

## **Session 13 How Then Shall We Live? Three Parables**

### **I. PRACTICAL PREPARATION**

- A. Jesus said that He would come *quickly* (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20) and that we must live in *readiness* because the end-times scenario would begin at a time that we would not *expect*. Matthew 24-25 are one teaching that focuses on practical ways God's people are to respond. How then should we live? Jesus taught on the end times, then gave practical applications in three parables (Mt. 24:45-25:30).

***<sup>44</sup>You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect... (Mt. 24:44)***

*This is the fourteen session of the course, Knowing the Biblical Signs of the Times. I am calling this, How Then Shall We Live? Some of you know that is similar to a title from a famous book by Francis Schaffer that he wrote in 1976. He was describing the decline of the Western culture and its corruption and decay and where it was going. He was saying this forty years ago. His big question was, well how do we live in the light of such pressure and such negativity because we are servants of the King? So I am just borrowing that phrase.*

*Jesus gave us three parables. We know that Matthew 24-25 is His most elaborate teaching on the end times in the Bible. It is important to know that Matthew 24-25 is one message; it is one conversation, so you do not want to separate those chapters. You want to keep them together. In doing so you will get a fuller message. You get a more complete idea because you get the whole conversation. Then, to really complete it, add Luke 21 to it, because Luke 21 is the same conversation as here in Matthew 24-25.*

*Well, here in Matthew 24-25, Jesus lays out the crisis and the glory related to His second coming, both the crisis and the glory. Then He tells us how to respond and gives us three parables. We are going to look at each parable briefly.*

*Now His overriding point that He made particularly in the book of Revelation is that "I am coming quickly." For 2,000 years nobody has been sure what exactly that meant. He said, in other words, "When I come, you have to be ready." He meant ready spiritually, that we would have a responsive heart, we would not be sluggish, we would not be weighed down, but we would be responsive, that we would be ready in our heart response. Not only that we would have an inspired understanding, but we would understand what is going on so we would not be captured by the counterfeit of the enemy who will be very attractive. So Jesus wanted us to have inspired understanding. He wanted us to have a vibrant heart, not sluggish, not weighed down. He wanted us to be connected together in community because it is only as we pursue Him, become ready, and as we do it together that we reach the greatest heights of effectiveness and even measure of the spirit.*

*I will overview all three parables just really briefly so you know where we are going. In the first parable, Jesus said, "My delay is shorter than you expect." In the second parable, "My delay is longer than you expect." Then in the third parable, "My delay is harder than you expect." He gives an answer of how to respond so that we end up with inspired understanding that is spiritual readiness, a vibrant heart that is not sluggish, and we have a dynamic connectedness in the community of God wherever He has placed us.*

- B. Parable #1: ***Jesus' delay is shorter than expected.*** The parable of the faithful and wise servant (Mt. 24:45-51) teaches us that there will be two types of leaders who profess to follow Christ. The two qualities that Jesus wants His leaders to focus on are being faithful and wise.

***<sup>45</sup>Who then is a faithful and wise servant...to give them food in due season? <sup>46</sup>Blessed is that servant... <sup>47</sup>He will make him ruler over all his goods. <sup>48</sup>But if that evil servant says in his heart,***

*“My master is delaying his coming,<sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards,<sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him...<sup>51</sup> There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt. 24:45-51)*

Let's look at the first parable. Jesus is saying, "My delay is shorter than you might think." Now again everybody has different responses. He was giving a broad teaching. He was saying, "I may come sooner, in an hour you do not think." Now in the early century this did not have the same application it has today.

A lot of believers across the world now look at this thinking, "Well, you know, He is coming hundreds of years from now."

He says, "Ah, do not just assume it is way off in the distance. I might come sooner than you think." This has a particular application in this hour of history.

What Jesus does in this parable is lay out two types of leaders in the Body of Christ. These are leaders that will be functioning in the Body of Christ. Both types of leaders will have professed that they have given their life to Christ. So they will have a Christian testimony, they will be functioning in the Body of Christ, but they have different responses.

One group of leaders is faithful and wise. Jesus said that the other group of leaders, though they function in the church and they profess to know Him, they are actually evil, because their motives are really wrong. They are using His name, His kingdom, and His people for their own advantage, but in more than just a little bit of carnality; they are intentional about it. They are abusing His authority and His people.

Let's read it really quickly here in the first parable. In Matthew 24:45, He says, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" Now I want you to really take notice of those two terms, faithful and wise, in the first parable. The second parable develops wise. The third parable develops faithful. So Jesus is going to take "faithful and wise" and develop them more in a moment. Here He sets out what He is after. This is what He wants us to be: faithful and wise. Those are the two primary things that He is after: faithfulness in our heart response, faithfulness in our diligence, and wise so we know what the Spirit is saying, we know what the Word of God says. We are not just faithful, but we also understand what the Word and the Spirit is saying. We have wisdom and we have a connectedness to God's heart. We are prioritizing our relationship with Jesus. We are valuing His leadership and what His Word and His Spirit says.

Verse 45, let's read it. He says, "Who is the faithful and wise servant?" This refers to a leader because they are ministering to—serving—people in the Body of Christ. You are a leader in the Body of Christ if you are leading five people. It does not mean you have to lead 5,000. I believe that most of you in this room have a teaching ministry. Even though the numbers may not be large for some of you, you still have a teaching ministry. You still are to feed other believers, particularly younger ones.

Verse 46, Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant." Blessed is that believer who is diligent; they are faithful about feeding other people. They are doing it with a spirit of wisdom. They are doing it according to what My Word says, and they are doing it in the way that I want them to. They are faithful and wise.

