

Preparing For The Return Of Jesus

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Date: 06 September 2026

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, Lord, thank you for your word. It reminds us of Jesus and his return to this world. But it's a challenge, Lord, that we must prepare well for that day.

And we need your help for that. And so we ask for your spirit and your power, your insight, to change us, Lord, and to hear from you, and to live lives based on what you tell us to do.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So keep your Bibles open at Matthew 25. And we'll go through this important parable together.

The thing is, we're all preparing for something in life. We're preparing for maybe, if you're still at school or university, you're preparing for exams, or maybe for a presentation at work, maybe for a sports competition.

Maybe you're preparing to get married or to get kids, or buying that house or a car, or maybe you're preparing for retirement. The more consequential the event, the more you're focused on preparing well for it.

[1:07] If you've written matric exams, you'll know the feeling. Matric exams are consequential, but not a lot of fun. One of the bigger and hopefully more fun events is getting married.

And that takes a lot of prep. There's that excitement, but that little touch of trepidation. How is it all going to go? Did I prepare well enough for it?

Am I ready for this life-changing event that I'm about to go to, to get into? Reminds me of a story of one couple.

They were asked for how long they were happily married. And they looked at each other with a twinkle in their eye, you know, and the husband looks at his wife, and then he answers the question, no, we've been happily married for three years.

And he gets a punch from his wife, no, but we've been married for 20 years. Yes, dear, he says. But they're asked how long we've been happily married. But hopefully your preparation will help you to be happily married for as long as you can.

[2:09] But in the parable today, Jesus wants people to, his people, to make the best possible preparation for the best event, but also the most consequential event of their life, which is his return.

And the Bible describes his return in the most glorious of fashions. And here it's described as this amazing wedding with this amazing wedding feast. So I'm just going to go through the parable quickly to see what it's all about.

But in the parable, Jesus is the bridegroom. But he's a bridegroom that's being delayed. The virgins, all ten of them, both wise and unwise, represent the church.

Jesus starts his parable in verse 1. At that time or then, the kingdom of heaven will be like the virgins who are gathering for a wedding.

So it's talking about how Christians are to live their lives as they wait and focus on Jesus' return. But the problem is the unexpected delay of the bridegroom.

[3:22] The unexpected delay of Jesus' return. And Christians are called to live wisely and not foolishly. So there's two sets of bridegrooms.

One is wise, one is foolish. The wise ones have oil. The foolish ones don't have any oil. They all fall asleep. It's not that the wise ones stay awake and the foolish ones fall asleep.

They all fall asleep, waiting for the delay. But when the call comes, that's when we find out who's been wise and who's been foolish. And the foolish ones are sent off to go buy some oil.

And they actually miss out on the return of the bridegroom. The wise ones go into the banquet. The door is shut.

The foolish ones come back. And they say, no, but let us in. And the bridegroom comes out and says, you know, I don't even know who you are. The ones who live wisely are prepared for service

to the bridegroom.

[4:24] Those who live foolishly are not well prepared. In fact, they are so badly prepared and they are of no use to the bridegroom that he doesn't want anything to do with them when he comes back.

Parables often have this shock twist at the end. And the shock here is that the bridegroom, who is Jesus, tells the foolish virgins who represent his church to get lost.

And he slams the door of the banquet in their face. And so the difference between preparing wisely and preparing foolishly is the difference between life and death.

It's a sobering parable for us to check if we're truly prepared for Jesus' return. So let's first look at what it means to prepare wisely.

Preparing wisely. The word that Jesus uses here for wisdom comes from the word to think. The wise virgins are virgins that are using their brain.

[5:30] To be wise is to think about what's going on around you, to take action ahead of time that gives you the best chance of success. Wisdom here has connotations of thoughtfulness, of sensibleness, and of prudence.

For example, if you're driving your car along the N2, happily driving your car, but just up ahead you notice a bunch of scollies.

Because the median line, the middle line of the N2 is often on your right-hand side, and the scollies are now there in the middle. And then you're driving along, you think, no, but what are guys doing in the middle of the road there?

