

Almost Ready Isn't Ready

I Am Not Afraid series

by Chris Famisaran

If Jesus is coming soon, what does that mean for how we live right now?

Father in heaven, as we take a look now at our last sermon, in the last section of Matthew 25, Help us, Lord, to understand, to be faithful, to be patient, and to be prepared in Jesus name, amen.

About maybe eight years ago, there was an article written how in St. Paul, next to Minneapolis and Minnesota, all 400 St. Paul firefighters have to train for ice rescue. Because if you're not aware, it freezes in Minnesota, that whole area. And so the departments, they were having to respond to a couple of rescues each year. If you've seen pictures of Minnesota, you know that people literally can drive cars onto a lake, right? Ice fishing is very popular. And so unfortunately, tragedy strikes sometimes and people will slip through. Well, less than two hours after the firefighters had completed their training, there was a cross-country skier who was going across a body of water and fell through on the ice at McCarran's Lake in Roseville. So the St. Paul firefighters, they geared up, they went, and the new firefighter who had just gone through this training hours before, was able to don a suit, get in the water and to secure that person to bring them out. And. And the training was done on the day, the first time he had been in the water with the ice rescue happening.

Are you grateful? Wow. Are you grateful for that person? I'm sure that person who was cross-country skiing was very grateful for this new firefighter, this rookie, to jump into the water and rescue them out. But all of that took preparation, it took time, it took responsibility.

So we're going to be talking about that today in Matthew 25. So, let's go to our first set of passages. I want to go to briefly, Matthew 24, actually, because there's actually five parables that come together and I'll just briefly highlight the first two in that. Towards the end of Matthew 24, Jesus shares a couple of parables where he says, in verse 45, who then is a faithful and wise servant

whom the master has put in charge of the servants in the household to make sure and take care and to be responsible. It would be good for that servant if the master finds him doing so as he returns. Truly, I tell you, he will put him in charge of all of his possessions.

But on the flip side, what if, though? But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, my master is staying away for a very long time, and then he begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards, and the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he is not aware, cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Strong language by Jesus. Okay? And it helps to set up chapter 25 and kind of in relation to the end of Matthew 24. We're all called to be servants of Jesus. And yet sometimes I think it's easy for us to maybe get a little when somebody is delayed.

Okay, maybe you're okay growing up when your parents went out, maybe they went on a date, maybe they went to go visit somebody. And maybe, especially if you're the oldest, you were, what, you were left in charge to make sure to what? Make sure nobody hurts or breaks anything. But also clean the house, right? When did you start cleaning the house? You take a time. Oh, they'll be back by three. When do you start cleaning? 2:50, right? You gotta do the dishes, you gotta dust the counters, you gotta make your beds.

I was listening to this. I was listening to this podcast, and there was a guy, he was relaying the fact of similar story, how his parents told them, you're responsible, make sure this house is clean when we get back. And of course, what do they do? They don't do anything. They play video games, they do all the fun stuff. They're running around outside. And then his parents called him and said, hey, we're heading home. And so, of course, what do they do? Eh, we still gotta. It takes about 30 minutes for them to get home. And then they realize about 10 minutes before 3, it's like, wait, we gotta clean. So they clean. And even then, what was so funny is years later, he talks to his parents and he said, you know, we would do this and that. And his parents, oh, we knew. In fact, his mom said your father would actually intentionally slow down about maybe a mile before to give you a little extra time for you all to clean up, right?

Kids, your parents know, they know every trick. They know everything, right? They're not dumb.

And we're in this. In this state of waiting, been waiting for many years, all right, For Jesus to return. Let's go down to chapter 25.

And starting now, we're going to look at three pictures, okay? And this here, this first picture is the parable of 10 virgins, okay? Verse 1.

At the time of the kingdom of heaven, we'll be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and now went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were, what? And Five of them were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps up, but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and they fell asleep.

Now they just for context, okay, and weddings, back in the day, you didn't just drive to the wedding venue. The wedding happens, maybe you stay for the reception and you go home. It was a multi day affair. That sounds exhausting, right?

Oh, I got married once, I prefer to keep it that way. I want to stay married to my wife forever. And it was beautiful, it was wonderful. But imagine, stressed out over five days. Oh, and so they're waiting. Verse 6.

At midnight the cry rang out, here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him. And all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones and the wise, give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out. And they replied, there may not be enough for both of us. Instead, dream, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves. But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went at them in the wedding banquet and the door was shut. Later the others came. Lord, Lord, they said, open the door for us. But he replied, truly, I tell you, I don't know you. Therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or of the hour. And so Jesus is talking and giving them wisdom to prepare for the future.

