

Stay Ready!
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We are in a sermon series called Signs of the Times. We are teaching on Matthew 24 where Jesus taught about the signs of the end times and what events would take place.

So far, we've looked at those signs which Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24. Immediately after that, Jesus revealed God's prophetic calendar. You find it in Matthew 24:15-35 where Jesus prophesied about events that would happen in the future. Those events are:

- The Rapture of the Church
- The Great Tribulation
- The Second Coming of Jesus Christ
- The Millennium
- The Great White Throne Judgment
- Followed by eternity in either heaven or hell

After speaking on the signs of the times and the last days events – Jesus spoke 5 parables in a row to teach the need for believers to stay ready for His second coming. We're going to look at the first 3 today in my sermon called Stay Ready.

Our text is Matthew 24:42-25:13

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: 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. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 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. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The parable of the thief in the night is very short and it serves to tell us that Jesus will come back when you least expect it – so you need to stay ready to meet Him.

The next four parables tell us what to do to stay ready. They show us four things we should be doing until the second coming of Jesus Christ: worshipping, watching, working and witnessing.

These are four things we do to stay ready to meet Jesus, but also to stay ready to overcome in life. While you are waiting on anything from God. We're going to look at the first two today.

1- While we are waiting on the Lord, we must worship

What do you think of when you think of the word worship? Most people think of singing songs. And worship does include singing songs to the Lord. But it is so much more than that. How we live our entire lives should be an act of worship to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says:

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Glorifying God is not limited to singing songs on Sunday. We are called to glorify God in whatever we do, including our work. Some people think that we glorify God by doing things that are considered spiritual – like going to church, praying, and witnessing. But they don't see how they can glorify God at work.

Listen - All of life is holy and should be lived unto God. We should go to work for the same reason we go to church: to glorify God. Yes, you need to come to church and worship with other believers in the manifest presence of God. But you need the manifest presence of God in your everyday life, in your home and in your workplace!

You can't stay ready for the Lord if you don't know how to get into His presence in your daily life! You need the Lord in order to stay ready to meet the Lord!

In the parable of the faithful servant, Jesus said that faithful servants will be given responsibility for others.

But he warned us that when there is a delay in the master's return, some servants can begin to mistreat others, which will result in the loss of their reward. Jesus is showing us that loving God and loving people go together. Serving God and serving people go together.

In this parable, Jesus said His servants should be faithful and wise. Faithful to God and wise toward people – we need to be both. Some people are faithful toward God but exercise no wisdom with people – that makes them faithfully foolish. But those who have wisdom without faithfulness to God only have worldly wisdom.

In the parable of the servant – the servant became evil and began to hang out with drunks and worldly people. The servant did not stay faithful to the end. That's why God wants us to be faithful and wise. Both are required to endure to the end. And that's what I want to talk about as we transition to the parable of the ten virgins.

You see, the servant got into trouble when the master delayed. And when we live our lives thinking we have lots of time to make things right rather than living our lives with a sense of urgency that we could meet the Lord any day – it results in us not living fully for the Lord.

2- While we are waiting on the Lord, we must watch

There's a difference between waiting and watching. In the parable of the ten virgins - five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones were not ready for the bridegroom, but the five wise ones were ready and watching. Jesus said in Matthew 25:13

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

We are not just waiting, we are watching. The word watch here literally means "stay awake and alert." It's like a military guard who is standing watch. Jesus said, Don't let My return sneak up on you. Be watching. Stay ready!

Weddings in the time of Christ had three major parts. First, a marriage contract was signed by the parents of the bride and the bridegroom, and a dowry was paid to the parents. This began what was called the betrothal or engagement period.

The second step in the process usually occurred a year later, when the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, went to the house of the bride at midnight, creating a torchlight parade through the streets. The bride would know in advance this was going to take place, and so she would be ready with her maidens, and they would all join the parade and end up at the bridegroom's home.

The third phase was the marriage supper itself, which might go on for days.

For Christians today, the first phase is completed on earth when each individual believer places his or her faith in Christ as Savior. The dowry paid to the Bridegroom's Parent (God the Father) is the blood of Christ shed on the Bride's behalf. The Church on earth today is "betrothed" to Christ and should be watching and waiting for the appearance of the Bridegroom.

The second phase symbolizes the Rapture of the Church, when Christ comes to claim His bride and take her to the Father's house for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In the parable of the virgins, they were required to have to have their lamps full of oil and lit when the bridegroom arrived. He took a long time to get there – so when he finally arrived, five were ready and five were not. The five who were not ready were left behind.

The bridegroom took so long that the five foolish virgins ran out of oil for their lamps. They did not have what it takes to go the distance! And there are many people who call themselves Christians today who do not have what it takes to go the distance.