Then in verse 48 He says that there is the evil servant. The evil servant says, "You know, the Lord is not coming for a long time. He is delaying." So he abuses his authority. He treats the other members of the Body of Christ harshly. He beats them. He even gets drunk with the drunkards. He is loose in his life, and he is abusive in the way that he carries his authority. In verses 50-51 Jesus said, "You better watch out because I may come sooner than you think, and there will be consequences for those kind of leaders."

1. The faithful servant worked with *good motives*, seeking to feed and help God's people. The wicked servant worked with *wrong motives* that abused his God-given authority.
  2. Jesus promised that those who diligently feed His people will rule with Him when He returns.
- C. Parable #2: ***Jesus' delay is longer than expected.*** The parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1-13) emphasizes the need to cultivate intimacy with Jesus as our Bridegroom God.

<sup>1</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. <sup>3</sup>Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup>but the wise took oil... <sup>8</sup>The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” (Mt. 25:1-4, 8)

Let's look at the second parable. Now in this He is taking a very different approach. In this parable the delay may be longer. He is telling them it may stretch out for a few generations. Well, we find out now it is 2,000 years plus. In this second parable He also develops what it means to be wise, not comprehensively, but He develops the most important issue related to how He defines a leader as wise. It is not the only issue, but it is the main one. If you get this issue right as a leader—and again you may be a leader over five, you may be a leader over fifty, or maybe 5,000. Who knows?—if you get this issue right, God calls you wise. You get this issue wrong, though you are sincere and though you are functioning in the Body, God calls you foolish. You are still saved, but He calls you foolish.

The issue in which He anchored His definition of wisdom for the man or woman, the leader—because He is focusing on leaders in all three parables; though it is not exclusive to leaders, it is people who are over other people, people ministering to other people—the number one issue, do they prioritize cultivating intimacy with God? More than just intimacy with God, but specifically intimacy with God as the Bridegroom God, as the God that has deep delight and desire for His people. Have they prioritized growing in understanding of that? Have they prioritized connecting and interacting with Him as the Bridegroom? Interacting with His heart, but also understanding His ways as the Bridegroom King as well. This flows out of the encounter.

Let's read a little bit of the parable. Tonight the goal is not to look at the parables exhaustively, but to give you just the main idea, because we are talking about how to respond to the signs of the times. How do we respond? The signs of the times are given to create urgency. The signs of the times in themselves are not the majority of the message. I mean there is a little bit of messaging in the signs of the times. The signs of the times create urgency so that we have urgency to understand those the 150 chapters in the Bible of which the end times is the primary subject. Most of the Body of Christ is pretty illiterate concerning those 150 chapters because they do not have urgency that it is important. The signs of the times create urgency to press into God and to understand what is happening according to the Word of God in that hour of history.

Well, here He says of the servants of the Lord that some are wise and some are foolish. Now they are all sincere; none of them are evil, He is not talking evil and good. He is talking to sincere ones, foolish and wise. You can be sincere and still be foolish. You can miss the primary point of how God defines wisdom: in taking time to cultivate intimacy with Jesus as the Bridegroom King.

Look at verse 1, "Then the kingdom of God will be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom." Let's read that verse again. "Then," when is then? He is talking about the Matthew 24 generation. There is one generation in history where the Holy Spirit emphasizes Jesus the Messiah as the Bridegroom King. Not only as a King, but as a Bridegroom King. The Holy Spirit has never emphasized that truth universally to the whole Body of Christ. There is one generation that He will do that.

Verse 1, “Then”—in the Matthew 24 generation—“the kingdom will be comparable to ten virgins.” Now, all these are ministries because they all have lamps. They are bringing the light of the message of Jesus to other people. They have lamps that are bright, they have lamps that are burning, and they have functioning ministries. They are all born-again believers as they are virgins in God’s sight. Isn’t that the most glorious thing? That God looks at every person and by the gift of righteousness, by the free gift of what Jesus accomplished for us on His death on the cross He gives us His righteousness and looks at us as a pure chaste virgin in His sight no matter what our history is.

So they are all born-again believers, they all have shining lamps, and they are bringing light to other people. Look at the end of verse 1, all ten of them are encountering the Bridegroom. They go out to meet Him, meaning the Bridegroom is a part of their understanding of the relationship to God. They are encountering Him; they are meeting Him as a Bridegroom God. So they are starting off well: born again, shining lamps, encountering the Bridegroom.

Verse 2, He goes on that, as time goes by, they all get busy, five of them continue to function in wisdom. Five of them became foolish over time. Now in verse 3, He defines what foolish is. Again they have lamps; they have shining ministries. Verse 3, here is the definition of foolish: they took their lamps—their ministries. Your lamp is your ministry; it is how you bring light to others—but they did not take oil.

Now oil in this parable and many places in the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to our heart. They took their ministries—their lamps—and they were busy on the road for Jesus, but they did not prioritize oil in their life. Growing their ministry was their first priority, while connecting with Jesus the Bridegroom God was a priority that was down the list. They started off well by encountering and meeting the Bridegroom. As time went on they lost focus.

Now I have never met a believer who, just on purpose, decided to lose focus. We lose focus because the months turn to years and the years to decades. We are laboring, we are laboring, and we get caught up in the labor. We get caught up in the increase of our ministry, the effectiveness of how many people we are connecting with. The Lord would say, “But you are not connecting to Me like you used to. You took your lamp, but you did not take oil. Your lamp is first to you; your oil is second. Reverse it. Flip it around. Make getting oil first and make your lamp second.” So He calls them foolish—not evil, not insincere—foolish.

