

Are you ready to meet the bridegroom?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 December 2025

Preacher: Joe Tough

[0 : 00] Before we continue, let's turn to God in prayer and ask for his help together. Let's pray. Father, as we come to hear from your word together, we come needy, we come undeserving.

! We thank you that you delight to do us good. You delight to show mercy. So speak to us now, we ask, through the preaching of your word and the power of the Holy Spirit, feed your sheep and bring home the lost, all for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, amen.

Are you ready for Christmas? I wonder over the last few weeks how many different times you've been asked that question. I mean, it gets to this time of year and suddenly everyone's small talk is just narrowed down to one topic. Are you ready? Has the turkey been bought? Have the presents been wrapped? Do your parents know it's just us this year? Up and down the country, if you just listen in, all these conversations are taking place over and over again.

And I mean, for those of you who have kids, you've got it even worse. Not only is it all that adults want to talk about, but suddenly your kids have turned into mini countdown timers, making sure you're given a daily update on just how many days, hours, minutes and seconds you have before the big day. But as we come before God's word this morning, away from the hustle and bustle of festive life, we are confronted by an even bigger question. Another, are you ready question? But one that will have eternal, eternal consequences? You see, our passage this morning puts a firm hand on our shoulder, looks us straight in the eyes and asks us, are you ready to meet Jesus? Are you ready to meet the bridegroom? Because unlike Christmas, we aren't given a countdown timer. We know neither the day nor the hour of Christ's return, just as verse 13 says. So we need something that will splash cold water on our faces and waking us up to the reality no one in the news is talking about. Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, so we need to make sure we are ready. Now, I'm sure it's at this point that all of us in the room who consider ourselves to be followers of Jesus start turning our heads out to the world, start letting our minds drift to those non-Christians we know who couldn't care less about the church and think this is exactly what they need to hear. And that's true. They do.

But the big surprise about this parable, and that might be easy for us just to brush past at first, is the audience. Who's the audience of this parable? Because we've seen Jesus give a lot of teaching in our series in Matthew. We've seen him give us teaching directed to the crowds, the Pharisees, but here in the fifth and final teaching block, in chapters 24 to 25, who's it all directed to?

[4 : 35] Well, the disciples. This parable is given as part of a longer, private conversation between Jesus and the disciples.

So, for all of us in this room who would consider ourselves to be followers of Jesus, let's turn our heads back around, because this parable is staring us square in the face.

Now, the parable begins with the familiar way most of Jesus' parables have in Matthew, with the phrase, the kingdom of heaven, and then goes on to compare it to something.

We've already seen many things the kingdom of heaven is like in Matthew. For example, we've seen the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sows good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.

Or the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, or is like a treasure hidden in the field. We've been given many images to describe to us what God's kingdom is like here on earth.

[6 : 06] But with our parable this morning, notice the slight difference in how it's worded. We aren't told the kingdom of heaven is like something.

No, we are told what the kingdom of heaven will be like. We are told what the kingdom of heaven will one day be like.

One day, it will be like ten virgins. Or, in other words, ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Now, again, this bridegroom language is also familiar to Matthew, as Jesus has already used the term to refer to himself.

In Matthew 9, when Jesus was being questioned about fasting by the Pharisees, he replied by saying, Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?

[7 : 17] The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and they will fast. So, Jesus has used the bridegroom language to refer to himself when talking about his arrival and his departure, and now he uses it again when talking about his return.

So, putting this all together, when Christ returns, the visible church will be like ten bridesmaids who go out to meet him.

And verse 2, what do we learn? Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

Now, as we spend time reflecting on the question, are you ready to meet the bridegroom? Or, in other words, are you ready to meet Jesus?

You're probably thinking, Well, how do I think that through? And it's here we're given a key of sorts that helps unlock it for us. When we wonder if we're ready to meet Jesus, we need to think that through by asking ourselves the question, Am I wise?

[8 : 50] Or, am I foolish? Because that's how Jesus divides the ten. Five wise, five foolish.

So, which group do you belong to this morning? Now, as we move on to our first point, the fools are unprepared while the wise are ready.

It's here at the start of verse 3 that Jesus unpacks for us what it means to be wise and foolish. We read this, verse 3, For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them.

Five of the bridesmaids are foolish because they took no oil. That's the big problem here. That's why they are foolish. Now, you're probably thinking, Well, what's the big deal not having some oil? But the thing we need to understand is that the oil is the one thing they need to be ready for when the bridegroom arrives. Their lamp is going to be no use without it.

[10 : 07] And if they don't have a lit lamp, they won't be able to join in the wedding procession. For any soon-to-be bride here this morning, imagine phoning your bridesmaids up before the wedding and asking them if they're packed, ready for the big day.

You ask them, You got the curlers? Yep. You got the flowers? Of course. You got your dress? Nah. I don't need to worry about that. The five are foolish because the five are unprepared. Now, compare this with me with verse 4.

But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. The wise are prepared. They've taken time to ensure they have the one thing they'll need in order for them to be part of the procession.

They're the type of bridesmaids that phone you to let you know their dress is packed and ready to go. They've listened to your instructions and have done as you've said.

