

Week 13 – The Virgin Oil Crisis – Matthew 25:1-13

Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:36-51

Introduction

How many of you have ever run out of gas and been left stranded on the roadside?

If you have, you know the sick, sinking feeling you get when the vehicle begins to sputter and you quickly look down at your instruments only to see what you really already knew [[gasgauge.jpg](#)]

I have actually run out of gas twice in my life – once while on an early spring motorcycle ride with Kathy and once as I was moving a sofa in the open back of my pickup truck and trying to get it home before a rainstorm moved in

Both of those occasions were long ago and it's been a long time since I actually ran my tank completely dry – but I have come verrrry close on many occasions

Most recently I thought I was going to run out for sure when I traveled down to El Paso this past March

Now, on the two occasions that I ran completely out, I had simply forgotten to check to see how much gas I had when I started out

But on my trip to El Paso I actually looked at my gas gauge as I passed through Dalhart, TX and thought I had plenty to get to the next town

However, I didn't appreciate how far apart gas stations can be when driving US 54 through the desert southwest

Just so you know, it's 70.2 miles from Dalhart, TX to Logan, NM and there are a few towns along the way

But there is not one gas station to be found between Dalhart and Logan and I can testify that when you're driving on fumes; Allsup's [[Allsup's.jpg](#)] Convenience Store shines like an oasis and I swear you can hear angels singing

Our parable this morning deals with running out of fuel

It's a continuation of Matthew 24 which is all about the unexpected return of Jesus for his bride, the church

We see this clearly as Jesus begins the parable with the word, "then" which means "at that time" relating back to what he had just taught about no one knowing the day or hour of his return

And Jesus uses the parable to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven will be like at his return

Remember, when we started this series on the parables we discussed how the kingdom of heaven represents the church so in actuality, Jesus is using the parable to tell us what the church will be like when he returns

And once again Jesus uses the illustration of a wedding to make his point

We've considered what a wedding in Jesus' day looked like but let's review it again quickly

First, the marriage was arranged and a bride price was determined and paid, establishing the marriage covenant

So, while the couple was considered to be as good as married at that point, the wedding hadn't yet occurred and the bride remained with her parents while the groom went to prepare a place for them at his father's house

This period of separation could be quite lengthy and no one knew precisely when the groom would return to collect his bride for the wedding to take place

It was customary for the groom to come at night and even though his bride was expecting him to come she had no idea on which night it would be or at exactly what hour

So the groom's departure from his father's home was preceded by a shout announcing his departure to collect his bride and people along the way would pass along the shout, "Behold the bridegroom is coming!"

When he arrived at his father-in-law's home he collected his bride and her female attendants and the whole entourage travelled back to his father's house for the wedding ceremony and the feast that followed it

With that imagery in mind I'll read through our passage as you follow along – **Matthew 25:1-13**

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 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.’ 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. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

We all know that the star of a modern wedding is the bride and the groom comes in a distant second

But in Jesus’ day the groom typically got all the attention and we notice that Jesus doesn’t even mention the bride at all in this parable and the groom is only a relatively minor character

Instead, his focus is on the ten “virgins” who were waiting to act as attendants in the marriage procession

In the telling of the parable it’s obvious that the bridegroom represents Jesus himself and his return which is imminent but of which the timing is unknown

But who are the virgins meant to represent?

I believe they represent the visible church in the period between Pentecost and the Lord’s return

In other words, they are us

Again, Matthew 24 and 25 are one continuous block of narrative that deals with the Lord’s return and this parable clearly is meant to convey some vital truth about waiting and watching that we need to understand

So, as we begin to study the parable we will first look at **the outward commonalities** of the virgins

Then we will consider **the hidden difference** that leads to the crisis of the narrative

And last will lastly consider **two possible applications** for the church today

I. The Outward Commonalities

The first thing want to notice is that all of the virgins are in their proper place waiting expectantly for the groom to arrive