Verse 4, He goes on, “Let Me tell you what the wise did. They took oil first.” Remember the first parable is the faithful and wise leader. Here He says, “Let Me tell you the premiere issue of how I define wisdom. You prioritize oil over ministry.” The most natural thing is for us to be far more focused on networking. Far more focused on the size of our impact. Networking is good actually, and impact is good, but there is something more important than networking and impact: our hearts growing in that we are connecting with the King. In verse 4, the wise took their oil; that is the first priority on their heart.

Then later down in the parable, because the foolish ones are still in ministry but are burning out and are losing some of that freshness, that vibrancy, that authority of God that they had in the things they said, the foolish said to the wise, “Hey, give us some of your oil! Our ministries are dwindling. Our lamps are going out. Our ministries are getting flat. Give us some of your oil.”

1. Some wise leaders work hard and with good motives, yet with a *wrong spirit* by neglecting to maintain their intimacy with God. Our measure of intimacy with God today can be lost. All ten virgin ministries started off with oil and a shining ministry that brought light to others.

Some leaders start off with shining lamps, encountering the Bridegroom, but over time their rigor fades. It happens all the time. I have lost my focus on oil a number of times in forty years of ministry. By the grace of

God, the Holy Spirit reminds me and I say, “Oh, I did it again.” I realign my heart. I probably do it two or three times a year. It is not like every day or every week.

I am talking about something a little more overt than just a general, everyday recommitting my life. You want to do that, but once or twice, three times a year—I mean it is no real actual number—the Lord will whisper in my heart and say, “You are more focused on ministry than My heart. Make ministry important, but make it number two, not number one. Make it ministry to your family first and then to others second.”

Well, they work with good motives, but with a wrong spirit. I don’t mean an evil spirit, but a wrong spirit. In Luke 10 when Mary and Martha were coming before the Lord, we know the story that Mary of Bethany was at the feet of Jesus. Martha her sister was disturbed and said, “Jesus, tell my little sister to get with it, to get to work.” He looked at Martha and rebuked her. Now He was not rebuking her because she was working in the kitchen.

Some people say, “Get out of the kitchen and get in the prayer room.” No, that is not what it is saying.

Beloved, you need people who serve in the kitchen. You need people in every facet of the kingdom. The point was not that Martha was in the kitchen. The point was that she was serving with a wrong spirit. She was serving disconnected from the King. We can serve in every manner of ministry, but with a right spirit. We serve connected to the King.

2. **Virgins:** All believers are as virgins before God by His free righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; 11:2).  
*<sup>2</sup>I betrothed you to one husband...I present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2)*
3. **Lamp:** Each of these virgins had a lamp, which spoke of a ministry that brought God’s light to others (Mt. 5:15-16; Rev. 1:20; 2:5; 11:3-6; cf. Zech. 4:2; Isa. 62:1; Jn. 5:35).
4. **Bridegroom:** All these ministries had revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom God. These are ministries that went out to meet, or encounter, Jesus as the Bridegroom God.
5. In this parable, Jesus’ warning is that the wise can become foolish if they neglect to continue to cultivate intimacy with Jesus by going out to meet Him as the Bridegroom King (Mt. 25:1).
6. The “**oil**” speaks of the presence of the Spirit touching our heart as we spend time with God (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27).
7. The foolish took their lamps (ministry), but **took no oil**. In other words, they pursued ministry as their first priority, instead of acquiring oil in their relationship with Jesus (25:3).
8. The wise ministries **took oil** in their vessels with their lamps. In other words, they pursued acquiring oil as their *first priority* before seeking to expand their personal ministry (25:4).
9. The foolish ministries recognized their mistake in neglecting oil. Many “ministry lamps” will go out because they will lack the spiritual vitality of the Spirit’s oil. They asked the wise to give them oil to “bolster” their ministries. The wise understood their limitation, knowing that their spiritual history and spiritual preparedness is not transferrable. Christian “self-help” and “pop psychology” sermons will not meet the need of the hour in that day. In that day, we must be a voice that pursues the truth in our secret life and not just an echo of popular ideas.

<sup>8</sup>The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” <sup>9</sup>The wise answered, “No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.” (Mt. 25:8-9)

The foolish recognized their mistake in neglecting oil. The foolish said, “Give us your oil for our ministry; our lamp is going out.”

Verse 9 is one of the most important verses. The Lord has used this verse in my heart many times. The wise said, “No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but rather go to those who sell and buy oil for yourself.” Now it looks like a harsh answer, but that is not the spirit to which Jesus is addressing this. The foolish were concerned, which is right. They were concerned their lamps were going out, that their ministries were dwindling. Their spiritual vitality of the Spirit’s oil was not in their ministry like it was in the early days. Here is the value of verse 9 when the wise said “No.” The wise understood their limitation.

You see the hook the enemy will use on you—I call it the Messiah complex—“You are the only one who can meet all the needs.” You cannot bear the pressure of disappointing people, so you say “yes” to everything, because you think you are the answer, or more commonly you cannot bear the pressure of them looking at you thinking that they thought you were this and that, but you obviously are not.

Jesus was telling us through this parable, “Know your limitations. You cannot be everywhere doing everything. You will end up with no oil, and then you will end up not being helpful at all to people. You will end up in the condition of those other ones.”

So what they were saying is, “We cannot transfer our spiritual history in Jesus, nor our spiritual preparation. We cannot transfer it to you. You have to do it yourself in the God-ordained way, the God-ordained process. You have to engage yourself, invest yourself, and get oil in the way the Bible says.”

What I mean by this having been a very important verse in my life, and I trust in many people’s lives, is that the necessity of saying “no” is very important. If you cannot say “no” and prioritize time to connect with the Lord, your lamps will go out, your oil will be gone, and you will not be effective to anybody. You might be popular, but you will not be spiritually effective. You have to know your limitations.