[11 : 26] So let me simply ask us all here this morning, and especially those of us who would call ourselves followers of Jesus, are you prepared or are you unprepared?

Do you have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you resting and trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation?

And is that bearing fruit in your life? Because what we've seen to be true in Matthew is that a genuine, saving faith is a fruitful faith.

It's the root that genuine discipleship grows from. You see, that's what splits the room here this morning.

That's the great dividing line between the genuine Christian and the person who just says they're a Christian. the genuine Christian is the one who has bent the knee to King Jesus.

[12 : 48] The one who is trusting and depending on Jesus' goodness not their own while seeking to do the will of the Father living a life pleasing to Him.

Because just think of the bridesmaids once again. Outwardly, they all looked the same. They all had been given an invitation.

They all were planning on attending the wedding banquet. They all looked the part. They all had a lamp in their hand. And even look with me to verse 5.

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. Notice that, verse 5. They all slept.

The arrival of the bridegroom was a surprise to each one of them. Both groups are taken off guard by His return. There's more here that the bridesmaids have in common than they have a part.

[13:58] God. And so, it is with us here this morning. As I look out into this room full of people, outwardly, you all look very much the same.

You've all stood to sing when we sang. You've all sat and listened. You've all chosen to be here this morning. We all outwardly look the part, don't we?

But inwardly, not all of us are the same. Not all of us have a fruitful faith in Jesus Christ.

Not all of us are living under His loving rule. So, are you sitting here just outwardly looking the part? Quite happy to dress up like a bridesmaid? Quite happy to associate yourself with a bridegroom, but inwardly have not bent the knee to Jesus Christ?

[15:20] You need to know looking the part isn't enough. Stop playing dress up and instead kneel before your king.

Come under His loving rule so that your faith would be fruitful and proven genuine. Don't believe the lying whisper that says you've got to keep this act up.

No. No, you don't. Because you can't fake your way into heaven. But now, let's continue through our passage because there is more for us to see.

There is more that distinguishes the foolish from the wise. as the second thing we learn is that the fools assume while the wise understand verse 6 to 9.

Now, we saw from verse 5 that the bridegroom was delayed causing all the bridesmaids to fall asleep. Now, in verse 6, we see they're awakened by the announcement of His arrival.

[16:40] the moment they've all been waiting for has come. The big day has arrived. So, verse 7, what do they all do?

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. But for the ones who fail to prepare, this is the moment it all starts to go wrong.

You can imagine them half asleep fiddling with their lamps, trying to get a flame to catch, thinking they're all ready to go, seeing the lamp burst into life.

They're about to step out the door when suddenly that orange flame starts getting dimmer and dimmer. Ain't no way they're going to have enough.

By the time they get halfway there, that little flame is going to be all burnt out. So, what do they do? Verse 8, they turn to the wise bridesmaids and say, give us some of yours.

[17:50] They don't say, oh no, what have we done? They don't say, I knew we should have taken more oil. No, none of that. They see no reason why they can't just borrow some from the others.

They assume, don't they? They know they need oil for their lamps. They know they haven't made the necessary preparations and therefore assume they can just piggyback off those who have. just like you can't fake your way into heaven, you also can't piggyback your way into heaven either. But you see, many people think they can. That because they come from a Christian family, that means on the last day they will be alright.

That because their wife or husband is a genuine follower of Jesus, that if it turns out all this is true, then surely there will be space for a plus one, right?

[19:09] Yeah, I know I'm not prepared. I don't have a genuine relationship with Jesus, but that's okay, because I know a bunch of people who do.

And they all like me. we're good friends, so I'm sorted. I mean, my granny always said she prayed for me too, so surely some of that is going to have to pay off.

Look down with me to verse nine. But the wise answered, saying, since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.

The wise understand, don't they? They know the reality of the situation. They don't assume, but understand that they can't share any of their oil.

There will not be enough for us and for you. Now, we might think would not the more Christian thing to do be to give up their oil for the sake of others?

[20:20] But as one commentator helpfully and bluntly puts it, this is not a parable about sharing. So let's not get distracted by that.

It's about being ready. The wise know it's their individual responsibility to have made the right preparation for themselves, while the foolish think they can just piggyback benefit of others.

So if you're sitting here this morning assuming you can benefit of others on the last day, know this, you can't.

It doesn't matter who you know. It doesn't matter who you're related to, who you're married to. you. We will all stand before Christ as individuals.

There will be no groups to hide in or others to look to. It will be just you. It will be just me.

[21 : 31] so are you, you, not anybody else in this room, are you ready for that day?

Now, there will be those of us in this room who deep down wish we could piggyback someone into the kingdom.

A spouse, a child, a sibling, or friend, and because we love them so much, oftentimes we convince ourselves that we could.

I remember when I first became a Christian, almost my first thought was for my best mate all through school, who, if I'm honest, was more like my brother than my friend.

I remember thinking, God, you can't save me and not save him. So I started seeing it as my responsibility.

[22 : 42] What started as a good desire to see my brother come to Christ became a hard task master. It became a crushing burden.

