

Matthew 25:1-13

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[0:00] So, oddly, to start this study in Matthew 25, I'd like to turn to Hosea 12, verse 10.

So, if you just turn there and we'll have a quick look at what that says. And it's because this morning we are going to look at... We're going to look at a passage that we need to be reminded that when God speaks to us, he sometimes uses what we call similitudes or similarities or parables or metaphors.

He puts things alongside each other that are similar. And so, in Hosea 12, verse 10, the Lord himself claims, through the prophet Hosea, to do this.

And he says, I have also spoken to the prophets, and I gave numerous visions, and through the prophets I gave... And some versions will say parables, some will say similitudes, some will say metaphors, depending on which translation you've got.

God himself says that he uses similitudes to teach us his ways. Now, we're still studying the Olivet Discourse, which is Matthew 24 and 25.

[1:26] Today we're starting chapter 25. And up to now, in chapter 24 and up to this point, we've seen Jesus handing out warnings and exhortations to his own people, the Jews.

He's given them a catalogue of signs to look out for. And if you remember, we said that this is one of the reasons we know that God deals with the church and the Jews as separate and distinct bunches of people.

The Jews are told to look for signs. The church is told, we read in 1 Corinthians 15, from verse 50 onwards, the church is told, no signs, you're just going to be gone in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

So, you can't be in both groups, and it's very important to keep in context. And towards the end of the last chapter, the Jews were warned several times to be alert, ready, and faithful.

They were taught by the Lord not to be apathetic, not to just let the world pass them by, not to just go, oh, well, it'll all happen in the end, and we don't need to worry about it.

[2:33] God's got it all in hand. We were told that we have to be diligent, alert, ready, and faithful. And they were also warned that they won't know when the Lord's going to return.

Now, we've taken the whole of the passage of this in context thus far, realising that it is addressed to the Jews. That said, there's a lot the church can learn from it, and there are a lot of parallel teachings in the New Testament from the Apostle Paul that make these apply also to the church. And one such passage is the one we're going to look at this morning. So, I'm going to read it before I even start to pick it to pieces, because I have to say, this really challenged me.

Not so much how to understand it, but how on earth to put it across in less than an hour. So, let's read Matthew 24, verses 1 to 14.

In fact, probably I'll do 1 to 13, but we'll see. Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

[3:45] Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the prudent took oil in their flasks along with their lamps.

Now, while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, Behold, the bridegroom, come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish said to the prudent, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the prudent answered, No, there will not be enough for us and for you too. Go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves. And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast.

And the door was shut. Later, the other virgins also came, saying, Lord, Lord, open up for us. But he answered, Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.

[4:45] Be on me alert then, for you do not know the day or the hour. So we have continued along the theme of needing to be ready. But we have used this analogy of ten virgins, and you would not believe the different approaches you get to this passage if you shop around online for a preacher that preaches on this passage.

There are many who say, Well, the virgins are obviously the church. I do not agree. There are some who say, Well, definitely the bride is the bride of Christ.

So that kind of says, Well, you can't be both the bride of Christ and the bridesmaids, because the virgins are bridesmaids, or they are the companions of the bride. So you can't be both.

So where do you fit? And I do agree that the bride here is probably the church, but not for the reasons you might originally elicit from the passage.

Quite often people attack this passage, and they haven't read other parts of Scripture, and therefore they get confused as, Who are these bridesmaids? And notice in this passage in particular, the bride isn't even named.

[5:59] There's very little said about the bride. We're all dealing with bridesmaids. So whoever the bride is, to some extent anyway, is not even relevant to this passage. But if you had to decide who it was, I believe it is the church.

And I also believe the bridesmaids are a representation of the two factions of Israel. They are believing Israel and non-believing Israel.

Now I will hopefully justify that as we go through. And if at the end of it, you think I've gone completely up the wall, please tell me, because if I'm wrong, I'd like to be corrected.

A Jew hearing that Scripture, hearing Jesus saying those words, because the Jews knew their Bible, often knew it entirely, certainly the Old Testament, knew it entirely by rote.

So their thinking would have gone to Psalm 45. And if you turn there with me, you'll see what I mean. Jesus is identifying here, he's implying that he is the groom, to whom the bride is about to be married.

[7:11] And in particular, what we want to read is verse 14 in particular, but we'll read a bit more than that. So verse 14 says, So yeah, okay, what about that?

So let's go back to the rest of the Psalm that precedes that. The first nine verses of that song are talking about a mighty king.

I'm not going to study them because I'll run out of time, but verse 5, Your arrows are sharp and peoples fall under you. Your arrows are in the heart of the king's enemies. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. What a lovely song that is. And then we get to verse 10, Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear.

