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Sermon Notes

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## **Partially Prepared is Eternally Excluded**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

*Amos 4:12 ... prepare to meet your God*

Jesus is going to return someday, in His Father's glory, at the head of an angelic army.

If there's anything you need to do to get ready for that, you better do it today.

Yes, today... or something like today.

God has ordained a time for us to get ready for eternity, and that time is TODAY

*Hebrews 4:7 Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*

Today... it's all we have to obey God and get ready for eternity. Today. Simply put, we can't obey God yesterday. Yesterday is gone forever, logged in the record books of God. We can LEARN from yesterday, learn from what we did or didn't do... learn from our experiences of success or failure... but we can't go back and obey God yesterday... ever!

Tomorrow... we can't obey God tomorrow either, because it's not here yet. We can PREPARE to obey God tomorrow, we can PRAY that we will obey God tomorrow, we can make it EASIER to obey God tomorrow, but by the time we can actually obey God tomorrow it has changed its name to TODAY!!!

Our lives are made up of a series of TODAYs...

Shakespeare's MacBeth, lamenting his wife's death, speaks of the dreary passing of time in this way:

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale*

*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing.*" — Macbeth (Act 5, Scene 5, lines 17-28)

But actually, your life is made up of TODAY and TODAY and TODAY

So, dear friends, it all comes down to what you do with TODAY.

And what is TODAY for? For getting ready for eternity. Getting ready... preparing for your own death and for the Second Coming of Christ

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, the time of preparation will end. What you have you will have, and what you don't have you will never have. The opportunity will end.

In our parable, we have ten virgins who hope to participate in the wedding procession when the Bridegroom comes. Perhaps they have all dressed up for the occasion, perhaps they have all done their hair, and procured their lamps for the torchlight procession... but five of the virgins are foolish—they have not FULLY prepared. They are only partially prepared... and as a result, they are excluded from the wedding procession and the celebration banquet

What do you need TODAY to be prepared for eternity? Are you ready to face the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes in His glory? And what is the best way TODAY to prepare for that glorious return?

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is given to us to help us THINK AHEAD by faith for what we'll need for that day

- A diligent student taking the SAT prepares for the test by studying for months, getting advice on how to succeed at the test, enrolling for the test, finding out where and when it will be, getting a good night sleep the night before, getting seven Number 2 pencils and a calculator, and getting to the site in plenty of time
- An Olympic athlete competing in the high jump spends years and years perfecting his technique, honing his talent, studying his nutrition, assessing his competition, competing in preliminary events... all to prepare for that critical moment at the Olympics
- A woman pregnant with her first child will prepare for months reading books on the labor and delivery process, going to birthing classes, studying aspects of infant care and the baby's first year, getting a room ready, having her mother come at the right time to help her, working with her husband to be sure everything is in a state of total readiness
- EVEN a trip to the Supermarket... making a shopping list, what store you would go to, what coupons you would use, what part of the store you would start with, how you would pay, etc.

It's amazing how carefully human beings plan great things and insignificant things alike...

And just as amazing how little they plan for eternity, for the Second Coming of Christ

The five foolish virgins failed to prepare adequately for the coming of the bridegroom... they represent all those whose preparations for eternity will prove to be inadequate when the Lord returns

## I. The Main Lesson: Present Preparation and Constant Vigilance

### A. Jesus' Summary: vs. 13

***Vs. 13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."***

- Christ has repeatedly made it plain that no one knows the day or the hour of His return and of the end of the age

### B. The Title Says it All: Partially Prepared is Eternally Excluded

- This parable has a long history of ALLEGORICAL interpretation
- Every detail in it has received its own symbolic representation... and we are never certain what any of it means
- I will discuss some of those details later
- BUT the key with a parable is to get the main point
  - The parable is about ten virgins, five wise and five foolish
  - The focus is on what makes the wise ones wise, the foolish ones foolish... and what the final outcome was
  - The wise virgins were wise because they were ready for the Bridegroom when he came and didn't miss the wedding banquet
  - The foolish virgins were foolish because they weren't ready for the Bridegroom when he came, and thus were excluded from the feast
  - The lesson is plain... we need to be ready NOW for the second coming of Christ... if we only go through the show of being ready, if we're only partially prepared, we will be eternally excluded from heaven
- It is of the essence of true saving faith that it prepares all true believers for the Second Coming of Christ... true saving faith gets us completely ready for the Lord to return

### C. Immediate Application: Come to Christ NOW

- There is only one way to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ... to repent of all your sins and trust in His atoning work on the cross
- To put off till tomorrow the issue of repentance and faith in Christ will leave you entirely unprepared for Judgment Day
- I will say this again at the end of the message