Every one of us has a history in God. Maybe it is a short history in God if you are a new believer. Maybe it is a long and deep history in God. You have a secret life in God, a secret history in God that only God knows about you. You cannot give that history to someone else. I cannot give my oil to somebody else, my life in God to somebody else. I can pray for them, and the Lord can inspire them and touch them, but I cannot give my preparation to somebody by saying words or praying for them. You can pray, and God’s grace will touch them, but there is one place oil comes from: your own personal interaction with God over time.

Jesus says that wise leaders prioritize this. Foolish leaders, good motives but foolish, do not know their limitations. They think they are the answer to everyone’s problems or they cannot bear the pressure of disappointing people, so they say “yes.” Jesus said, “You are foolish. I love you. I know you love Me, but you are foolish. You will burn out, and in a short amount of time you will have very little to give that has spiritual vitality in it.”

10. Jesus exhorts us to “buy oil,” to engage in the God-ordained process of acquiring intimacy with God. We do not earn this, but invest ourselves in a costly way to receive it.

<sup>18</sup>I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich... (Rev. 3:18)

Jesus exhorts us to buy oil. He did it twice, first in Matthew 25, in the parable, He told us in the parable to go buy oil. This is Jesus talking. Then some years later in the book of Revelation, He said it again, "Buy gold." He says to buy oil in Matthew 25 and to buy gold in Revelation 3. Now He does not mean earn it; that is not what He means by "buy" it. It does not mean to go earn it. It means to invest yourself in your relationship with God in a way that is costly. It costs you time. You lose certain opportunities when you draw back in your schedule, and you invest that time in the Lord. You do lose opportunities. When I look back over forty years of ministry, there are many places I could not go and many situations I could not be at. There were many gatherings I could not be a part of because I did not have the time to do it all. I prioritized gold and oil, though not always. Again I have been corrected by the Lord many times. The Lord says to get back to that. He says to invest yourself in a costly way. It will cost you because people will get upset at you. You really will miss out some opportunities. It is costly. You are not earning anything, but you are positioning yourself to get oil.

- D. Parable #3: ***Jesus' delay is harder than expected.*** The parable of the faithful servant (Mt. 25:14-30) focuses on being faithful and diligent in our life assignment even when it is small and difficult.

<sup>21</sup>*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things...* <sup>24</sup>*He who had received the one talent...said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown..."* <sup>25</sup>*I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground..."* <sup>26</sup>*His lord...said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant..."* (Mt. 25:21-26)

Parable number three teaches us that the delay is harder than expected. In the first parable He says that the kind of leader God wants is faithful and wise. In the second parable He elaborates on wise. In the third parable He elaborates on faithful. Just like He surprised us the way He defined what wisdom is—wisdom means prioritizing encountering the Lord and growing into intimacy; nobody would have guessed that that was what the primary issue of wisdom is in God's kingdom—now He surprises us again as He defines what faithful is.

Faithful is not the size of your impact. It is the size of your heart response. Sometimes we will look at a ministry, and if they are impacting a large number we think, "Man, they are so amazing! They have been so faithful." God sovereignly determines the size of our impact. You do not get rewarded by the size of your impact. You get rewarded by the size of your heart response.

You may impact a small number of people, but you said "yes" in diligence with all of your heart. The Lord says that that is what He is after.

Look at verse 21. Again He develops the faithful servant. He says, "I will say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" Now this is the verse that is lied about more than any other verse of the Bible. What I mean by this: every "Christian" funeral I go to, the preacher says that God has said to the guy, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I say that verse is used more times in a less-than-accurate way. Well, you do not really know, but you know what I mean.

I look at that verse, and I do not think it is going to be said very often. I think it is going to be said to millions for sure, but there are hundreds of millions, billions of believers even, over history, several billion by the great harvest at the end. This is not just a given. This is just something that everybody hears at a funeral. "Well done, good and faithful, you were faithful here."

Here is the surprising definition, "faithful over few things." As in, you did not lose your way, you did not lose your zeal because the sphere you had was small. A lot of people I have seen over the years will be excited and diligent if the sphere is big. But when the sphere of impact is small, they are bored and disengaged. The Lord is telling them right here, He says, "No, faithful over small, that is what I look for." Of course for 99.9999999 percent of the whole human race, or let's say of the Body of Christ, our impact individually is small. There are

only a few Billy Grahams and Bonnkes in history who themselves in a primary way touched millions. For most of us, our impact individually is very small. Collectively it is big. Individually it is small, but the Lord says that there is no problem with that. You can be faithful, and you can hear well done; just do the will of God.

I know more people who so are offended at the smallness of their impact that they cannot engage with God with a vibrant heart. It is the smallness that makes them disconnect, because they were taught in their early Christian life that big is the only thing that is good. Now, collectively our impact is big, but individually I will say it again: for 99.9999999 percent, it is very small. We touch our twos and threes, we touch our tens and twenties; we do it over decades. Again, collectively it is big, and every now and then there might be a big moment.

The Lord looks at the diligence in the midst of the small because His eyes are on it. Here is what He says—this is amazing—“I will make you ruler over many things in the resurrection.” Jesus said, in effect, “I so value faithfulness in small matters that I will insist that that person is part of My government in the age to come. I am so zealous and I so value faithfulness in the small that that woman, that man, will be part of My government. They will be ruler over many things in the age to come.”

He values faithfulness in small. Jesus is not impressed by bigness. I like to use this analogy that I have said many times over the years that when Billy Graham stands before the Lord, Jesus is not going to say, “Father, Father, I think that is Billy Graham! Oh, that is amazing!” Jesus created all the stars, billions and billions, billions and billions. He is not impressed by a stadium full of people. Billy Graham filled a stadium and Bonnke more than a stadium, whatever the number, only because God gave it to them. Their lives are going to be measured the same way you and I are going to be measured: by the faithfulness of their heart responses.