Forget your people and your father's house. Then the king will desire your beauty because he is your Lord. Bow down to him. The daughters of Tyre will come with a gift.

[8:22] The rich among the people will seek your favor. The king's daughter is all glorious within. Her clothing is interwoven with gold. She will be led to the king and in embroidered work, the virgins, her companions who follow her will be brought to you.

They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing. They will enter the king's palace. So this indicates a wedding attended by virgins who are accompanying the bride, but the groom is not only the groom, but is the king.

And so we have, we believe, I believe, it's probably King Solomon. Although, I could be wrong on that. The scripture's not specific.

But it kind of fits in with the Song of Songs and so on. So I kind of, I'm convinced myself that it's probably Solomon, who was a type of Christ. So when Jesus starts talking about the wedding feast, the kingdom of God may be compared to a wedding feast, the Jews listening would have been thinking Song of Songs and they would have been thinking Psalm 45.

And Jesus quite often uses this, what would you call it, a device, a literary device to guide the thinking of the people around what he's teaching.

[9:42] So, now what we can say, whether I'm right or wrong about this, before we move on, the advice given in this passage is applicable to all of humanity.

I believe the context is, as I have said, I think the bridesmaids are a representation of the Jews and I'll tell you why in a moment. However, whether I'm right or wrong about that is a little bit besides the point because passages such as Ephesians 5 verse 14, if you want to quickly turn there.

In fact, if we start with verse 13, but all things become visible when they are exposed by the light for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, awake sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

There's a call there to diligence and to be the light in the world and to shine God's light on whatever's going on. Then if you flip over to chapter 6, verse 10 onwards, finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

And then we start getting dynamic again. Put on the full armor of God so that you'll be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. And so it goes on. There is a call to the church to be diligent just as these bridesmaids are also being called to be diligent.

[11:00] So don't dismiss this morning study as well that belongs to the Jews. The same advice in many respects is given by Paul to the church. So chapter 25, as we've just read, carries on with this theme of consequences for not being ready.

And he chooses, as an analogy, the Jewish wedding feast because he always chooses for these bits of teaching something with which the Jews will be familiar.

And I think when we look at the Jewish wedding, which I'm going to do a little bit now, what you will understand is when we talk about the Jews as being the people of God, the nation of God, God's chosen people, so many bits of their culture God had organized so that the culture itself would continually prophesy back to them as to how they should conduct themselves and also of the coming Messiah.

And once again, the context that this is written in, the fact that it's a Jewish wedding that's under the microscope here a bit, confirms that the context is the scripture is applicable to the Jews more than anyone else.

And marriage has been used in many places in scripture as an analogy for God's relationship with his people. And we've already seen it used in Matthew 22, verses 1 to 14.

[12:27] I won't go back there, but that's where the wedding feast is described in such a way as God was using it to show that those who thought they had an automatic right of entry shouldn't believe that, that there were those he would happily go out over the waste places and gather anyone to him who would believe.

So the marriage feast has already been used. And so he's here, he's talking about a wedding feast and he's taking the role of the bridegroom and I would say and also the king.

Now the Jewish wedding was probably still is, anybody that's been recently would tell me if this is true, but it was broken down into three parts. And part one was the betrothal.

And just to explain, the betrothal was far more binding than today's engagement. The nearest we have to it in our culture is an engagement.

But the betrothal in a Jewish wedding preamble was a legally binding contract. There were only two ways you could get out of it.

[13:44] One was to die and the other was if you committed adultery then you would have to go through a formal divorce. But that wedding, that marriage, once the betrothal had taken place, that wedding was set in stone.

It was permanent with those two exceptions. And the father of the groom, so the groom would go, the potential groom would go to his dad and say, I want to marry this woman.

And the woman's, sorry, the groom's father would agree with the bride's father a bride price. Now, of course, if you take the bride of Christ, the father of the bride and the father of the groom are the same.

But that doesn't take away the need for an agreement. So the son would go to the father and say, I want to marry this woman. And he would then agree with the bride's father the bride price.

And it could be money, it could be property. The example we've had on a Thursday night fairly recently is all the precious gifts given to Isaac, sorry, given by Isaac to Rebecca and her family before that marriage took place.

[14:59] So the father would agree to pay this bride price. Now, in the case of the church, which is the body of all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, the whole of that body is the bride of Christ.

The bride price the father agreed to pay was the life of his dear son. And so the bride price was paid at the cross of Calvary and he paid it with his own body and blood as agreed with the father.