Oh, and they're carrying a big concrete block. Okay, so wisdom, being switched on with your brain, having foresight, using prudence, using sensibleness, you slow your car down, you don't stop, and then you go to the side of the road, and then you continue along the way.

Preparing wisely in the context of the parable means living with a single clear focus point in your life, and that clear single focus point is not just Jesus, but Jesus' return.

[6:49] And then to ensure everything in your life lines up with that reality. The wise virgins were fully focused on their job as the ones welcoming the bridegroom, and they prepared ahead of time to make sure they had enough, even if he was delayed.

It's pre-preparation, although preparation literally means to make before, pre-preparation. But pre-preparation is needed for wisdom. I think for Christians, that means living a life of wisdom and prudence.

Now, prudence, it's an older word for wisdom. We don't often use it anymore. But prudence requires self-discipline and restraint.

Self-discipline and restraint. Governing our impulses for immediate gain in favour of long-term gain and careful management of our resources.

The challenge, of course, is we're not living in an age of prudence, but an age of excess. Everything in the modern world is focused on short-term, quick-fix solutions, and sometimes Christians can fall into that same trap.

[8:03] But we are meant to be much more about the long game in life. Think about it. Would you rather invest in a company called Prudential, and by the way, there is a company called Prudential, it's based in the UK, they're over 100 years old, and they have assets of over 500 billion rand.

Would you rather invest in a company called Prudential or a company called, hey, don't worry about the future, just do what you like now? Which one is probably going to give you better returns?

And so prudence, although it's not a word we use often anymore, the idea behind it of self-discipline, restraint, governing our impulses, being careful what you invest your money and your time in, and think carefully about what it is you're doing with the stuff of your life, that's what this parable is calling Christians to live like.

So, you need to ask yourself, is your life characterized by a focus on Jesus? Is your life characterized by a focus on His return?

And are you consciously lining up every aspect of your life to His agenda so that your life looks like a life of prudence, of self-discipline, restraint, planning, and husbanding of your resources?

[9:28] Those are resources that Jesus gives you. And He's going to call you to account for them one day. I think many Christians struggle with the prudence part of living with wisdom.

I mean, none of us live this out consistently, but is it something that marks your life? Or are there areas of your life that you need more wisdom in, more prudence, more restraint, more planning,

more careful thought?

The promise of God is that if you need it, if you need wisdom, you can ask Him. And the promise is, He will give it to you, but He does use it as a test to see what you really want.

I'm going to quote from James chapter 1. I don't think it's on the screen, but just listen to this. James says this, If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously, to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

If you lack wisdom, ask God, who gives generously. He doesn't trickle wisdom. He will heap it on you. But, he goes on, When you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind.

[10 : 44] That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. So, there's a test when you ask God for wisdom. Do you really want my wisdom, or do you really want the thing that you're asking me about wisdom for?

If I can put it like that. Now, we can be tempted to think living with wisdom is an optional extra or nice to have. You know, some people, those guys are wise, you know, they're really good.

I'm not that wise, I'm just going to continue living my life my way. So, we think it's an optional extra, but it's really not an optional extra, because the parable warns us that not living with wisdom will lead to your utter ruin.

And so, we need to look at what foolish preparation looks like if God returns. So, preparing wisely means living with care and foresight, then living foolishly is the opposite of that.

In the parable, the foolish bridesmaids don't have enough oil. It shows that they haven't thought ahead of time. It also shows that they, ah, they'll expect that someone else will provide the thing that they were meant to provide, the thing that they were meant to have done for themselves.

[11 : 58] Someone will fix it. And then, of course, they run around frantically at the last minute trying to get what they haven't prepared for. Not thinking ahead of time, thinking other people will fix it and then running around frantically.

That sounds like a lot of us, doesn't it? A lot of people living today live their lives like this. Now, the word for foolish is the same word from which we get the word moron.

I'm just telling you a fact. Now, in the Bible, the word foolish is not a pejorative. It's not to make you to make you feel silly, but it is a character flaw.

To be foolish is to have a dull, unthinking, and unperceptive mind. And, consequently, not taking actions that align with successful outcomes.

It's just not to perceive the world around you well, to kind of close yourself off and go, ah, something, somehow, it'll be okay. It's kind of like wishful thinking. But God doesn't want us to go through life with wishful thinking.