You lock into the truth that you can have joy and a vibrant heart along the journey. If you lose sight of that, you will be constantly striving to get a bigger sphere. I mean it is okay to try to get a bigger sphere, but when you are striving, you are in anguish, you are in pain, and you are mad at everybody who will not give you a bigger one, the Lord would say, “Man, you are losing your whole history with Me because of this. You are losing those years where you can be developing your history with Me.”

Verse 24, the guy with one talent, with the small assignment, he complained. He said, “Well, Jesus, I know you are a hard Man. I know You are not very fair. Like, wow! You reap where You have not sown and”—verse 25—“I was really afraid. I was afraid You were going to be mad at me, so I went and hid.” He gave all these answers, “I thought You were a bad leader, a hard leader, by giving me such a little amount, and I was afraid of You that what I did was not going to be worth anything. It was not worth anything anyway. I was afraid.”

Jesus shocked this guy in verse 26. He replied, “No, your problem really is not that you think, that I am hard and you are afraid. The problem is that you are wicked and lazy.” He shifted the whole conversation. Jesus is talking to leaders of course throughout history, but He is talking particularly to the Matthew 24 generation.

- E. Those responding wrongly worked with the wrong evaluation and neglected their assignment. The message in this parable is that we are to be faithful (diligent) and good (godly) with a servant spirit (humility) in context to our ministry assignment even when it is difficult (v. 24) and small (v. 21).

The challenge in this parable is that they had a wrong evaluation. They thought big and prominent were only what was important. They did not know that being faithful behind the scenes where nobody but the Lord would ever know is what God evaluates as faithfulness.

- F. Jesus described His servants as being tempted with *wickedness* (lust) and *laziness* in the end times. The dramatic increase of media (entertainment) presents a generation of old and young believers with new temptations. The quality and quantity of media entertainment (pornography, video games, Facebook, Twitter, sports, movies, news, talk shows, etc.) tempts people to be preoccupied with the lives of celebrities, friends, and strangers, etc. The besetting sin of many believers today is laziness with its procrastination and “veg-out” mentality.

<sup>1</sup>Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: <sup>2</sup>Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...<sup>3</sup>without self-control...<sup>4</sup>and lovers of pleasure... (2 Tim. 3:1-4)

*So Jesus described these servants as being tempted with wickedness and laziness. This servant said, “I don’t trust Your heart. You are not treating me rightly, Jesus, by the assignment You gave me. You are not opening the doors that I thought You should open. I was afraid that my ministry was just worthless anyway. Why should I work to touch three people; that is not worth my time and energy. I don’t even want to do it. I am afraid I am just wasting my time.”*

*The Lord says, “No, actually you are wicked, and you are lazy.” That is a pretty strong redirection of the conversation. Well, this is real. Jesus is really going to have this conversation with people. Again He is talking to all of history, but He is talking particularly to the Matthew 24 generation in which He comes, because there is a dramatic increase in this generation. This increase effects old and young. I hear some people talk about the media explosion, saying that it is something young people struggle with. Let me tell you, old people struggle with it too. They get captured in all the entertainment. They get captured and incited to all kinds of lusts. They get captured in all kinds of lifestyles. They see images all day long which fashions and forms their heart in a negative way, and they end up walking out some of these things even as believers. Lust and laziness begin to dominate their life.*

*I have written here about the quality and the quantity of entertainment from pornography to all these things. I do not mean that everything listed—the video games and all this and that—are all evil. I am saying that the incredible preoccupation with entertainment and playing and the voyeurism of all the immorality has caused a spirit of lust and wickedness—we will call it wickedness because that is what Jesus called it—and laziness to take root in believers in this hour like no other time in history.*

*I believe that one of the besetting sins of this generation, though not the only sin, is laziness. It is preoccupied with entertainment and therefore it procrastinates. “Well, I am going to seek the Lord, I am going to minister to people, I am going to reach out, I am going to disciple, I am going to get that relationship right, but tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.” It is like, “Well, today was busy and I lost today.” It is procrastination, and it is rooted in laziness and lust.*

*Now I am talking about an entire generation; I am talking about old and young. This is tempting seven billion people. This is not particular to the Body of Christ. Jesus said, as it were, “I know something about that time frame that you do not know. Lust and laziness will be real giants that you will have to face. That delay might be a little bit longer. If you get offended, and you are not engaged in My work, in My kingdom, in the battle, you are going to get captured on the backside of this. If you are not engaged, you are going to get engaged in something else.” So Jesus lays that out for them. I mean, each one of these parables is like “Wow!” I mean they are eye-opening. These three parables are very brief, but, boy, are they filled with significant exhortations from God’s heart!*

- G. Our ministry assignment (or sphere of influence) may be small in man's eyes, but is so important in God's eyes that He greatly rewards His people for being diligent in it. We must be motivated by how important our work is in *God's eyes* rather than by how big it is in *man's eyes*.
- H. The message is that God sees and rewards our efforts and that there can be loss of reward. The essence of the fear of God is to know that God sees and rewards what we are doing.

<sup>23</sup>*Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,* <sup>24</sup>*knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward...for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:23-24)*

- I. **Conclusion:** Jesus called His people to be *wise* and *faithful* servants (message of parable #1). Then He identified being *wise* with acquiring the “oil of intimacy” (message of parable #2) and *faithful* as being diligent in ministry assignments that are small and difficult (message of parable #3).