It's important to understand and I say this mainly because if anybody's listening online they may pick up on this. I've had people say to me in the past and there's even a so-called Christian minister going about at the moment saying this that for the father to put his own son to death was child abuse.

But what that lacks is an understanding of the fact that the father and the son agreed to this. Jesus knew that to take the bride he had to deal with their sin and the only way to deal with their sin was to pay for it with his blood.

So this wasn't some callous father putting his son to death this was an agreement between father and son that that was going to be the price that no lesser price would serve the purpose and so at Calvary he paid the price.

[16:26] The other thing he did we come to the bit about giving gifts to the bride Jesus said in John 14 and John 16 that he was going to the father to prepare a place and this will take me on to section 2 of the marriage in a moment but one of the things that he should have done before this is given gifts.

Now one of the things Jesus did when he went back to the father was he sent the Holy Spirit and so the church was given the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of the gifts the purpose of the groom's gifts to the bride was to provide for the bride to give her security to give her some property of her own often it's called a dowry and she would receive these gifts and they were for her and they were for her sustenance in the event that something happened to him so Jesus gave the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church a more precious gift you could not find and then having paid the bride price the betrothal was then complete the son would then go away for approximately a year no date was actually set but he'd go away for approximately a year during which time he would build her a home usually an extension on the father's house turn with me to John 14 gospel of John chapter 14 and just verses 1 to 3 do not let your heart be troubled believe in God believe also in me in my father's house are many dwelling places if it were not so

I would have told you for I go to prepare a place for you if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am you may be also and you know the way where I am going now this the listeners here would have immediately clicked he's talking about marriage the analogy is with marriage I'm going to my father's house to make a dwelling for you there are lots of dwelling places in my father's house and I'm going to make one for you and then when it's done I'm going to come back and take you to myself which is a picture of the rapture of the church so I'm going to be taken by the Lord to the dwelling place he's prepared for me that's the picture now in in the Jewish marriage the the groom would go back and take about a year to build a dwelling for him and his wife usually an extension to the father's house turn also to John 16 so just turn a couple of pages to the right and we're going to refer to this scripture again in a moment but start at verse 5 and once again

Jesus is saying but now I'm going to the father who sent me so let me just run you through this again man says to father I want to marry this woman father negotiates the bride price sends the son back to confirm the betrothal with the wife then he goes back to his father's house so what you've got here is now I'm going to him who sent me normally the father would send the groom to the bride

but now I'm going to him who sent me and none of you ask me where are you going but because I have said these things to you sorrow has filled your heart and I'm going to read the next bit because I need to refer to it later but the point I want to make here is here Jesus talks about him going back to the father he goes on and says but I tell you the truth it is to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go away the helper will not come to you but if I go I will send him to you and he when he comes will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment concerning sin because they do not believe in me and concerning righteousness because I go to the father and you no longer see me and concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged so I'm going to go to the father and I'm going to send the helper to you precious gift so what we see is not only in verses 14 to 16 there in

John 16 sorry go back to John 16 verses 14 to 16 what we see there is Jesus is talking about his relationship with the father and he says he will glorify me for he will take of mine and disclose it to you all things that the father has are mine therefore I said that he takes of mine and will disclose it to you so he secured the bride with a promise just read on a verse some of his disciples said to one another what is this thing he is telling us a while and you will no longer see me again a little while you will see me because I go to the father so you have in that sentence the promise that he will go away and he will come back and if you get nothing else in this he has said he's coming back we haven't seen that yet the second coming is something that

[22:01] Jesus has promised so these are the sorts of words that a besotted groom might well say to his bride I'm going away to build a house for us an extension on my father's house but I am coming back she would then depend upon that promise and would await his return without knowing when he would return she would await his return and as I say there was no date set it could have been fairly short given that he had a house to build it was likely to be longer it was usually about a year so what you can imagine during that year is that she would be thinking we're getting up to a year he must be coming soon that's exactly what we're all feeling isn't it he can't be much longer and so what you get towards the end of that time is a sense of readiness there is a we are ready for him coming back now this this blows me away but when the groom had completed the home to the father's satisfaction the father would then send him back to get his bride so up to that point nobody knew when he was going to come for his bride only the father knew if we go 24 verse 36

Matthew 24 verse 36 just to remind us we've already studied it but hey it's always good to remind ourselves of occasions when the scripture confirms itself Matthew 24 verse 36 but of that day and hour that's the hour of him coming back no one will know no one knows not even the angels of heaven nor the son but the father alone only the father knows and that that has been written into the Jewish wedding plans for centuries that the norm is that not even the son knows when he's going to be allowed to bring his bride back until the father is satisfied that the house is satisfactory Doesn't that blow your mind?