## II. The Parable Set in Context

### A. The Disciples' Three-Fold Question

***Matthew 24:3 "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"***

### B. The Olivet Discourse

- Vs. 4-14 describes in general but striking terms how life in this sin-cursed world will progress between the first and second comings of Christ
  - (i) Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes in various places
  - (ii) The special and vicious persecution of the church
  - (iii) The consistent and escalating apostasy of believers under the pressure of that persecution
  - (iv) The need to stand firm to the end to be saved
  - (v) The preaching of the gospel to every nation
- Vs. 15-25 the Abomination of Desolation and the terrors that follow
  - (i) The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70
  - (ii) The final trial under the Antichrist at the end of the world
- Vs. 26-31 the Second Coming of Christ described

***Matthew 24:29-30 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." <sup>30</sup> "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.***

- The Rapture... the rescue of the elect from the earth

- The Suddenness and unexpectedness of the Second Coming

### C. The Uncertainty of the Time and Date

**Matthew 24:36** *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

**Matthew 24:37** *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

Life will be going on as usual... no direct indicators that the world as we know it is about to end

- He has also given us two clear parables already stating the need for constant vigilance

**Matthew 24:42-51** *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> 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. <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. <sup>45</sup> ¶ "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? <sup>46</sup> It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. <sup>47</sup> I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' <sup>49</sup> and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. <sup>50</sup> 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. <sup>51</sup> He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

- The parable about the homeowner and the thief in the night

**Vs. 44** *So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

- The parable about the steward whom the master puts in charge of the household to feed and care for the other servants

**Matthew 24:45-46** *"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? <sup>46</sup> It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.*

- This parable of the Ten Virgins supports this same approach that Christ wants us to have... constant vigilance by faith, ready for the Master's return, faithful about the Master's business

#### D. The Cultural Context: Jewish Marriage Process (John MacArthur)

- A Jewish marriage consisted of three parts
- First stage: the engagement
  - Arranged by the fathers of the bride and groom
  - Engagement amounted to a contract of marriage in which the couple had little or no direct involvement
- Second stage: the betrothal ceremony
  - The bride and groom exchange vows in the presence of family and friends
  - At that point, the couple was considered married
  - The relationship could only be broken by formal divorce proceedings
  - If the husband happened to die after the betrothal ceremony, the woman was considered a widow, even though their marriage had never been consummated and the couple had never lived together
  - During the betrothal period, lasting many months, even as long as a year, the groom would go establish a trade for himself by which he could support his wife and family, and would build a home for them to live in
- Third stage: the wedding feast
  - During this feast, the entire community would become involved
  - The festivity could last as long as a week
  - All starts with groom coming with his groomsmen to the bride's house; she would be waiting with her bridesmaids
  - Together the bride and groom with their attendants would parade through the streets proclaiming that the wedding feast was about to begin
  - This procession was generally at night, and lamps and torches would be used by the wedding party to illuminate their way and attract attention
  - At the end of the feast period, a close friend of the groom (acting like a best man in our weddings) would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom and the couple would for the first time be left alone together

- The marriage would then be consummated and the couple would live from that point forward in their new home
- This third phase is the context for Jesus' parable

### III. The Parable Explained in Detail... without Allegory

#### A. Long History of Allegorical Interpretation

- Allegorical interpretation:
  - every physical element of the story has some spiritual counterpart
  - only the truly spiritual person can figure out what each element means

#### B. The Virgins

- Though ancient and medieval Roman Catholic interpreters made much of the virginity of these young women, the word just emphasizes that they were young women... that's all
- The girls fell into two categories... five in each group
  - Augustine: the number five relates to the five senses; and the five wise virgins represents those who were chaste in the use of those five senses:

“Every soul in the body is therefore denoted by the number five, because it makes use of five senses. For there is nothing of which we have perception by the body, but by the five folded gate, either by the sight, or the hearing, or the smelling, or the tasting, or the touching. Whoso then abstains from unlawful seeing, unlawful hearing, unlawful smelling, unlawful tasting, and unlawful touching, by reason of his uncorruptness has gotten the name of virgin” (Sermon XLIII)

- Whatever the significance of the number five, the real issue is the division between WISE and FOOLISH
- Matthew is extremely concerned with the issue of WISE vs. FOOLISH
  - i) He has half the occurrences of the Greek word translated here “wise” in the New Testament
  - ii) He ALSO has half the occurrences of the Greek word translated here “wise” in the New Testament
  - iii) Prime example: wise and foolish BUILDERS at the end of the Sermon on the Mount

***Matthew 7:24-27 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."***

- Similarities between the two groups
  - The number five: five were in each group
  - The fact that they were young women waiting for the bridegroom to appear
  - The fact that they had torches for the procession
    - i) These torches would have oil receptacles and wicks
    - ii) They would have been mounted on wooden poles
    - iii) The wicks would have had some oil in them already and could have burned for a short time
    - iv) However, the whole system only worked for a long period of time if the oil receptacles were filled with oil
- Essence of the foolishness: Lack of FORESIGHT

***Vs. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.***

- While they had torches, they did not take oil
- They had not thought through what they would actually need for their role in the wedding procession
- They had the outer accoutrements, but not what it would really take to be involved

Hendricksen: They were careless, not forward-looking, guilty of inexcusable and senseless neglect

- Essence of the wisdom: FORESIGHT

***Vs. 5 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.***

- The five wise girls took oil in jars so that their torches would really work

- They looked ahead, thought ahead, planned ahead
- They were actually really READY when the bridegroom came

#### C. The Delay and the Slumber

***Matthew 25:5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.***

- This is once again pretty clear evidence that the Lord was preparing His church for a long delay between His first and second comings
- The fact that the five WISE virgins as well as the five foolish ones fell asleep shows that there is no moral failure involved here
- Some commentators say this refers to DEATH... not at all an impossibility; but since this detail is not discussed in the text, it's best not to speculate
- At any rate, this shows that the kind of vigilance Jesus commends is not one in which we are so intensely focused on the Second Coming that we neglect everything else in life

#### D. The Coming of the Bridegroom

***Matthew 25:6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"***

- The key moment has arrived!! The object of their desire has come at last!!
- There can be little doubt in the parable that the bridegroom represents Christ, and this midnight cry is likened to the cry of the archangel at the Second Coming... Christ is returning!!
- The exciting wedding procession is about to take place
- The whole reason for these virgins being dressed up and having torches now has come; what's the sense in a young woman taking part in the torchlight procession without a lit torch?

#### E. The Lighting of the Torches

***Matthew 25:7-8 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'"***

- The time for the torchlight procession has arrived, and tragically the foolish lack of foresight of the young women is exposed at last

- The wicks could carry the flame for just a few moments... soon, they realize their devastating error... they need oil

#### F. The Lack of Oil

***Matthew 25:8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'***

- As their wicks begin to sputter, they immediately realize why
- Amazingly, they know NOW what that had failed to think through before: these torches will not work without a supply of oil
- They try to scramble and cover their reprehensible lack of foresight...
- BUT the wise girls show their characteristic foresight...

***Matthew 25:9 "'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.'***

- One might think they are being sassy or unfeeling or unkind, since it is midnight and one might think "There'll be NO oil salesman awake at this hour"... however remember, that's not really their problem; the wise virgins had the foresight to provide oil when it was available
- Now... what is this OIL that they lacked?

#### A.B. Bruce has a cogent insight

He noted the "endless diversity of opinion as to the emblematic significance of the oil. Every interpreter has his own conjecture. The oil is faith, charity, almsgiving, desire for the praise of God rather than the praise of men, good works in general, the Holy Spirit, diligence in the culture of grace, religious joy, etc. In short, it is anything you please; each conjecture is purely arbitrary, one is as legitimate as another, and the multiplicity of opinions justifies the inference that they are all alike illegitimate."

Bruce points out that the reason they were excluded from the feast was not lack of oil but their lateness... those that were READY went into the wedding banquet

If indeed the oil was truly needed for entry into the wedding feast, the main point is still there: NOW is the time to get what you need to enter... when the Bridegroom returns, it will be too late

#### G. The Foolish Virgins Leave, Return, and are Excluded

***Matthew 25:10 "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.***

- The foolish virgins go try to buy oil...
- We never find out if they were successful or not
- It was clearly NOT the time to be doing that in any case
- That was the time to be greeting the bridegroom
- When they return, they are excluded

***Matthew 25:11-12 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'***

- The door was shut has a ring of finality
- Like the door on the side of Noah's Ark, this represents the end of the opportunity
- The statement of the bridegroom is shockingly familiar

***Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

- These foolish virgins are excluded from the wedding feast because they were not ready when the time came... they were partially prepared, and thus eternally excluded

#### IV. Lessons from the Parable

##### A. Nominal Christianity Will Not Save

- I believe one of the most powerful applications of this parable is this one assertion: NOMINAL CHRISTIANITY will be worthless on the Day of Judgment
- All around the world there is a plague on the church called the “nominal Christian”
- These are people who have an outward form of Christianity, but there is no reality behind it
- They can talk the language of the church, they can act like Christians... they are moral and appear quite pious on the outside