## II. WATCH AND PRAY (MT. 24:42; 25:13; LK. 21:36)

*Let's look at the phrase, “Watch and pray.” We touched this a little bit a couple weeks ago for about seven or eight minutes. I am going to take it to just a little different place. It is so interesting to me, and more than interesting it was puzzling to me, that the most practical counsel Jesus gave to the Matthew 24 generation was to watch and pray. We are talking about the most violent, sinful, chaotic, dangerous generation in human history. Demon activity, lust at the highest level, chaos, conflict, hatred and betrayal, violence and danger, and He said, “Watch and pray.” Like, really? That is it? Watch and pray? You are the smartest Man who has ever walked the earth. You are the best Shepherd who has ever touched the human race, and in the most dangerous generation in history, the most violent and volatile and confusing with deception, that is Your counsel?*

- A. Jesus gave us practical counsel on how to be wise and faithful—by calling us to *watch and pray*. Jesus' main exhortation to be prepared spiritually is by *watching and praying*. God's people are exhorted 20 times to *watch*—ten times the exhortation is related to the end times (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:6; Rev. 16:15) and ten times to general Christian living (Mt. 26:38, 40, 41; Mk. 14:34, 37, 38; Lk. 12:38; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; Rev. 3:3).

<sup>42</sup>*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:42)*

<sup>13</sup>*Watch...for you know neither the day nor hour...the Son of Man is coming. (Mt. 25:13)*

*I have written here that this is His main exhortation. God's people are exhorted twenty times in the New Testament to watch or to watch and pray. Often watch and pray go together. They are actually distinct, though they overlap. Ten times—nine of them by Jesus, by the mouth of Jesus, one by Paul. Do you know there are very few things Jesus said in the Gospels that was repeated nine times? The way the Scripture is laid out, when God says something two or three times, like Jesus did in the Gospels, that is gold. I mean that is big. If it is one time, it is big. Two or three, that is intense. Four or five, that is getting up there. Nine times? Very few things have been emphasized by His mouth in the Scripture nine times. It tells us this is of the highest importance.*

- B. Jesus is the best shepherd, yet His primary exhortation was to watch and pray. He did not mention storing water, food, or batteries, nor establishing a communication system with shortwave radios.

*I said this last time that I would have thought when Jesus said to prepare—He is talking about spiritually—He would have mentioned physical preparations too. He did not mention anything about storing up food or water or batteries. He did not talk about establishing short-wave radio communication. I think that those kind of*

things in the physical sense can be helpful. But He does not tell anybody to store up guns. He is not making comment on storing up food and water and that stuff. He is not even commenting on it.

My point is that He doesn't even mention it. Now the Lord has different people preparing in different ways. That is not my point right now: to comment on all the twenty-five different approaches. My point is that He says to watch and pray, because He knows something about these two activities: that if we engage in these two in a diligent way, we will have answers for the crises in the local situation. We will have divine wisdom, we will have connection with God, and we will have answers in that day.

Jesus says, in effect, "If you connect to Me, if you do these two things I will tell you in communities of believers that are watching and praying, where they prioritize this, you will be in a context where I will give you wisdom and resource in that hour—if you have been watching and praying before that hour." Now this makes more sense to me because I would like a little bit more information about south Kansas City and what is going to happen. You know I just want a little bit more information in the next few decades. The Lord says if you watch and pray you will know what to do in your part of the world as things intensify.

If you do not watch and pray, you will be at the mercy of fear and you will be at the mercy of counsel of really bold people who are giving you counsel that is not inspired by the Spirit. If you have a fearful heart or a weighed-down heart or a sluggish heart, or you are in isolation and you are not in committed covenant-community of believers who are prioritizing this, you are going to be vulnerable to all kinds of bad counsel that is given by bold people through their media.

The Lord will say, "No, I said in the Word to do the opposite of that."

"Well, this leader is really bold, and he said it really strongly, and I do not know; it seemed right to me."

He would answer, "What do you mean?"

"It seemed it was right."

"It is bad counsel."

I want to be with believers who are prioritizing watching and praying, and not just one or two. God is raising up, by the way, millions of these communities around the world. I do not know if it is millions, but thousands and thousands. I do not know the number, of course, but many, many places where whole communities of believers—I mean local churches one or two hundred, one or two thousand, ten thousand and I do not care what the number is—are prioritizing watching and praying. Together is where the synergism, the multiplied strength, and the multiplied wisdom are: where communities prioritize watching and praying together. That is not all they do, but that is a part of their spiritual mandate and a part of their priority as a spiritual community.

- C. Some believers pray, but do not watch—paying attention to what is happening prophetically in the nations. Others watch, but do not pray. Jesus calls us to do both.

Now some believers pray, but they do not watch. Then other people watch, but they do not pray. Watch means to actually watch what the Bible says is going to happen in that hour and then watch what unfolds in society. You watch it, and the Holy Spirit gives inspiration because you are watching it with faith and attentiveness. Doing that together with believers, wisdom increases as wisdom comes out of what the Bible says. We see what is happening in the society, we put it together with scripture, and the wisdom grows. That is watching.

Praying is connecting with God's heart—intimacy with God—and praying is releasing His power. He says that if you watch, you will grow in wisdom and understanding, and you pray, positioning yourself to grow in strength at the heart level so you have a vibrant heart, you are not captured in fear and lust, bitterness and you

release the power of God. That is called intercession that shifts situations in the hour of crisis. You watch and pray, and you will have the resource, wisdom, and connectedness with other people to make right decisions.

- D. God's people need strength to escape the snare of sin and fear so as to stand in victory (Lk. 21:36).

<sup>35</sup>**For it will come as a snare on all...** <sup>36</sup>**Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy [have strength] to escape all these things...and to stand before the Son of Man."** (Lk. 21:35-36)

1. **Have strength:** A vibrant spiritual life leads to courage and zeal for God. The phrase *be counted worthy* (v. 36, NKJV) is translated as *have strength* in most modern translations. An NKJV footnote offers *to have strength* as an alternate translation. The idea is that we would be *strengthened to respond* to the Lord in a way that is *worthy* of who He is.
2. **To stand:** Believers can *stand in victory* as overcomers, rather than falling in sin, etc.
3. **To escape:** God's people are to be *prepared spiritually* to escape the trap of falling into sin and giving way to lust, drunkenness, fear, deception, etc.