[13 : 09] He's given us a brain that works, and he wants it to be sharp and aware and reactive. So, a foolish person driving down the N2, drives, drives, drives, might not even notice there's skullies there on the right-hand side.

Ah, chitty, chitty, chitty, chitty. Bam! The brick is through your window, and you're not driving anymore. Or they see. Oh, they drive, drive.

There's the people. Ah, I'm sure it'll be fine. I'm sure someone will do something. Don't take any evasive action. Keep driving. And the brick's through your window. In the parable, preparing foolishly means living in a way that doesn't take Jesus or his return seriously.

The foolish bridegrooms not bridegrooms, bridesmaids. The foolish bridesmaids, they're not focused on the return of the bridegroom.

They're, I don't know what they're thinking about. But they're not taking it seriously. They had one job. They're meant to focus on this. That's what they're there to do, to provide a light as he comes in to the banquet hall. Preparing foolishly is living in a way that doesn't take Jesus or his return seriously.

[14 : 28] It's taking the things of God too lightly. You know about God, you know about Jesus, but you're not invested in God or Jesus.

And there's two very sobering lessons that sharpen the difference between wisdom and foolishness. the first thing that stands out is that the foolish bridesmaids are denied access not because they're malicious, but just because they didn't prepare properly.

So they didn't hijack the wedding event, they didn't kibosh it, they didn't trip people up, they didn't steal the other bridesmaids' oil. They just didn't have enough. They just weren't thinking.

They were just doing their own thing. They just didn't prepare properly. You know, at first glance, it doesn't seem like such a big deal. You know, they just forgot some oil.

Go get some oil, fine, we'll see you later. But because they were foolish, and because that means they weren't focused on Jesus and his return, the bridegroom's return, they get excluded.

[15:39] You know, people often think Jesus is only going to exclude those from the future kingdom. He's only going to exclude people who are really evil, really bad, done really wrong things.

He's actually going to exclude people from eternal life because they couldn't be bothered with him in this life. That could be you sitting here today.

You know who Jesus is, but you're just not that interested in him. Besides, you're busy trying to live a good life. You know, nice to people, good husband, good wife, provide for your family, work hard. all that counts for nothing with Jesus because actually it's all for yourself. And the one day where you want Jesus' help and you say, Jesus, help me.

This judgment day that I've got to face is too much for me to bear. Jesus says, sorry, I don't know who you are. The door to life is shut to you.

[16:46] You need to stay outside in the dark where there's wailing and gnashing of teeth and darkness and death. And so Jesus is warning you that it is ultimate foolishness to prepare better for your retirement than for your eternal future.

but what's even more sobering is that this parable is actually for people who are already part of the church but who never really show any of the fruits of having Jesus in their life.

And so you could be going to church your whole life but you've never really had a living relationship with Jesus in a way that deeply impacts how you live your life. your life is still a little bit chaotic a little bit unfocused a little bit too focused on yourself and the things of this world.

Not really focused on Jesus not really focused on kind of but not really. If this characterizes your life you need to take Jesus' warning really seriously because Jesus' words are absolutely chilling.

when the bridesmaids are knocking on the door to come into the banquet you would think that the bridegroom would say oh hi guys it's understandable you didn't have enough oil don't worry come in just sit at the back and keep quiet.

[18:18] You know like people who come to church late ah sorry that's not that's not in my notes. Jesus doesn't say that.

what is his judgment on the foolish bridesmaids? Verse 11 the others came Lord Lord they said open up the door for us but he replied truly I tell you I do not know you.