If we are going to make it to heaven, we must have endurance.
 If we are going to overcome in life, we need endurance.
 Over and over in Matthew Jesus says we need endurance.
 For instance, Matthew 24:12-13 says:

And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

We all need to make sure we have enough oil in our lamps to make it to the end. In the Bible – oil usually represents the Holy Spirit and lamps represent the word of God. Psalm 119:105 says:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

This parable shows us that we in order to have endurance, we need faith in God's word and we need to be filled with God's Spirit. That's why being filled with the Spirit is a command in the Bible, not an option. Ephesians 5:18 says:

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Remember in the parable of the servants how the evil servant ended up drunk? We see drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit contrasted here again in Ephesians. That's because if you are not filled with the Holy Spirit – there will be an emptiness inside of you that you will try to fill with other things. And those other things will eventually ruin your life! That's why you need your lamp filled with oil. You need your life filled with the Holy Spirit.

Some people try to make up for their lack of oil by hanging around people whose lamps are full of oil. That happened to the foolish virgins who ran out of oil and thought they could get some from the others. But they could not!

You see, you aren't saved because your parents are saved. God has no grandchildren! Everyone must come to him in faith on their own. And you cannot make it to the end by trying to borrow other people's oil. It's good to attend a Spirit-filled church – but you need to be Spirit-filled! It's good to have Spirit-filled friends – but you need to be Spirit-filled!

You are not strong enough to get through tough times in your own strength! You need the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think these days we are too easily moved by people or circumstances. People say things that push our buttons and we are over the edge. We experience some tough times and we're moved off our faith.

I've seen people turn from God for many reasons – but the common denominator in all of them was that they did not have enough oil in their lamps to make it to the end. When I say make it to the end – I'm not just talking about making it to the rapture. I'm talking about making it to the end of whatever tough time you're going through. I'm talking about making it to the end of your life in faith!

I've had the honor of ministering at many funerals of saints who exemplified having oil in their lamps to make it to the end. At those funerals I usually read some of the last words of Paul which are found in 2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.

In this amazing passage, Paul sums up his life in four phrases:
 I have fought the good fight
 I have finished the race
 I have kept the faith
 I am ready to depart this life and enter into my eternal reward.

Funerals are tough, but they are easier when they are for people who have fought the good fight and finished their race. Believers who did not give up and did not quit before the end of the race. Believers who kept the faith. Overcomers who understood the two sides of faith: belief and trust. They believe God for healing and they trust God with the outcome.

This is the kind of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 – the great faith chapter of the Bible. Hebrews 11:33-40 speaks of people

...who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Sounds pretty amazing – but it goes on to say this about other people of faith:

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Notice that some people of faith did not receive the promise in their lifetime. This was not due to a lack of faith. The Bible says they obtained a good testimony through faith! They trusted God and kept the faith no matter what the outcome! It's what I call "but if not" faith.

The book of Daniel tells about Daniel and three Hebrew friends named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They had been captured and taken to Babylon – but God gave them great favor because of their faithfulness. But others did not like it - so they tried to get rid of them. They set up a golden idol and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it. Those who refused would be executed by being thrown into a fiery furnace.

When it came time to bow - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused because God said not to bow to anyone but Him. They were taken before the king and he told them that they would be given one more chance to bow or they would be thrown in the fire. Their answer shows us how to stand in faith to the end. In Daniel 3:17-18 they said:

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

The story ends with these guys getting thrown into the fire - but without being burned! They came out without a hair singed and they did not even have the smell of smoke on their clothes!

Sometimes God delivers you from the fire – sometimes He takes you through the fire. We tend to think that the greatest testimonies are when God delivers us FROM the fire, when sometimes it's when God takes you THROUGH the fire.

That's because if you go through the fire – He'll be with you. But your faith in God cannot be determined by your circumstances. If you are going to stand you must have "but if not" faith. This kind of faith trusts in God no matter what the outcome. This kind of faith that refuses to give up.

In Acts 20:22-24 Paul spoke to the Ephesian church about his future.

And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

The Lord had revealed to Paul by the Spirit that he was headed for prison and death for preaching the Gospel. But that did not move Paul! He wanted to finish his race with endurance and joy – and he did!

Time and time again in the Bible we see people who refused to be moved by circumstances.

- Abraham was not moved by his age or Sarah's inability to bear children: He did not waver at the promise of God and they had a child!
- Joshua and Caleb were not moved by the giants in the Promised Land – in fact they said, "We are well able to overcome them."
- Jesus was not moved by having only five loaves and two fish – in fact He used them to miraculously feed 5000 people!
- Moses was not moved by the Red Sea – in fact he moved the Red Sea!
- David was not moved by Goliath – in fact he removed Goliath!

And we need to get to the place where nothing moves us other than God!

No matter who or what comes against me, none of that moves me!

No matter how I feel, I'm not moving! No matter how difficult the battle, I'm not moving! Not matter how bad I want to quit, I'm not moving.

No matter how long it takes, I'm not moving!

I'm not moving until God says move! Nothing else moves me! People can't move me! Circumstances like medical reports or the economy can't move me!

Satan can't move me! Only God can move me!

Sometimes your victory is won by simply refusing to move!

We used to sing an old hymn that said: I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Just like the tree that's planted by the waters I shall not be moved.

Though all Hell assail me, I shall not be moved

Jesus will not fail me, I shall not be moved

Though the tempest rages, I shall not be moved

On the rock of ages, I shall not be moved.

Until Jesus comes back I'll worship, watch and endure to the very end!