It blows mine! So we are currently living in this time of betrothal we have been betrothed and we're waiting for him to return and people who set dates are mad for the reasons we've just explored he doesn't give us dates he just gives us his intention but this leaves us with something of a dilemma when's he actually going to rock up when's he going to turn up we don't know so the only things that we can do there are two things we can do and only one that we should do the two things we can do is go well it'll either happen or it won't or we can be diligent awaiting his coming and not be caught out as some of these bridesmaids were caught out so only only the father knows when he's going to send the bridegroom back to us and we are awaiting!

his return now the thing about awaiting! the return of the groom was that once you were betrothed you had to keep yourself pure! no adultery no hanky panky you had to keep yourself pure however long that was are we keeping ourselves pure?

and that's a rhetorical question I'll leave it out there but it's a good question to ask every time temptation comes are we keeping ourselves pure? because his expectation is that we will God the father has already been through this with Israel and Israel was an adulterous nation and they have been unfaithful to God many times and he's still willing to forgive them nevertheless it's brought them nothing but trouble and if you want your Christian life not to bring you loads of trouble!

[26:28] during this period of waiting the bride would gather around her the bridesmaids or companions usually virgins who would also eagerly await the groom's appearance and their job was to prepare the bride so hmmm okay in John 4 verse 22 we read salvation is from the Jews what does the bride need in order to be ready it needs to be saved at the very least salvation is from the Jews there's a scripture in Isaiah I think it's in chapter 42 I might get to it in a moment if I can remember it that where God says Israel is to be it was created to be a light unto the Gentiles so the source of our salvation if I'm right about identifying the bridesmaids as

Israel their job was to prepare the bride some of them made a great job of it and some of them made a pig's ear of it but their job was to prepare the bride which is why I've concluded that the bridesmaids were a picture of Israel believing Israel and unbelieving Israel because unbelieving Israel have not really done their duty but believing Israel are the ones and in fact it's really interesting because whether they believe whether they're believing or not what they have done is they've carried the word of God through the centuries so that the bride could be prepared and in that sense to me the bridesmaids here are a picture of Israel now when the bride when the groom came back to get his bride he would return suddenly and at night no prescribed date but he would turn up suddenly and at night hence we read in the passage we just read the cry went up at midnight the groom is here come out and meet him so there would have been this flurry of activity and they'd all get dressed and light their torches because once they'd gone out to meet the groom the groom would lead the procession through the town and they would all have their torches lit and there'd be this torch lit procession just in case you're in doubt this wasn't people carrying little hurricane in their torch or anything like that mobile phones with the torch app switched on this would have been the old what you would you'd see in the films depicting a bygone age where you'd have a staff with a bunch of rag on the top that was soaked in olive oil and they would set fire to it and they would walk with that and when it started to dim they get out the flask of spare oil and they would put more oil on it so that it wouldn't run out before the end of the procession so this picture of we've got these ten virgins and the groom is coming incidentally just as an aside in western marriage we elevate the bride and

I'm sure she was fine and so on but in Jewish marriage it was always the groom! the bride the most important person was the groom because the groom was always a type of Christ but that's a bit of an aside so he comes at midnight and as you would expect they're all asleep it's what you do at midnight there's no sin in that but when the cry goes up they immediately oh he's here we better get going and then there are those who are ready oil in the lamp let go and there are those who go oh I've got no oil quick I wanted to try and set up a thing here so that somebody would burst in at this point and go has anybody got any oil I need oil but it didn't happen the thing is though what's the thing about oil and what's the thing about light well two things here oil in scripture is always a representation of the holy spirit so the bridesmaids who had the oil their lamps were charged and they had a flask full of oil they had if you can possibly have this a surfeit of the holy spirit typologically and then in psalm 105 we read

I think it's sorry it's psalm 119 verse 105 says his word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path and we can find in revelation 22 verse 5 we see Jesus the living word illuminating the earth so the light that the holy spirit sheds is the word of God that gives light to the path of us who walk the earth and you've got one bunch of bridesmaids virgins companions who are not ready because they're not full of the spirit and they're not full of the light of life or the light of God and I know I'm speaking typologically here but you've got another lot that are ready that have been diligent they've charged their oil they've charged their lamps and they're ready to go

I think I painted this picture last week of the fireman who's about to get out and go on a call and they certainly used to sleep with their trousers over their boots beside the bed and when the alarm went off they would be out so fast they used to time themselves to get from bed to fire engine they were that ready and these five of these bridesmaids are ready and the others are not now coming back to the analogy that we spoke of earlier the ones who are not ready because they've been apathetic and they're not full of what is typologically the word of God and the light of God and they're this isn't just a wedding they're going to miss I'm sure we've all had to miss the weddings of friends and it's sad but hey it's not the end of the world this is the wedding of the king and it's not only the wedding

of the king but it's the wedding of the king of all kings and they knew they should have been ready for it if it is king