Our passage this morning is part of what we know as the Olivet Discourse where Jesus privately answered the question that we find in **Matthew 24:3** concerning the timing of the end of the age and what signs would accompany it

And in the verses that follow Jesus told his disciples that it was not for them to know the precise timing but he instead gave them a way to know when the time was ripe –

That is to say he gave them clues to look for to know when the season had arrived for his return but not the day

And then in **Matthew 24:34** he made it clear that once the season had arrived according to the signs he had just spelled out the end would come without further delay – or within a generation

Considering the way that Jesus expressed himself, the disciples can be excused for thinking that he would return before they died – but here we are some 2,000 years later still waiting

How many of you like to wait? [**waiting.jpg**] For the most part we hate to wait. Right?

And yet most of life it seems like we’re waiting on one thing or another

When we’re little we wait to be big

When we’re older we wait to drive, or date, or get married, or have kids, or retire

And our modern culture hasn’t done anything to alleviate the pain of waiting – in fact, I think it’s made it worse

I even find myself getting impatient when I have to wait for the microwave to warm my food...

I have a little side story to share regarding microwaves – this week our microwave quit working

I knew where the problem was and I already had the parts to fix it but wasn't able to work on it until the next day

So we had to prepare dinner the old-school way – with pots and pans heating on the stove – what a pain!

I realized we have really gotten spoiled and trained to expect things to happen immediately if not quicker - haven't we?

But when you really stop to consider it, wouldn't life be boring if you never had to wait for anything?

Waiting and anticipating are part of what gives life its meaning and movement and they serve to enhance the value of the thing we're waiting for making it all the more precious when it finally arrives

And here the virgins are all waiting with real anticipation for the groom to appear which means they believed that his arrival could come at any moment

They have each brought their lamp and outwardly there would seem to be no difference between them

They all appear to be ready to join in the joyful procession of the wedding party

And in this regard the virgins represent all who are earnestly awaiting the Lord's return as we see it foretold in Scripture

But as Jesus tells the parable he reveals that they are not all the same – he says that five are wise and five are foolish

I want you to notice that Jesus doesn't say that some of the virgins were bad and some good – he wasn't making a moral distinction between the two groups with this parable

All ten were there with the same heart of anticipation and were all eagerly awaiting the arrival of the groom

And when the groom was delayed they all slept – both the wise and the foolish – and there aren't any words of rebuke or correction for their sleeping

Those clues tell me that this wasn't the sleep of neglect or disinterest but that it represents the normal activities of life

Looking back at our Scripture reading again we see this same pattern in the example of Noah which shows us that life is going to continue apace until the Lord returns

And in **Acts 1:11** we see the disciples standing and gazing into the sky after Jesus had ascended and the two angels mildly chastising them for doing so because they had received their marching orders and they weren't to stand and gaze into the sky looking for Jesus to return

Our lives are to be lived while being mindful of the fact that the Lord may return at any moment but that watchful anticipation allows for the normal activities of life and that includes sleeping

Knowing how difficult it is to sleep when filled with anticipation tells me that the motif of the virgins all becoming drowsy and eventually falling asleep while waiting is introduced to emphasize the delay of the groom

Because it's the delay of the bridegroom that reveals the hidden difference between the virgins that makes all the difference

II. The Hidden Difference

All of the virgins were present and all of them were genuinely looking for the arrival of the groom

But some of them didn't anticipate how long the wait might be so they made no provision for a delayed arrival while some of them brought along extra oil for their lamps just in case

Let's look at **verses 3-4** again because these verses have proved to be a point of contention among the scholars and how we interpret these verses makes a difference in our interpretation of the passage –

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

The ESV provides us with an accurate translation from the Greek but the difference of opinion comes in with the word “no” as in the foolish virgins took *no* oil with them and whether that means no oil at all – which would make them look rather too foolish

Or whether it means they didn’t take any *extra* oil as a wise precaution

Personally, I believe the second option makes more sense for the following three reasons:

The **first** reason is that bringing a lamp that was completely empty from the start makes no sense given their devotion and desire to be a part of the wedding parade of which bearing a lamp or torch was essential