This word know is a powerful biblical word it's a covenantal knowing it's akin to the word for choose or love in the Old Testament in Amos chapter 3 verse 2 God says you only have I known or chosen of all the families of the earth and in Galatians 4 9 God says this Paul says but now that you know God or rather are known by God it's the same as loved by or chosen by God and so to not be known by Jesus is a catastrophic relationship break it's a covenantal divorce it's Jesus way of saying you know what you had nothing to do with me in your life so now I'm going to have nothing to do with you that's a wake up call if you're not living with Jesus at the at the center of your of everything that you are and everything you do not for nothing does the Bible say you must live with wisdom or not live at all speaking as wisdom

God says this blessed are those who listen to me who watch daily at my doors waiting at my doorway for those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord but those who fail to find me harm themselves all who hate me love death and what Jesus is saying is that anyone who doesn't live with wisdom that puts him at the center will receive death the scary thing is if you're a foolish bridesmaid if you're a foolish Christian if you're a foolish churchgoer you think you know Jesus you think he knows you but your lifestyle gives you away your thinking is foolish it's dull it's darkened it's slow to think about God but it's quick it's alive it's responsive to the allures and entertainments and the shiny things of this world truly I tell you

I do not know you is a sentence of death over your life you're shut out of the kingdom and you don't get to enjoy the banquet of eternal life for those who have lived wisely so what must you do with this if you're living foolishly you can you can be upset oh this guy's being horrible to me or you can take it to heart and say you know what I would like to join that banquet I'd like to be part of that wedding feast I'd like to have a future and so I want to urge you to join the banquet Jesus gives us very good motivation to be prudent and wise and to focus on his return but there's a lot of confusion and really bad teaching on the end times and so just a quick word about what Jesus means when he returns what this banquet is all about what the future is all about the return of Jesus in the

[22:28] Bible is the physical return of Jesus out of heaven to planet earth so we've looked at this recently the last few weeks about Jesus coming and Jesus coming back it's important to realize that he has gone right remember Acts chapter 1 he ascended on the clouds of heaven he's seated at God's right hand at the moment one day he's going to come back out of heaven on those same clouds and he's going to come back to planet earth yeah there's going to be some fairly cosmic events it's going to be a different kind of an earth a new earth but it's still going to be on earth but he's going to come back to reign as the mighty conquering king over every evil that has existed in the cosmos it's a cleaning up and a cleaning out of anything that does not recognize him as the one true king it's a physical return of a physical person to a physical place in physical time with physical buildings and physical people we're going to be there and we're going to have to give an account to that person as to how we lived our life it's an amazing event the bible describes it in the most glorious fashion and you really want to be on the right side of that person who comes back so I'm going to read from revelation in fact why don't you turn with me there because we're just going to spend the last few minutes just reading what God tells us is going to happen and then you can decide what it is you want to do with that so one greater than

Solomon is going to arrive in a better fashion than that so revelation then I heard what sounded like a great multitude like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder and there was shouting hallelujah for our Lord God almighty reigns let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready fine linen bright and clean was given her to wear the bride is us the church fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people and the angel said to me write this blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb that sounds like it's going to be a very cool wedding celebration doesn't it it's going to outdo any wedding celebration you've ever been to but what about the bride groom what about

Jesus what's he going to come like have a look at verse 11 same chapter well I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true with justice he judges and wages war his eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself he is dressed in a robe dipped! in blood and his name is the word of God the armies of heaven were following him riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen white and clean coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations he will rule them with an iron scepter he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God almighty on his robe and on his thigh he has this name written king of kings and lord of lords it is the best thing that you can do with your life is to make sure that that person likes you and the way to do that is to acknowledge that he is king of kings and lord of lords this is why the biblical hope that

God wants Christians to have is for the return of Jesus the whole story of the bible ends with Jesus telling us he's coming soon I'm just going to read a few more verses from the very end of Revelation you could turn there if you'd like to Revelation 22 I'm going to read from verse 12 these are some of the last words of the bible it's the thing that we are meant to focus on in our lives Revelation 22 verse 12 look Jesus says I'm coming soon my reward is with me and I will give to each person according to what they've done I am the alpha and the omega the first and the last the beginning and the end and then this invitation from verse 17 the spirit and the bride say come and let the one who hears say come let the one who is thirsty come and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life and verse 20 he who testifies to these things says yes

[28:38] I am coming soon amen come Lord Jesus well let me pray for us Lord Jesus you are the mighty bridegroom coming back for your bride Lord help us to be well prepared for that day it's going to be awesome and awful we want to be happy and joyful at your return help us to live with wisdom so that is the case amen may!

Thank you.