Okay, you don't know the day that I am to come, but be prepared. So throughout this, these next, these three pictures is that as I was reading this, I realized this week that there is an overall theme of responsibility, okay, there is an overall theme of responsibility for followers of Jesus.

The other thing, okay, so what's true about this story though, is that all 10 of them were what? They were all asleep, Okay? Y' all like to sleep. I like to sleep. So Even though all 10 of them, though, but half of them were wise because they were what? Prepared. And the other foolish, eh, it's going to happen soon. I'm just going to procrastinate and wait a little bit. But they weren't ready. Those who were wise, they were dressed for action. They were ready. Their lamps were ready to go.

And sometimes in our faith, are we diligent and vigilant in our faith to remember to keep the oil burning in the lamp? Are we taking time to spend God? Are we taking time to be in the community? Are we faithful? Or maybe as it says, as your clothes, is your belt buckle tightened? Does everything fit? Or is it loose? Or are you ready? Are you dressed appropriately to go, be ready. But then also, as it says, at the midnight, the cry went out, are we being faithful? Are we watching? Or do we get comfortable and maybe fall asleep?

As Mark 13 says, Believers, be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know the time when will come. But also, are we taking care of ourselves? Are we Sober minded, as 1st Thessalonians 5 says? Do we have the ability to think clearly? Do we have spiritual discernment? Is it easy for us to be distracted being diligent? Are we being faithful and responsible to make sure that we're not distracted? And so, as we also move forward, are we walking in the light? Is the oil burning? Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Are we reflecting Jesus? Are we reflecting the light? And not only that, are we close to burning out? Or do we have enough supply?

How many of you love to drive to the edge of barely getting by with the gas tank almost on empty? Okay, I used to be horribly egregious about that. If my tank is not at least half full, I start to get anxiety, right? Which means multiple trips to the gas station, which can be vexing, because then when you look at the gas prices, you're like, ugh. But when you run out of gas, you run out of

gas. And hopefully you have a triple A card, and hopefully you have reception or the kindness of a stranger. Otherwise, what happens? You're stranded.

So are we prepared? Are we a faithful and wise servant? Are we following what God has asked us and called us to do? All of this is being prepared. Are we staying firm in prayer as well? Do we know the Savior? Do we know the bridegroom? Do we know who is coming to save us? And lastly, are we standing firm in faith?

So the five, the five who were wise were present and prepared, and the other five were. I'm just going to wait. I think as followers of Jesus, I think God has called us to be diligent, to be faithful, to know who God is, but also to be prepared.

Now, the next picture here that we find is that of the parables of bags, of gold or of talents. So as we shift now, okay, verse 14, Jesus says, again, it will be like a man going on a journey who's called his servants and entrusted to them with wealth. To one he gave five bags of what and how many to the next person? Two bags. And the last person, how much did he get? One Bag. And what does it say next? Each according to their ability. Okay, so recognize, they all didn't get the same. They got what they were based what they were. God felt was, was right and entrusted to. Okay, so the first one. So then he went on his journey.

Verse 16. The man who received five bags of gold went out at once and put his money to work. And he gained how much more? Five more. He doubled the investment. Okay, so also the one with two bags of gold gained how much? Two more. But the one who received one bag went off and he did what? He dug a hole. He put the gold in there and he covered it. He hid his master's money.

Verse 19. After a long time, the master of these servants returned and he settled accounts with them. The man who received five bags brought the other master, you've entrusted me with five bags of gold, see, I've gained five more. Jesus says his master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I'll put you in charge of how much many things. Come and share your master's happiness. Okay?

Verse 22. The man with two bags of gold said, master, he said, you entrusted me with two bags of gold, see, I've gained two more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I'm going to put you in charge of how much many things. Come and share your master's happiness.

Verse 24. You notice how it changes the writing? Then the man who received one bag of gold, he came and said, master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And so I was afraid and I went out and I hid your gold in the ground. See, here's what belongs to you. Okay, so you gave me this gold, I buried it, and now here's the gold. Was the master upset with him? Let's find out.

Verse 26. You wicked and lazy servant. That's not a good start for him. So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. Well, then you should have put money on deposit with the bankers so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest.

Okay, so if you'd at least gone to the bank and deposited there, just put in a cd, a mutual fund, whatever, I would have at least gotten a little bit back, right? But this guy, he was so fearful, he didn't even try. What is Jesus trying to say? Here is, look, I want to give you Opportunities to be able to serve, to steward what I have blessed you with. All he simply wants us to do is try. Now, do you think the Master just randomly gave them five gold pieces, two gold pieces or one gold pieces, and just say, go out there, or did he do it with intention? Because there's a difference. Some got five, one got two. One got one each according to their what? Their ability.

