

THEREFORE KEEP WATCH

Matthew 25:1-13

Key Verse: 25:13

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

In chapter 25, Jesus tells us through three parables what will happen when he comes again, especially in his church. According to Jesus, there will be two kinds of people. One kind is blessed and rewarded. The other kind is cursed and punished. This judgment extends into eternity. Obviously, we want to be blessed and rewarded. Then we must learn from Jesus the basic attitude of those who wait for his return. Each of these three parables teaches us an important lesson. Today’s passage, the parable of the ten virgins, tells us how to keep watch and prepare for his coming. Let’s learn from Jesus how to keep watch.

First, be as pure as a virgin in devotion to Christ (1).

Look at verse 1. “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.” “At that time” means the time of Jesus’ coming again in power and great glory. The ten virgins refer to the members of Jesus’ church. It seems significant that Jesus uses the image of a virgin. A virgin’s defining quality is her purity. She saves herself for her bridegroom of destiny, forsaking all others. This is how we should wait for Jesus. Jesus is the bridegroom (Mt 9:15a). The church is his virgin bride (Rev 19:8). We anticipate a glorious union with Christ, overflowing with joy. Therefore, we must keep ourselves pure as we wait for Jesus.

In the Bible there are wonderful examples of virgins who lived with pure hearts and fulfilled God’s destiny. One is Rebekah in Genesis. As we know, Father Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, the son of the covenant. As the servant prayed at a well outside the town of Nahor, Rebekah appeared. Genesis 24:16a says, “The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, no man had ever lain with her.” At the servant’s request, she drew water for him, and his camels as well. The servant perceived that Rebekah was God’s choice for Isaac. Her family members agreed and asked whether she would go to Isaac and marry him. She said, “I will go.” In truth, she committed herself fully to God. From her, we learn purity of heart and decisiveness in life commitment. We find the same quality in the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

When our Lord Jesus comes again, we must be found waiting for him, and him alone. When Jesus comes, we must be ready to go with him immediately into eternity. Paul told the Corinthians, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him” (2 Cor 11:2). With this attitude, Paul kept watch over himself and the flock of God. We must examine our hearts. We must be like pure virgins in waiting for Jesus. If we are not, let’s repent and be cleansed in his blood (1 Jn 1:7,9).

Second, be wise and prepare (2-5).

At first glance, the virgins seem to be all the same. They were all virgins; they all had lamps; they all went out to meet the bridegroom. They might have been singing together as they went. But Jesus tells us that there was a big difference among them. Five of them were foolish and five were wise (2). How was this revealed? The wise took extra oil in jars along with their lamps (3,4). This act of preparing extra oil shows that they used their minds to think ahead. They were diligent in thinking. Then they acted based on their foresight. They were like students who pay careful attention to the class syllabus and then make a prudent study plan and follow it to stay ahead of schedule. These people submit their financial aid applications well before the deadline and receive the best grants and scholarships. They do not live according to their moods or feelings; they do what they should do. It might have seemed burdensome to carry extra oil, like carrying an extra bag through the airport security checkpoints. But they did so willingly. On the other hand, the foolish ones were lazy. Either they were too lazy to think ahead, or they were too lazy to act on the basis of what they knew. Lazy people become foolish people. In Biblical thought, folly is a moral problem. Fools live according to fleshly senses, like Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. They pursue sensual gratification without any serious regard for their future. They are like students who ignore deadlines, intending to make up for it later, maybe through a miracle.

Jesus wants his people to be wise. In Matthew 7:24-29, Jesus told the parable of the wise builder. It was to encourage his people to spend enough time understanding his words and putting them into practice. Then they could

lay their life foundation on the rock of his truth instead of the shifting sand of human ideas. This requires devotion and hard work, like writing Bible testimonies faithfully. Again, in Matthew 24:45-46, Jesus commended “the faithful and wise servant.” By the way, where does wisdom come from? Jesus is our wisdom (1Co 1:30). We can have wisdom when we ask God. James 1:5 says, “If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.” When we pray, God does not rebuke all of our shortcomings and send us away condemned. Rather, God sends Jesus into our hearts. Then we can become wiser than King Solomon.

When the virgins went out to meet the bridegroom, they expected him to be there. But he was not. Look at verse 5. “The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.” The bridegroom was a long time in coming. As the minutes turned to hours, their sense of keen anticipation began to waver. Amid the burning lamps they became drowsy and fell into sound sleep one by one. This tells us that we cannot stay awake for Jesus’ coming by our own strength. Even the wise virgins fell asleep. They were not superheroes with extraordinary power. They were weak in their flesh, just like the foolish ones. Still, they were distinguished from the foolish by their wisdom. This encourages us. Though we are weak, we too can be wise when we pray.