Well, Luke 21 is the same setting as Matthew 24. Matthew does not mention this part of the conversation, but Luke throws it in by the Holy Spirit's inspiration. We took a whole session on Luke 21 a few weeks ago. Again, this is in the same teaching of Matthew 24-25 because Luke 21 is a part of that same teaching, just a little different or more information added beyond what Matthew captured by the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

Luke 21:35, "For it will come like a snare on the whole earth." —it refers to the increasing distress, the increasing sin, the increasing darkness that will come like a snare on the earth—so "watch and pray." The point is *watch and pray so that you would have strength*. It says, "that you may be counted worthy," but almost every other Bible translations besides King James, says, "Watch and pray to have strength." I feel confident that is the right translation. Watch and pray—get strength for your heart. Watch and pray together—be a praying community. Release the power of God into the crisis. If you do that, you will escape.

Some people think that "escape" is the rapture. He is not talking about the rapture. He is not saying that you will escape the conflict, that you will escape the challenge. He is saying that you will escape being caught by the snare. You will escape being captured by lust and fear. Fear will not overcome you. Lust will not dominate you. You will stand in victory in that hour, if you are a person who watches and prays.

It is not enough to watch and pray alone; I want to be a part of a community that watches and prays. I believe that the Lord is raising up such communities all over the earth that are beginning to prioritize not just outreach and some other things which are very, very important but they are actually prioritizing watching, paying attention to what the Bible says would happen in that hour in that generation. They are watching things emerge, and that watching creates urgency. That urgency is created because whatever you watch you talk about. We read the Bible, we watch it over, we see in society that the trends emerging are what the Bible prophesied, and we end up talking about it because we are stirred. That talking about it bonds people together with a common urgency. Then they pray with far more urgency, and then they prioritize connecting with the Lord. They prioritize praying and releasing the power of God in their city, their local area. In that context God says He will give you wisdom, He will give you breakthroughs of the heart, He will give you breakthroughs of resource, and He will give you breakthroughs in many areas. This is the answer of the Great Shepherd.

### III. TO WATCH

- A. **To watch:** This exhortation *focuses on the mind*—to grow in understanding by watching the biblical signs of the times unfold. As our understanding increases, it produces greater urgency in us.
  - 1. **Scripture:** Watch or search out what the Bible says about the end-time signs of His coming.
  - 2. **Circumstances:** With a heart of faith, watch the signs progressively unfold in society.
- B. Watching includes being aware of the biblical signs of the times as “anointed observers.”
  - 1. Watching what the prophetic scriptures say about the end-time distress in the nations, people can see prophecy progressively unfold before them.
  - 2. As people watch, they inevitably talk more about what is occurring that is in line with the prophetic scriptures.
  - 3. Thus, they connect with more people who have a common urgency and vision.

*Whatever we watch as anointed observers, if we see what the Bible says will happen in that generation, we need to let it create urgency in us. Again I believe we are in the early days of that generation. Remember a generation in the Bible can be 100 years. It does not have to be exactly that. It might be a lot shorter, or it might be longer. I feel confident we are in the early days of that generation. Again this is not a prophecy, but I believe it is time to be watching what the Bible says. This is not just a class for you to take. I want to encourage you: these little phrases in the Bible are more than just Bible data. These are breathed by the Holy Spirit, recorded in the eternal Word of God, and they are to equip a generation. These little phrases that we have covered over this class, these little trends—well they are big trends but—they are just a phrase here and there. You might say, “Okay, so knowledge is going to increase and so is communication. So what?”*

*The Lord would say, “No, no! I sent a mighty angel to say that. That is a huge, significant reality.” You do not want to let it escape your notice and just move on. Let that increase. We looked at that in Daniel 12:4. Let that unfold in front of you. You are watching it unfold in front of you in the nations, so let that create urgency. You are in the only time of history where all of these issues are escalated at this level.*

*I just want to urge you: do not let this information just be little Bible data. It was given to create urgency. So now we are watching, and then we are talking together. We talk to one another, and it bonds us with a common urgency because we get what is going on; we get the biblical narrative. Then we talk to God with greater urgency. We talk to God, and we talk to one another. Then we are in position for the wisdom and resource of God to touch our heart and to flow through us and touch cities.*

- C. Watching gives people urgency to *talk to God*—praying to release His power into the crisis.
- D. Watching gives people urgency to *talk to people*—connecting more in unity of vision.
- E. As people watch and talk about what they see, whole communities of believers grow in their connectedness to God and each other and are thus positioned to gain insight into what do when crisis touches their local area.

- F. The command to watch was given to God's people so that they might avoid the unnecessary losses associated with a thief (Mt. 24:42-43).

<sup>42</sup>Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. (Mt. 24:42-43)

- G. Paul said that we are not in darkness that the Day of the Lord should overtake us as a thief.

<sup>2</sup>You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night [the unprepared suffer unnecessary loss]...<sup>4</sup>But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief...<sup>6</sup>Therefore...let us watch and be sober. (1 Thes. 5:1-6)

1. A thief causes one to suffer loss of things that could have been avoided by watching.
2. The thief motif mostly emphasizes the element of loss that one suffers because of an unexpected coming.

#### IV. TO PRAY

- A. **To pray:** This exhortation focuses on the heart—to grow in strength from connecting with Jesus. Prayer is key to growing in intimacy with God and living invigorated by the beauty of the King.

