goes in to the house and the foolish girls are not allowed in. They've missed out because they were not ready.
- Master goes on journey; leaves various amounts of money with 3 servants. The first two use the money wisely; the 3<sup>rd</sup> hides his money. Master returns after long time. the first two get congratulated; the last one loses even the little he had & is thrown out.

So what do we learn from these. Matthew's grouped all these words of Jesus for a purpose. There is a similar theme.

In all of these there is an important person the master and the bridegroom – they clearly represent God or Jesus as the Messiah. Here he is come to his people, the Jews. There are

parables of his rejection; the foolish women; the foolish servant – they are not ready; they do not do as they need to or are asked to do.

Wisdom and folly are highlighted in the first parable. But there is also the idea in the 2nd parable that the first 2 servants acted wisely. How do we act wisely? Well, you get yourself ready. So how do you get yourself ready? We'll see in a minute.

There is judgement in all of the parables except the first one which is very short anyway. This ties in with the judgement that we read about last week, the judgement on Israel and its leaders. But it doesn't just apply to Jesus' time – the same principle is there for us today. I think it means, in line with everything else Jesus has been teaching us, that we need to make a decision, a choice. You can't sit on the fence with Jesus. You're either in or you're out. But Jesus graciously warns everyone, including ourselves, be ready.

Have you got the idea. The key thing is to keep watch and be ready – so the key question for us is how to keep ourselves ready.

How do we get ready?

At the end of chapter 24 Jesus says, *If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.* <sup>44</sup> *So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.* – The message - keep watch – how? Be alert for those things that would drag us away from Jesus. Be expectant. Christians are to watch: not like astronomers through a telescope, or guards watching a CCTV screen, but like lovers who can't wait for another glimpse of the beloved, or captives in a labour camp longing for the day that will allow them home. God can guide his followers who are expectant, who are looking to him for wisdom and guidance. They are open to direction, ready for the unexpected. But people who are not expectant are very hard to shift.

The parable of the virgins or young women. The key thought here is **be ready**. Be wise in how you act. Act in a way that would please God. Plan ahead so that you can do those things that really count. The Jews were like the young women, some were ready but many were not. They looked like they were ready, they had their lamps, they had dressed appropriately, but they had no oil. We don't need to try and work out what was the oil or the lamp or any of these objects, the key thing is that they were not prepared. As I think about this, the key thing about being prepared is to enter the kingdom. We need to follow the instructions of the master and come in – how does Jesus put it? Repent. Jesus wants us to recognise that we need a Saviour and we cannot save ourselves. Be ready BY coming into the Kingdom; and remember we need to do it on God's terms. Are you prepared? Are you ready? Have you entered the kingdom? Don't put it off. Tell Jesus you want to follow him.

Note that they all fall asleep, that's ok. We can't be awake every moment of the day and night. But the key is that they have prepared well and they are ready when the bridegroom comes at midnight. Jesus talks about being wise and foolish, a theme which runs throughout the Bible. In Proverbs we see how wisdom and folly works itself out in all areas of our daily lives. Ultimately, the wise person is the person who respects and honours God and the foolish the one who forgets or ignores God. But it's not just knowing what God wants us to do in any and every situation. If the living God might knock at the door at any time, wisdom means being ready at any time. What's more, once Jesus has come, bringing God's kingdom to bear on the world, being wise or being foolish means knowing, or not knowing, what time it is in God's timetable. What does God want us to do right here and now? If we're wise we realise that the world has turned a corner with the coming of Jesus and that we must be ready to give an account of ourselves. The coming of Jesus which we celebrate on Saturday, Christmas Day, is the biggest event in history, the big turn-around day, when God comes into the world to rescue us. So the question for me is if this is true, is every part of my life connected to Jesus coming back.

I have been rebuked as I read this. So often my attitude is, Ok I've done my work. Now it's my time. or ok I've now got a holiday. It's my time. I have this attitude of entitlement. You know, I

deserve this holiday; this time of relaxing. Now holidays are good; they help to recharge the batteries. But I want MY holiday, there I go again, I want THIS holiday time that God has given me to be a time when I build my friendship with God; I've got extra time to enjoy him. I was challenged to think about Jesus' attitude. He was incredibly busy at times, healing, teaching – so many people wanted a piece of him. So at times he withdrew to a lonely place, so he could be with God, his Father.

Remember, there will be times when we will fail. There will be times when we'll go to sleep on the job. Part of being a follower of Jesus is not that we always get everything right but that, like Peter among others, we quickly discover where we are going wrong and take steps to put it right. So yes Jesus welcomes sinners and he does forgive us when we fail. But let's respond to him as he convicts us. I want to fall in love with Jesus more and more so that I do act as his child, not give way to my baser passions.

4<sup>th</sup> parable – responding to the call. The talents represent the Kingdom of God offered as a gift to men and women. This becomes a powerful work in their lives. It shows that the call into the kingdom of God demands response and responsible service. The third man represents those who are hearers of the word but not doers.

There is a sense in which this parable tells us that there will be an accounting for our actions. It seems like a final examination, an HSC exam about how we've used the gifts of what God has given us. The third man who hid his talents seems like the Jewish leaders who had been given the law of Moses and the Temple and God's presence, and they had buried them in the ground. They had not been a light to the world – they had been worthless slaves. The first two seem to represent those who did respond positively to Jesus, who had entered the Kingdom. In one sense everything we have, all that we receive, new life, forgiveness etc, is by grace.

There is no sense in the whole of the Bible that we get what we deserve as this parable might suggest. We all deserve judgement and death. But this final picture of the third servant being thrown into the outer darkness reminds me again of the theme throughout the bible that God

takes what we deserve upon himself. In this last piece of teaching the constant theme of people being cast into outer darkness and death, is a reminder that in a couple of days, Jesus himself will walk that road and take on himself the death that we deserved. At this Christmas we welcome and rejoice at Jesus coming, God coming into the world. But we remember that he came to take upon himself the death that we deserved. So much to be thankful for to our amazing God!! Let's be ready, in every sense of the word. Understanding this parable helps us to understand the last parable.

There is one more parable in this chapter. Let me tell you this one. It's not really a parable; it's a picture of Jesus. He has returned and he's sitting on his throne and everyone is there before him. He IS the king. Then he will separate everyone into two groups. It will be like a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats.

<sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> "Then the king will say to the godly people on his right, 'Come, my Father has great blessings for you. The kingdom he promised is now yours. It has been prepared for you since the world was made. <sup>35</sup> It is yours because when I was hungry, you gave me food to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I had no place to stay, you welcomed me into your home. <sup>36</sup> When I was without clothes, you gave me something to wear. When I was sick, you cared for me. When I was in prison, you came to visit me.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the godly people will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food? When did we see you thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you with no place to stay and welcome you into our home? When did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and care for you?'

<sup>40</sup> "Then the king will answer, 'The truth is, anything you did for any of my people here, you also did for me.'

<sup>41</sup> “Then the king will say to the evil people on his left, ‘Get away from me. God has already decided that you will be punished. Go into the fire that burns forever—the fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> You must go away because when I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. <sup>43</sup> When I had no place to stay, you did not welcome me into your home. When I was without clothes, you gave me nothing to wear. When I was sick and in prison, you did not care for me.’

<sup>44</sup> “Then those people will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty? without a place to stay? without clothes or sick or in prison? When did we see any of this and not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “The king will answer, ‘The truth is, anything you refused to do for any of my people here, you refused to do for me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then these evil people will go away to be punished forever. But the godly people will go and enjoy eternal life.”

Our time is up. Let me make 2 comments. Firstly, Jesus is right when he says that when you do anything for any of my people you are doing it for me, or to me. Some people have said Ok, what Jesus is saying is that we need to be loving and so we are saved because of what we do, if we're loving and caring for others. How do we come into God's family? How are we saved? It's not by the things we do. It's because Jesus died on the cross and then we need to trust in what he did and believe that he has saved us by his death.

So what's Jesus mean here then? Faith will show itself in works, and such works are the fruit, the evidence, of a true faith. So the judgment about works is actually a judgment about faith, because the reality of faith is seen in the evidence of the works. The works are the sign, on the outside, of the inner reality of faith. This is why God is so disappointed with Israel: they are not fruitful because they are not believing. If the faith is genuine, works will be there. If they

are not, then the faith is not real. So the works are a part of that judgment. Real sheep love Christ and his flock.

The sheep will come from all nations, some Jews, some Gentiles. It's really significant that the King says, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, **the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**' Did you hear what Jesus said? Clearly, this judgment is not an investigation of the lives of the sheep to see that they have done enough good to earn a place in heaven—quite the reverse. The sheep have merited nothing. They are objects of the Father's favour and grace. In addition, they inherit the kingdom, not as a reward that is earned, but as a gift that is received. Indeed, this kingdom has been prepared for them, Jesus says, before they were ever given life, before the creation of the world. So the choice of them was based on grace before they even existed, before there could even be any sort of merit. Verses 35 and 36 actually explain the reasons for this decision. It is based on their attitude to the king, to Christ himself. The sheep have illustrated their reception of Christ by their actions, just as the goats later on illustrate their rejection of Christ by their lack of action. Notice too that this is apparently a great surprise to the sheep. The righteous answer (37), 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you ...' and so on. Clearly, they were not doing these things hoping to earn eternal life by their good works. The way to be ready for the coming of the king is to be active, showing our love to Christ's brothers, and as his brothers to be proclaiming the message of his kingship by our lives and by our lips. So let's be ready. Come into the Kingdom. Keep our eyes on Jesus. Expect him to lead us, to guide us each day. Love others and tell others about the great King. Let's keep watch.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that even as you were preparing to go to the cross you were so concerned for your people that you kept urging them be ready. Keep watch. Thank you that you have made it possible to come into your kingdom. Holy Spirit, Help us to respond to Jesus' words. And Father, thank you that you chose us and graciously brought us into your family.