The **second** reason is the exclamation of the five foolish virgins, “...*our lamps are going out*” which seems to indicate their lamps were lit but didn’t have enough oil to remain lit for the duration of the procession

And **third**, it seems to me that the emphasis of the parable and the entire passage is the unknown time of the groom’s arrival and the need to be prepared for a delay

It seems better to me to view the five foolish virgins as being ill-prepared rather than completely unprepared having forgotten to bring any oil at all – they simply thought their limited supply would be sufficient

You may disagree with my assessment and that’s fine – frankly, you’re in good company either way

This is simply one of those grey areas in Scripture that we dare not be too dogmatic about

So whichever position you take I encourage you to be able to defend why you believe it, hold it rather loosely, live your life according to it, and give grace to those who disagree with you

The meaning of the oil

So far, we’ve identified the bridegroom and the virgins but we haven’t considered what is represented by the oil

What we do know is that it’s something essential because it’s the lack of oil, or the lack of a sufficient supply of oil depending on your viewpoint, that resulted in the foolish virgins being excluded from the wedding feast

When we consider the symbolic uses of oil in the Old Testament we see that it is most often used to represent the Holy Spirit

We regularly see oil poured on various items and even people to signify their consecration indicating the presence and work of the Holy Spirit

And when we recognize that this parable tells us about us we have to then determine what ministry of the Holy Spirit might be in view that could be possessed, at least in part, by all of the virgins – again, representing the visible church

Turn and look with me at **John 16:12-15** where we see Jesus telling his disciples about the coming Holy Spirit –

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Clearly, one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to make the truth understandable so as to reveal and glorify Jesus

And if we look back just a few verses to verse 8 (**John 16:8**), we see that this ministry of the Holy Spirit extends even to unbelievers

And thank God that it does because without it none of us would be saved!

But here’s the thing...

The reality is that anyone who sits in a Bible-teaching church will be exposed to the truths of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit may well work to draw them into a deeper, fuller understanding of the Word but not everyone will be saved

Some will be content to do as much as they can of what the Bible teaches and appear to be true believers – without ever accepting Christ as their personal Lord and Savior – and they will have a limited supply of oil

We need only look to the life and testimony of John Wesley one of the founders of the Methodist Church to see that this is true

Wesley was born into a strong Anglican home; his father was a priest and his mother faithfully taught him and his siblings about religion and moral living

While attending Oxford, Wesley became a member of what was known as the Holy Club whose members took vows to lead holy lives, take Communion once a week, pray daily, and visit prisons regularly

They also spent three hours every afternoon studying the Bible and other devotional material

He was ordained as an Anglican priest upon his graduation from Oxford and ten years later he travelled to America on a missionary trip with a group of Moravians to present the gospel to the Native Americans

While on that trip, circumstances caused him to realize that he was not himself a saved individual

Wesley knew a lot more than most people about the Bible, its doctrines, and even the fact that Jesus is the Savior of the world; he definitely had a great deal of knowledge about spiritual truth, but he didn't know Jesus personally

By all appearances John Wesley was a prime example of a believer but he was actually one of the foolish virgins

He had the lamp of outward example and enough oil to appear as if he was a believer and he no doubt was eagerly anticipating the appearance of the bridegroom alongside the true believers

But he didn't have the reservoir of oil that fills a person who has accepted Christ

I'm sure that John Wesley was grateful for the delay of the bridegroom because, had he arrived earlier, John Wesley would have found his supply to be inadequate

And he would have heard those fearful words from behind the closed door, *"...I do not know you"*

Churches today

This parable, much like the parables of the fishing net and the weeds which we previously looked at, indicate that the visible church will continue to contain true believers and those who only appear to be believers to the end of the age

So that remains true today as many who regularly attend, faithfully serve, and even some who lead churches have never entered into a saving relationship with Christ

Like the five foolish virgins in our parable they have convinced themselves that mixing with believers and behaving like a believer will suffice