*Well, what do we pray for? We pray for God's strength to be manifested in our hearts because we do not want to be captured, weighed down by fear, lust, and bitterness. Bitterness will get people. We looked at Luke 21, and those are the three big issues. Fear, lust, and bitterness are the three that Jesus highlighted in Luke 21. He says in verse 34 not to get caught by those three. They are going to increase tremendously. They will weigh your heart down, and you will not be responsive to the Lord. You will read the Bible and it will just be information on a page. You will not be moved by what the Scripture says. You will not have a spirit of prayer, and you will not be encouraged when the Word of God is spoken because your heart will be weighed down and heavy. Lay those things aside. Watch, see what the Bible says, see what is happening, talk to God and with others talk to God, talk to one another. Let the fire grow in your midst.*

- B. By praying, we grow in our connection to Jesus' heart and we release His resources into the crisis. Prayer releases a greater measure of His power and resources into a situation or crisis—justice.

<sup>9</sup>...ask [persistently], and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>11</sup>If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent...? <sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Lk. 11:9-13)

<sup>7</sup>...will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night...<sup>8</sup>He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:7-8; NAS)

- C. Our inner man is our most important aspect of life, yet it is the most neglected prayer focus. Any who will pray for strength in their inner man will surely receive more. Our experience of the Spirit's power in our heart can be increased or decreased over time.

<sup>16</sup>*...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... (Eph. 3:16)*

- D. For free resources on *Ten Prayers to Strengthen Our Inner Man: F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P* you can go to <http://mikebickle.org/resources/resource/3637>.

- E. The Spirit empowers in small measures. Often we cannot measure or discern the specific times when He touches us. I compare this principle to taking vitamins for years. There is never a day when we think, "This is the day the vitamin really helped me today." I have taken vitamins for years, and I cannot remember one day when "this is the day it took."

<sup>8</sup>*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. (Gal. 6:8-9)*

- F. Jesus modeled what He taught in Luke 21:20-36 immediately thereafter. In Luke 22, He engaged in earnest prayer for strength in the garden of Gethsemane and asked His friends to stand with Him.

<sup>40</sup>*He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" <sup>41</sup>He knelt down and prayed,  
<sup>42</sup>*saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." <sup>43</sup>Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. <sup>44</sup>And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood... <sup>46</sup>He said to them..., "Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation." (Lk. 22:40-46)**

- G. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus exhorted His disciples to watch and pray.

<sup>41</sup>*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mt. 26:41)*

## V. SUMMARY

- A. By watching and praying, we position ourselves to receive greater *insight* (by watching) to understand what God is doing and greater *strength* (by praying) to love well as pressures increase.
- B. Those who grow in *understanding* and *strength* will be strengthened to stand as overcomers who escape the snare of lust, fear, and bitterness (Lk. 21:34-36).
- C. People who seek to love well must not be ensnared in fear, deception, or confusion. We must watch so that we understand the narrative and can be part of the solution, not the confusion.
- D. Multitudes will need the help of people walking in power and courage with insight into what God is doing. Such people will be a part of the solution rather than contributing to the confusion.
- E. People with understanding are those who have a *compass* while in a storm on the sea. Get prepared in understanding, and then prepare the unprepared so they can stand against fear and deception.

- F. The Lord is raising up communities all over the earth who prioritize watching and praying. They are growing in their understanding of the biblical end-time storyline. They are seeing how the signs are increasing with both negative and positive events and trends, and they prioritize connecting to God.
  - 1. Together they will know how to respond to situations in their local area—receiving understanding from God on what to do in practical issues like food, provision, and protection.
  - 2. Being deeply connected to Jesus and like-minded believers, they will be equipped to overcome so as to not be ensnared by fear, immorality, drunkenness, and bitterness—so that we make right decisions in times of crisis.
- G. The command to watch and pray is a call to love people well. People will need to be helped by those with godly resolve, courage, and insight into what God is doing. Spiritually dull believers filled with fear and confusion will contribute to the problems of those they love, not to the solutions by making decisions and giving counsel that is contrary to what the Scripture or Spirit are saying.
- H. Many individuals and local churches are called to minister with the forerunner spirit to people — thus, they must prioritize watching and praying.
- I. As for me and my spiritual house, we will serve the Lord by prioritizing watching and praying. I want to be in the midst of a community of people who prioritize watching, praying, and fellowshipping with groups all over the earth that have a similar urgency to press into Jesus.
- J. Biblical understanding equips people to cooperate with Jesus and His leadership and to resist and expose deception and fear. They see the big picture of where things are going. We have confidence that He is with us.

*When you watch and pray, you make godly decisions and you make right decisions. Communities of believers that watch and pray are not shut down with lust. They are not overcome with fear. They are not taking bad counsel from whatever bold voice is in the media. They know the Word of God. They know what the Spirit is saying. Together it emerges little by little, and they are at a place of safety.*

*Wherever you go—I am thinking now of the IHOPU students—in whatever city you end up, make sure you are part of a community of believers who are prioritizing watching and praying. That is not all they do, but that is part of the priority. Because, if we are weighed down and we are captured and our hearts are unresponsive, beloved, we are going to be a part of the problem, not part of the solution. We are going to be fretting in fear and confusing everyone around us with our fear, our anxiety, and our frantic counsel and ideas. I do not want to be a person bringing that to other people. I want to be a part of the solution, not part of the confusion.*

*The Lord says to be in a community that watches and prays. As for me and my house, we are going to be a people that watch and pray. As for me and my Bible school, we are going to be a people that watch and pray. We are going to prioritize it with all the different ministry expressions in the marketplace and all kinds of different ministry expressions, with a spirit of watching and praying. Amen, let's stand before the Lord.*