God's love. And maybe you feel like that this morning. If I was just a better wife, if I had just been a better father, if only I did this or didn't do that, can just keep spinning round your head.

dear brother or sister, it's their responsibility. Yes, pray.

Pray on. Yes, evangelize. Yes, keep witnessing and witnessing. But do all knowing that at the end of the day, it's not your job to carry them on your shoulders.

you don't need to keep picking up a burden you can't carry. But now to bring this all together and see what reception the bridegroom will give to the foolish and the wise.

[24 : 10] Now, up till this point, it's always been the foolish bridesmaids that have gone first. But now at the bridegroom's return, it's the fate of the wise bridesmaids that is made first in line.

Look down with me to verse 10. And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

The bridesmaids that are ready for his return are welcomed. The bridesmaids that are ready are brought into the marriage feast, personally escorted.

Notice that. They went in with him. Not just they got in, but they went in with him.

Earlier this year, I was invited to a wedding. Now, I didn't know the bride or groom too well. I'd actually never met the groom in person, and only met the bride a handful of times.

[25 : 28] So, when the invitation came my way, it was a bit of a surprise. I mean, are they just inviting me because they feel they have to? Now, I knew I'd be welcomed in on the day, but a fair question someone might ask is, would anyone even notice or care if you didn't show up?

But when I got to my seat at the table, there waiting for me was a handmade name card. Joe was handwritten on it by the very bride, herself, with a dried flower she'd pressed on the side.

It was just a little detail, but one now I appreciate so much more looking back, because it assures me that they actually wanted me to be there.

And I hope that little phrase, went in with him, does that for you today, putting your nerves to ease. It's not just you're going to be allowed into heaven. He actually wants you there. He really does, more than you want to be there.

[26 : 53] so brothers and sisters, those of you here today who have a saving faith in Jesus Christ, who are trusting and resting in Jesus and his work alone for your salvation, and are genuinely seeking to serve him, living under his kingship and rule, this is what awaits you.

You'll be welcomed and greeted by Jesus Christ himself. The door will be shut behind you, where you'll enjoy all the luxuries he's prepared at his table.

and your seat, with your name on it, will be waiting. But now, to see what awaits the foolish bridesmaids, those who are unprepared, look down with me to verse 11 and 12.

afterwards, the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, truly, I say to you, I do not know you.

The foolish bridesmaids know who the bridegroom is. They call him Lord, Lord. They also see no reason why they shouldn't be let into the feast.

[28 : 43] Even though they were unprepared, even though they rock up late and miss his arrival, they still see nothing wrong with shouting at the door, open to us.

But the door stays closed, because the bridegroom responds from the other side, truly, I say to you, I do not know you.

They know him by name, but he doesn't have a relationship with them. Jesus, Jesus, open up, it's me.

I've heard all about you all my life. I know who you are and what you've done. okay, I didn't make the preparations I knew deep down I had to make before meeting you, but come on, it's me.

My granny's in there, my wife, my kids. Just ask them, I'm sure they'll be able to vouch for me.

They're probably wondering why I'm not at the table next to them.

[29 : 58] Open up, I should be in there. if you're unprepared to meet Jesus, not having a genuine saving faith in him that's bearing fruit in your life, and you think because outwardly you look like a Christian and collectively know lots of Christians, you'll surely be welcomed into heaven by him, then let these words ring in your ears.

I never knew you. Hear these words now, I beg, so you don't have to hear them then.

Stop putting off the preparation you know you need to make. Come, bend your knee before the king we all must bow to.

Throw yourself upon the mercy of Christ. Beg him for forgiveness and ask him to transform you from the inside out.

God, if there's still breath in your lungs, if Christ has not appeared in his glory, you still have time to be counted amongst the wise.

[31 : 36] You still have time to be prepared. So make sure you are. His hands are still outstretched wide to you this morning, calling sinners to come, but one day the door will be closed for all eternity.

So make sure it's closed behind you, not in front of you. verse 13, watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

He could come back any second, any time of any day. So to all of us here, look out, be aware, and make sure you're ready.

Let's pray in closing. Father, I pray we would all individually be ready for the day of Christ's return.

Would we all be ready to go out to meet him? save those who are sitting here that know deep down they aren't ready? Would you draw them to yourself?

[33 : 19] And would they stop putting off the preparation they know they need to make? Father, cause knees to bend. Cause lives to be changed.

Christ. And Lord, for those here who do have a fruitful faith in Jesus Christ, would you encourage them, strengthen them, and give them an excitement for the day when they will be welcomed into the banqueting hall of heaven by Jesus Christ himself.

And Father, we also bring before you those of our friends and families that do not yet know you, those that often weigh so heavy on our hearts, especially this time of year.

Oh Lord, would you please say them? And Lord, would you please free us from carrying burdens we aren't meant to carry? But now, Lord, as we come to sing your praises once more, would you cause the truths we are about to sing to come alive to us?

Would you warm our hearts and affections towards you and encourage and strengthen us, we pray? All for your glory and our good.

[34 : 39] In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.