Third, have personal faith in Jesus (6-12).

Look at verse 6. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’” The bridegroom was near. It was time for the wedding party members to present themselves and form a joyful procession. Look at verse 7. “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.” The virgins must have been startled and they hurriedly made final preparations by trimming their lamps. This is to cut away the charred parts of the wick so the lamps would burn brightly. As they did so, the foolish ones noticed that their lamps were going out. They were out of oil. In desperation, they asked the wise ones to share their oil. They seem to have a habit of depending on the wise. Perhaps they had borrowed clothes and cookware and study notes and money from the wise in the past. But this time the wise refused. “‘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’” (9). The wise were not being selfish. They were wise. The most important thing for each one was to go into the wedding banquet. To divide their oil would risk their own entry. They would not take that risk. In the same way, each human being must make sure of his own salvation. We can risk many things to help and serve others, but we cannot risk our salvation. What is more, saving faith cannot be transferred. When we stand at the gate of heaven we can enter only through our personal faith in Christ. We cannot borrow this from another and we cannot lend it to another.

The words of the wise virgins are valid. They said, “go and buy some for yourselves.” Going to buy oil is like investing time and energy to grow in personal faith. This is the best way to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Then how can we have personal faith? We can do so through the word of God and prayer. Romans 10:17 says, “...faith comes through hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Again, in John 5:24 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” The word of God is right here for us, but each of us must decide to spend personal time listening to Jesus. We can also grow in personal faith when we acknowledge God’s sovereignty in our trials and receive them as divine discipline. This also requires a personal decision. Then our trials turn to gold. 1 Peter 1:7 says, “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Growing in personal faith does not happen naturally. It happens to those who seek God intentionally.

Each of us must prepare for Jesus’ coming personally. It is a great blessing to live in the UBF community. But this will not get anyone into heaven. It is a great blessing to grow up in a Christian family and to have many Christian friends. But this will not get anyone into heaven. We must get to know Jesus personally, now, while we have the freedom and opportunity to do so. We must each learn to depend on God personally for our eternal salvation.

Look at verse 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.” When the bridegroom arrived, only those who were ready went into the wedding banquet. Those who were not ready when he came were left out. It is true that they had been ready earlier, but they were not ready when he came. It is important to be ready when Jesus comes. Those who have professed Christ for many years must consider this soberly. Being ready yesterday does not

earn any credit if we are not ready today. We must be ready for Jesus' coming until he comes. Some of us must admit that we have been on a spiritual vacation. We go through the motions of serving God but there is no burning passion to see Jesus come again in our hearts. Perhaps a difficult personal problem has distracted us. Or we might have simply become tired and lazy. We must wake up spiritually. We must be ready when Jesus comes.

Verse 10 ends, "And the door was shut." These are ominous words. Once the door is shut, those who are in are in, and those who are out are out. At the present moment, Jesus' grace is available to anyone and everyone. Jesus said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Acts 2:21 says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But a time is coming when the door will be shut. We must enter into the kingdom of heaven now, by faith.

Look at verses 11-12. "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir! They said. Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'" The real problem of the foolish virgins was that they did not know Christ. Jesus knows those who are his. Only those who have a personal relationship with Jesus will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Fourth, keep watch (13).

Look at verse 13. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Jesus' point of this parable is to keep watch. This means that we must live by faith in Jesus' promise in an adulterous and sinful generation. People of the world say, "The world is just going on as it always has. Jesus is not coming again. There is no judgment" (2 Pe 3:3,4). They justify all manner of ungodly behavior. In this environment we must keep watch for Jesus' coming again. We must hold Jesus' promise in our hearts. Jesus said, "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." It is eternal destruction for the ungodly, but glorious victory for Jesus' people.

There is a documentary movie called "The Endurance." It is based on the true story of an English expedition to cross the antarctic led by Mr. Shackleton in 1914. After their ship was destroyed, his crew of 27 men were left stranded on a desolate, icy island. Mr. Shackleton and four others set out by lifeboat to try to reach a whaling outpost hundreds of miles away. It would take three months all together. During that time, the crew members lived in terrible cold and darkness. Their only food was whale blubber and seal meat. There was a temptation to let the cold overpower them and fall into a deadly sleep. But they believed that Mr. Shackleton would return. They kept watch every day. Keeping watch in hope kept them alive. As they had hoped, Mr. Shackleton returned and they all went safely back to England, missing no one. In the same way, we are often tempted to fall asleep in worldly desires and the power of sin. But this will rob our spiritual life. We must keep watch in hope for Jesus' coming again. Jesus will come again in power and great glory to give us eternal life, everlasting victory, and true glory. May God bless each of us to keep watch like the wise virgins until Jesus comes.