They operate in a kind of limbo where they neither fully reject nor fully accept the complete and total surrender and commitment that being a true follower of Jesus requires

Instead, they give mental and verbal assent to the moral teachings of Scripture and rely on espousing the right attitudes and carrying out the right actions in the hope that doing so will be enough to satisfy God in the end

They determine to be satisfied with the limited oil of intellectual knowledge and outward compliance but never receive the filling with oil they could have through surrendering to Christ

And in doing so they have enough light to appear to be a believer but as our parable shows us in the end the "oil" they were content with will not be enough, they will be exposed, and they will be excluded

Then in **verse 13**, Jesus tells his disciples the reason for the parable

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour

Obviously, Jesus told this parable to his disciples to clue them in to the fact that his return would be delayed for some amount of time but that it was imperative to be ready for his return at any time

What those disciples could not have possibly foreseen was that the return would be delayed as long as it has

Here we are roughly 2,000 years later and the disciples of Jesus are still looking for his return – hopefully with eager anticipation and with our lamps in order

And, really, the overarching application of the parable is the same for us as it was for those first disciples – be ready

But let's look at two specific applications we should take from the parable

III. Two Possible Applications

The **first** application is rather obvious

Be certain of your salvation

No one but you and God know for sure whether you are fully trusting in the saving blood of Jesus Christ for your salvation

It is possible to fool everyone as to your true spiritual state all the way to the end – whether that is the end of your earthly life or the end of the age whichever comes first

As John Wesley demonstrates it's possible to be raised in a Christian home, to believe all the right doctrines, to participate in all the activities of the church, to do all the right things while avoiding all the wrong things and still not be saved

Therefore, the lesson is clear:

Examine yourself and make certain that you recognize your sin and the need of a Savior

Make certain that you have surrendered yourself fully and are trusting in the saving work of Jesus Christ alone for your salvation so that you possess the sufficient oil of salvation that is necessary for entrance into God's perfect home

The **second** application is like the first but a bit different

As we have spent time this summer going through a selection of the parables we have seen that some of them speak of a loss of reward for the believer

We've seen that it's possible to be saved and yet to miss out on the fullness of blessing and joy that is available

I believe the same lesson can be seen in this parable

The most obvious meaning behind the parable is that of making certain of one's salvation but Jesus often told his parables with a bit of intentional ambiguity – and he does so here leading to the scholarly disagreements I mentioned earlier

And I believe we can apply this parable even if we are absolutely certain of our salvation by making sure that we are living Spirit-filled lives

We know all too well that it's possible to be a true believer and still not be filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit

We can squeeze the Holy Spirit's influence out of our lives through being caught up in besetting sin or just through general disinterest in the things of the Lord

And when that happens we do damage to our relationship with God and we risk missing out on the fullness of life we might otherwise enjoy here and a fullness of reward when we reach heaven

It's not really a stretch then to see the foolish virgins as saved individuals who are excluded from the wedding feast but who will still be in heaven

So, as believers, we need to also examine ourselves to make certain that there is nothing that is hindering the Holy Spirit from filling us completely so as to attain the maximum reward

Conclusion

None of us knows the day or hour that the Lord will return but we know that he can return at any moment so it is imperative that we are living our lives in a state of eager anticipation making sure to be found in a state of readiness

That means we need to be aware of the level of oil in our tank because when he comes it will be too late

There will be no borrowing of oil from someone else and no last-minute topping off of the tank and no amount of regret or effort will move the needle backward on our gauge [[gasgauge2.jpg](#)]

I want to close by having you turn with me to 2Peter 3 and follow along as I read verses 9-14 (**2Peter 3:9-14**)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

The worship team will come now and lead us in our final hymn #676 "O Jesus I Have Promised"

As we prepare to partake of the Lord's Table I encourage you to take the time during this song to examine yourselves

Make certain how much oil you possess right now because the bridegroom can arrive at any moment to collect his bride, the church

Servers, please make your way forward during the last verse

Let's pray