He didn't give five each and go try to do something. I think that there was intentionality because the Master believed in them according to their ability. And all they would have had to have done was at least try. But as her guy, he did not even try. And what happened to the first two? They were blessed. It was doubled. And I think sometimes we're so fearful though, because when God gives us responsibility, God gives us either resources or an opportunity to work for God. Does that motivate you?

Are you excited or are you scared to death? There's kind of in between. Are you ambivalent? And I hope and pray that you will be inspired even if you are scared to death. Because all great things start, I hope, with a little bit of fear. Why? Because it keeps you humble. If you receive an opportunity and you say, I'm going to crush this and smash this and be awesome, I'd be a little nervous. Because the best leaders are those who are humble and listen, the first two were faithful. They received the responsibility that the Master had entrusted. The one that he gave five pieces of gold especially. Did he trust that person? Yeah, because that was a lot of money. Would he just randomly do that? If he didn't trust him, how much would he have given? I'll just give you silver and bronze. I ain't giving you gold. No. He gave them each a gold piece, if not more, by two or by five. And I think Jesus trusts us a little more credit than we would. But we have to be able to try.

So be faithful. Does fear dictate your life like the third person? The people who have courage to do great things, are they fearful at all? All the time. But they move in spite. I remember there was a particular challenge I was dealing with and I was so scared to death. But the only way things were going to be resolved is if I put one foot in front of the other. Just like everything that you have done in your life, you've had to make a decision. I will go in spite of my fear, in spite of my hesitation. And I and trust God. And if we do so with God's grace, God will make a way so stewards okay?

We're all stewards. We're all called to be faithful. And ultimately, God simply, I think it's just. The bar is just, hey, try and allow me to work in your life. And sometimes trying again, it may be scary, but it may also be thrilling when what God has done in your life could be better than you would have ever imagined. So trust, okay? So ultimately, be prepared. And how well are you stewarding the gifts, the resources and opportunities God has given you? God has given you blessed. God has given you gifts. God has blessed you with these gifts.

The last picture now. Okay, the third part of this passage, verse 31. When the Son of man comes in his glory and all of the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne, all of the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people from one from another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He'll put the sheep on his right and the goats on his

left. And then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and. And you gave me what, something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger. You invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came and visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or imprisoned and go and visit you? The king replied, truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to what to me?

Verse 41. Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you didn't invite me in. I needed clothes and you didn't clothe me. I was sick and imprisoned and you did not look after me. They will answer, lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick or in prison and did not help you? He will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal Punishment and the righteousness to eternal life.

We'll come back to that passage. I know that's a difficult passage, but the main emphasis here is what is the thing that tied these two groups? Okay, what? They didn't know they were serving or rejecting God, Okay? They didn't know that they were serving or rejecting God. And it's interesting. Jesus identifies as what, one of these, the least of these. Think about this then, okay, If God identifies with those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, those who are in prison, those who need clothes, those who are in need, how does that change your perspective? When you go to Ralph's, when you go to the post office, when you go to the dmv, whenever you go into the sea. And those around you, okay, now they may not necessarily need food or clothing, but everyone is in need, physically or spiritually. And when you look at them, how do you look at them? Do you look at them as just hungry or as a fact of.

Do you see Jesus? These people? Is that going to affect how you treat that person? How are you going to see them? Are you going to see them with love and grace or avoidance or maybe disgust as we wait for Jesus?

Last week I said, Jesus does not want us to be what, passive? Jesus wants to be proactive, to be responsible. And so the first part of this picture that we're talking about here, the first is don't fall, even if you fall asleep, because nobody can stay awake forever. Be prepared. Are you getting to know Christ? Are you adding to the oil?

But the second part is now, are you being responsible what God has given with you, or are you spending it on yourself? And lastly, the third portrait in Matthew 25 is to go out and serve those just maybe. There's also a passage as well that says you may even be entertaining angels. Jesus identifies with the least of these as my brothers. How does recognizing Jesus presence in the Vulnerable Review reshape how we view serving others?

It's been a very challenging, interesting week, I'd say. I mean, many of you have seen the destruction that's happened in Nepal and Tibet. At first I thought it was AI. I thought somebody made a horrible video. But then I looked at who was sharing it and I realized they would never do something like that in the first picture I see. And some of you have ever have also seen just whole villages just completely wiped out. There was no chance. Thousands of people have passed away already. Many more probably will also come up.

If you've been a millennial or Xennial, it's also another tough week because the great Peter Cullen, the voice of Optimus prime, many other, many other fine shows passed away at 85. Tim Curry as well. But I think everyone can also agree, what a tragedy that one who was so universally loved in this world, Dolly Parton. It's funny somebody said, you know, this is the one thing that can, at least we as a country can be united upon. Despite all our division, we love Dolly. I knew Dolly was a very gracious and selfless person, but as I researched this week, I didn't realize how, how generous she was. For instance, in 1995, she started the Imagination Library to help children in her own hometown of Seville county in Tennessee. She wanted to make sure that each child would have a free, high quality, not a cheap, but a good book mailed directly to their home every month until they were five years old.

You also add the People Fund. Dolly launched this fund as an emergency disaster response to the wildfires that tore through the Smoky Mountains years ago. It was unconditional direct cash. They also had the trusting people where the money was given with no strings attached. And sometimes there was a surprise bonus that Dolly hosted a mass of star studded national telethon that successfully raised not just thousands, but millions of dollars for the cause. Over total, it said that they spent more, distributed over \$12 million to wildfire disaster victims and provided scholarships to high school students who lost their homes. And then you have the children's hospitals funded where they renamed it the Dolly Parton Children's Hospital. But she quietly advocated and raised money for a long time. And then you have the Monroe Carroll Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt University. It's also been said that the buddy program is something that she developed where in the town that she grew up, they noticed that they were facing a huge major crisis of kids dropping out of school. And by around, I think it's seventh or eighth grade, they could track already pretty, pretty accurately of who was going to finish high school or not just drop out and go to work. And so what she did was she called all of the local middle schoolers to a special assembly at Dollywood and she had them pair up with a friend and they both had to sign a contract to do whatever it took to keep them in school. And so Dolly promised them that if both of their friends, if their buddies successfully graduated from high school, she would personally hand them a \$500 check each. Now \$500 in Southern California, that's good money. But in Tennessee goes a lot further generosity.

Also, I know this is how I kind of started to learn how generous she was. She was providing music, education, instruments and everything to underserved schools of all races. She quietly advocated. She did not want to be known. Kindness, generosity, service, all through acts of love. Now, I'm not saying Dolly is perfect or a saint. I'm sure she had her own challenges. But what an inspiration.

How can we, perhaps especially quietly, without knowing, how can we serve others? How can we be kind? How can we be helpful? It may be literal helping somebody to put clothes on their back, or sometimes just being the presence or being willing to just listen and talk with somebody who's going through a very hard time.

So who are the least of these in your life that you can serve? How can you be a light? How can you be the salt and light that Jesus has called us to go into the world? How can we love one another? How can we love God with everything? With our heart, soul, mind and strength. And love our neighbor as ourselves. And one of the things that I realized is that as we're waiting for Jesus, I am grateful that Jesus said this, because it gives us what. It gives us something to do. If you sit at home and do nothing, what happens? You can tell yourself and your mind all kinds of stories and make up all kinds of things. But if you're actually doing something, guess what? Does it make the time go by faster? Yes. So I know, brothers and sisters, it has been challenging. We're all waiting. Some of us have been waiting since the day we were born. Some of us have been maybe waiting a week for Jesus to return. But until that glorious, wonderful, beautiful day, help us to be wise. Help. Let's all be wise, not only personally, but also corporately as a church to be prepared for when the bridegroom comes. May we be faithful in our stewardship of what God has blessed us with to serve others. And in doing so, let us not discriminate who we serve. Let us be able to serve even the least of these.

So for your reflection this week, which of these three pictures. Those who are waiting, the 10 virgins, the talents or the sheep and the goats? Which of these describe your greatest challenge? Okay. Being prepared, being faithful, or being compassionate?

One last verse I want to leave you with. Okay, let's go to Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10, Hebrews 10. All right. And let us consider how we may. What? Spur? Okay. Encourage. It's not passive. It's not a noun. It is an. It's a verb. It's an action. How can we spur one another? Untoward love and good deeds not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching faithfully. Wait.

As a community this week, I want you to go and connect with someone you normally would not associate with, okay? That could be anybody. And I want you to show kindness to that person, okay? Say hello, make them smile, tell them they have a really great car, whatever, bring them a cup of orange juice. Whatever it may be, be kind and may we As I said in the first week, I'm not afraid if I have Jesus with me. So don't be afraid because he who overcame

the world is also leading and guiding us until that great and wonderful beautiful day. I hope and pray that this has been a blessing and an encouragement to you. I know this is a very broad, very basic understanding of this topic.

We're going to dive more in the future at some point. I already have in mind what we're planning to do, but there's also a lot of things that we have to also work towards. So I pray if you have questions about this topic, please don't be afraid to reach out to us or any of our elders. We will be happy to study with you.

Father in heaven. Lord, we know you have promised that you will one day return. We don't know exactly when that will be, but we know that you are a good and faithful God. And until that day, help us, Lord, to be prepared. Help us to be faithful with what you have given to us. And help us, Lord, to serve all of those who are the least of these as you have identified in Jesus name. Everybody said Amen,

Grace and peace, everyone.