- In some European nations where Christianity was the dominant state religion, there is a heritage of nominal Christianity
  - Constantine's conversion in AD 312 immediately wedded church and state and made paganism a dead end for Romans... there was immediately a pressure to convert and be baptized
  - That pressure became far more aggressive in the centuries that followed in Europe... the true gospel work of faithful witnesses for Christ was mingled in an unholy way with warrior kings who lusted for power; Clovis, King of the Franks, converted and was baptized on Christmas Day, 496, because he believed Christianity would help him conquer the Allemanni tribe. The same day Clovis was baptized, 3000 of his soldiers were baptized as well... how many of them were truly converted we cannot tell
  - Charlemagne, baptized and crowned King of France in the year AD 800 was in many respects a model Christian King, advocating Christian education to a level not seen before in Europe. However he also followed the same approach of spreading the Kingdom of Christ: convert or die!! Charlemagne would defeat his foes and force them to be baptized. Obviously the genuineness of many of these baptisms is seriously open to question
  - At any rate, Christendom in Europe developed rife with NOMINALISM... people outwardly claiming to be Christians, but without any true faith; it plagues Europe to this day... nominal Catholics in Italy, nominal Anglicans in England, nominal Lutherans in Germany and Scandinavia, nominal... IN NAME ONLY
- BUT dear friends, it's not just in Europe
  - America has its share of nominal Christians as well
  - Nominal Baptists populate the roster of Southern Baptist churches all over America
- Paul on NOMINALISM

***2 Timothy 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.***

- Just like the FOOLISH VIRGINS... they meet to outward profile—they are young women from the community ready to take part in the bridal procession; they have the proper outfit, the proper hairstyling, they are waiting in the proper place... they even have the TORCHES... but they lack the OIL needed to make the torches actually work

- BEWARE the danger of nominal Christianity... outward forms, but no inward reality
- No inward FIRE, no inward love for Christ, no inward HOLY SPIRIT
- Going through the motions... coming to church week after week, serving on committees, speaking the language
- The WISE virgins represent those who have the outward forms of the Christian life: prayer, bible reading, Christian conversation, church attendance, spiritual gift ministry, care for the poor and needy, involvement in missions... but for the WISE virgins, there is a true principle of GRACE in everything they do... Christ is in it all! He is ALIVE inside their actions... they are not resounding gongs or clanging symbols when they give to the poor and needy... they are doing everything BY Christ and FOR Christ... the oil of the Holy Spirit is flowing inside them; when they sit down to read the Bible, it is a HOLY ENCOUNTER with the living God, not some dry ritual; when they pray, their hearts are going out in passion toward the lover of their souls... their words are not the cold formal prayers of a hypocrite, but the warm, even hot desires of a genuine heart after God; when they give to the poor and needy, they do so as unto the Lord, trusting God to use their money for the eternal benefit of the needy person... there is a principle of genuine GRACE through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enlivening everything they do
- However, the FOOLISH virgins may do many of the same things... they may read the Bible... but there is no LIFE in that habit; it is merely a formal habit; they may attend public worship on Sundays, but it is merely a ritual done for external reasons; they may sing the hymns, since they know the words by heart... but in their hearts there is no genuine passion for Christ

B. Today is the Day of Salvation

***2 Corinthians 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.***

- The central lesson of this part of Matthew's Gospel is: NOW is the time to go get the oil for your souls!
- Fully equip yourself for Judgment Day... when the Lord returns, it will be TOO LATE
- Look to the ROOT matter... your own heart before God... do you know for certain that you are ready to meet your maker... to face your God???

- Do you know for certain that your sins are forgiven???

#### C. Today is the Day of Preparation

- It's not just for justification that God has given us TODAY... it is TODAY that we must do the works God requires of us
- God has ordained good works for each of us to do

***Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

- Those good works are the validation of faith... without those good works, our faith is worthless

***James 2:17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.***

Some commentators openly teach that the lamp is faith and the oil is works... I do not agree, for we have no validation of that connection with this parable

My point is simply that the Parable speaks about the urgency of doing NOW, TODAY what God wants you to do TODAY

- Today is the day to do the ministries God has prepared you to do in the church
- Today is the day for you to lead people to Christ
- Today is the day for you to disciple your children in the faith
- This parable is AGAINST PROCRASTINATE in the Christian life... if the Holy Spirit is leading you to do something, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins tells you to do it TODAY, while you can

#### D. The Oil of the Indwelling Holy Spirit

- Many commentators openly connect the OIL of the lamp with the Holy Spirit
- They point out that David was anointed King over Israel with oil, representing the Holy Spirit

***1 Samuel 16:13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.***

- They look to Zechariah 4, the image of the golden lampstand with oil flowing through pipes to keep the lamp stand burning, and the lesson of the image was told us by the prophet:

***Zechariah 4:6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.***

- The power of the indwelling Holy Spirit filling the believer and allowing him or her to BURN BRIGHTLY for Christ is an enticing connection with this parable
- However, I reject that as the definitive interpretation for the same reason... we don't know for certain that this is what the Lord intended by the symbolism
- I do know this... the Lord has sent His Spirit to prepare us completely for that final day... are you following His lead?
- Are you truly prepared to meet your God?