[33:43] Solomon then Solomon was a type of Christ and so when Jesus is painting himself into this picture here he is painting himself into the picture of the king of kings whose wedding feast you do not want to miss and as a Jewish bridesmaid you're responsible for preparing the bride one of the messages that comes out of this is you cannot piggyback faith you cannot have faith because I've got faith you are personally responsible for developing your own faith for making sure your own oil is full and your own lamp can shine you can't do it on somebody else's you can't piggyback it I mean there are lots of Christians who think well I go to church so I'm a Christian you can spend your life living in a

library and not consume anything from any of the books doesn't make you a bookworm because you live in a library or the other analogy is obviously you can go and move into your garage but you'll never become a car right we have to be we have to take responsibility for our own salvation now this is going to come hard to some but imagine and please if you have an unsaved husband imagine if you reject Christ and you are then you are the leader of your household you are therefore going to lead your kids away from Christ and we know from scripture that if any of you lead one of these little ones astray it would be better for you have a millstone tied around your neck and be thrown into the sea fathers are responsible for leading their children into the path of God which you can't do if you're not going there yourself and I know we have folk in the room who have unsaved other halves but there's no way to dodge this and actually if it puts a fire under us to encourage them to turn to Christ then so be but God if I'd have led my kids away from him at some point God would hold me accountable for that and my children were I think five and three respectively when I got saved and starting to lead them toward God took place there and then and has been there ever since that day but I look back now and think I so nearly missed it was such a close call lots of people believe they're Christians even though they don't go to church oh yeah I think I believe in Jesus he was a nice man they haven't they haven't got the heart relationship that a bride would have with a groom and the relationship between a bride and a groom is an intimate one people pay mental assent to

Jesus as a historical figure that lived and walked about and did a few miracles and I don't know whether I believe those or not but to be part of the bride you need to have a heart to be intimate with the groom just turn briefly to 2nd chronicles 15 and we're just going to read from verse 4 to 7 this is a time when Israel is in distress it says but in their distress they turned to the Lord God of Israel and they sought him and he let them find him in those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the land nation was crushed by nation and city by city for God troubled them with every kind of distress but you be strong and do not lose courage for there is reward for your work they sought!

he hasn't said go and get an ology at university in order to follow me he simply said follow me have that desire to be intimate with me I just want to finish up with this turn to revelation because we need to think what's the takeaway for us here and I think it's obvious but I'll say it anyway and that is keep on keeping on seek that intimacy with him turn to revelation chapter two and I'm going to cherry pick some verses here because there's a point at the back of this so chapter two verse seven he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God go to verse 11 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death go to verse 17 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to him who overcomes

[39:24] I will give some of the hidden manna and I will give which no one knows but he who receives it and then go to verse 29 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches and then chapter 3 verse 6 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches and then verse 13 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches!

the point that comes from this all of those letters to all of those churches he deals with the church as a body and he either says well done or he says actually I've got this against you and you need to

correct yourself by doing this or that or the other but in every case he puts the solution in the hands of the individual pronouns are important not as important as some people think today but they are important he who has an ear is a singular and where you express a corporate thing in Greek you use the masculine so he does not mean women are excluded he who has an ear means anyone who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches so I've got this against you church of Laodicea but you individuals who are in the church of Laodicea listen to what the spirit says to the churches it's our responsibility to conduct our salvation if you are hanging on in a church that is dying because you are loyal get out go find a church that has this desire for intimacy with Jesus and as long as they've got that it doesn't matter but a lot of those churches haven't got that and people stay in that

I've got particularly Roman Catholic friends that know that Roman Catholicism is deep, deep, deep in error oh but I can't leave because I'm loyal sorry but you need to leave the book of Jude tells us to leave those places and if possible take some with us so I believe that's the application for us I'm going to leave it there there's more I could say but I've run out of time and I think you've been very patient Father thank you so much for this word and I pray that if I've misunderstood this passage which I must admit I I struggled and I did work hard with it but Lord if I've misunderstood it I pray that you'd correct me but Lord there's lots of it that I didn't misunderstand and I know you want us to desire intimacy with you and so Lord I do pray that you will show us how to do that how to put our anchors into you so that we never ever lose touch with you and I know Lord that you are gracious that you saved us despite everything and you've given us a salvation that is secure but Lord show us how to enjoy that salvation through intimacy with you for the rest of our natural lives in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen