

Ready Or Not?

Because of the big snow on Sunday, instead of launching into our new sermon series on “Great Theological Questions,” Jeff led a dialogue sermon on a parable of Jesus found in Matthew 25.

1. Warmup: As you look back across your life, tell us one of your best snow memories.
2. Parables are stories with a spiritual lesson embedded. This was Jesus’ favorite way to teach. In most instances, he didn’t explain his stories. He simply told stories and left it to us to explore the possible meanings. Why do you think Jesus chose to teach in unexplained stories? And what should we learn from that?
3. The parable we’re going to focus on tonight is about an ancient wedding celebration, so it will help to know a little bit about ancient Jewish weddings. In at least some of those weddings, the groom and his entourage would march from his house to the home where the bride was living and where her entourage awaited. Then the bride would be carried back to the groom’s house on a litter, with both entourages marching alongside carrying “lamps,” which were probably more like what we would call torches. Rags would be soaked in olive oil, placed on a stick, then lighted. In the story Jesus tells, the groom and his entourage are unexpectedly delayed. So now, let’s read what happens: Matthew 25:1-13.
4. In both worship services, the first thing people noticed about this parable is that the wise bridesmaids refused to share their olive oil with the foolish ones. At first blush, this seems odd. After all, Jesus was all about sharing and generosity.
 - a. So what should we make of this? Was it wrong for the wise bridesmaids to refuse to share their oil? Why or why not?
 - b. In the Bible, when people are called by God to do something special, they are often anointed with oil, symbolizing the presence and power of God’s Spirit flowing into them. So perhaps Jesus meant the oil to represent the presence of the Spirit within us. With that in mind, Jeff suggested that perhaps Jesus was trying to make the point that we can’t borrow our faith from someone else. Each of us must “own” our own relationship with God. Do you feel you own your faith? When in your life did your faith become your own, instead of something borrowed from others?
5. In verse 13, Jesus hints at a key meaning of his story. He says, “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
 - a. What day or hour do you think he was referring to? What are the possibilities?
 - b. Many believe Jesus was referring primarily to the Second Coming. Many Christians believe the Second Coming will take the form of Jesus’ physically returning to earth in a dramatic appearance at the end of the age. But that’s not

the only view. Some renowned theologians like Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin (to name a few) have understood the Second Coming in a very different way. Some believe the Second Coming will occur gradually, over time, the world becomes better and better until the reign of God breaks out. Yet others believe the Second Coming already occurred in the first century when the church replaced Israel as a focal point for God's work in the world. Which view most resonates with you?

- c. Does a person's view of the Second Coming matter? Why or why not?
 - d. In your view, what does it mean to be awake and ready for Jesus' Second Coming? What does an "awake" person look like?
 - e. What should we learn from the fact that the groom's arrival is delayed?
6. On Sunday we noted that the theme of readiness applies to much more than just the Second Coming. In general, we should live with a constant awareness that we might just encounter the presence of Christ at any moment in any circumstance of life.
- a. Do you feel like you're living with that sense of alert expectation? Why or why not?
 - b. Tell us about a time when God "broke through" in your life. Were you ready? Did you seize the moment?
7. Jesus' parable also makes the emphatic point that doors of opportunity don't stay open forever. Moments come, and moments go. If a moment of great spiritual opportunity appears, but we're not ready to seize it, that opportunity may never recur. Other doors may open, but a door we let close may never re-open. When in your life have you let a great spiritual opportunity get away?
8. On Sunday, several people suggested that the biggest mistake the foolish bridesmaids made was to leave the scene to look for oil. Several people suggested they could have still been part of the wedding party even without torch lights. For example, they could have sang and danced as they marched, even if that meant walking in the shadows. What do you think would have happened if they had tried that?
9. It would be easy to assume that we're completely the group of wise bridesmaids or completely in the group of foolish ones. Truth is, at different times in life, we probably spend time in both camps.
- a. Based on all we've discussed, what does it look like to live as a "wise bridesmaid," and what does it look like to live as a "foolish bridesmaid"?
 - b. At this moment in life, which way do you feel you're living – and why do you say that?