

Waiting Well until the King's Return

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[0 : 00] Welcome back to the last in our series on the parables of Jesus. We've had a great time, haven't we, learning about God and about Jesus our King and about that we belong to His kingdom with His subjects and what He wants us to do and how we to live.

Today's parable teaches us that Jesus is our King, but that He's a King that's not here and that we have to spend some time waiting for Him and how do we do that? How do we do that well? As I say, today's parable is all about waiting and it's the one thing that we hate to do, don't we?

No one likes to go to the shops. We don't go to the shops to wait. We go to the shops to get stuff done, to buy things and to take it home. No one wants to go to the bank and go and wait in the queue. And yet today's parable is about waiting and learning how we to act as God's people as we wait for the return of our King.

And the fact that Jesus is a King is well established in the New Testament. The main point we're supposed to get about Jesus is that He's the King of God's kingdom. The surprising thing in today's parable, and as well as it would have been for Jesus' disciples, is that we have to wait for Him to come back.

Where's He gone and what's He doing? And the reason that that's a surprise is that Jewish expectation, based on the Old Testament, was that God was going to come and establish His kingdom, and that's fine.

[1 : 17] But they would have expected His king, someone like David, to be established in Jerusalem and to reign from Jerusalem. And from there, all the blessings that God had promised would happen.

And it would also involve the temple. Temple worship would be restored. They would either chase out the Gentiles, or the Gentiles would come and bring tribute to them. But they would be God's people reigning, not just in Jerusalem, but reigning from Jerusalem over the whole earth, in a sense, and waiting for God's blessings to arrive.

So they would have been very surprised to hear that Jesus is the King, and that He is not going to be there. But you know, Jesus smashed lots of expectations when He arrived, and spoke and told them what kind of King He is.

He's a King that's going to die. That would have been shocking to them. He's a King that's going away. He's a King that doesn't want to kill their enemies, but that He wants His people to love their enemies.

He's a King, not just of the Jews, but of the Gentiles as well. So Jesus overthrew all these expectations when He arrived, and His disciples had to think through what all of these things meant.

[2 : 29] Just prior to the parable in chapter 25, in Matthew chapter 24, Jesus is describing Himself as one like the Son of Man, who is coming out of heaven to establish power and authority, in a sense, to establish His kingdom, but that He's coming to bring judgment, and specifically on Jerusalem.

Again, another thing that would have had these listeners scratching their heads. We thought the kingdom was to be established in Jerusalem. How come you, the Son of Man, are coming to destroy it? But nevertheless, it's the picture of Jesus as the Son of Man coming down and establishing His kingdom, and the Jews knew that that hadn't happened by the time that Jesus is saying these things.

Jesus is, in fact, telling them to look forward to His return, and to wait, and to watch, because there were going to be signs as to when these things are going to happen. Now, in Matthew chapter 24, it's a notoriously difficult chapter.

We don't have time to go through today, but many commentators will say that it refers, it's important for us to understand this, that it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but that that's just a picture of what will happen at the end of time when Christ Himself returns.

And yes, there's going to be signs, and Jesus says you must watch out for these things, because this is going to happen. In Matthew chapter 24, from verse 42, it says this, Jesus says, Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

[3 : 55] And understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what time the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch, and would not have left his house to be broken into. So you also must be ready, He's telling His disciples, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.

And our parable ends up with the same, Therefore, chapter 25, verse 13, Therefore, He says after this parable, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

And so the parable is framed in helping us understand that we have to be waiting and watching for Jesus to return. And what are we supposed to be doing while we do that?

And the parable is going to encourage us to watch and wait well, specifically to watch and wait wisely, as opposed to foolishly. Now, we all hate waiting, but Christians should be doing it well by now.

We've been waiting for 2,000 years, and yet it's still difficult. And so let's unpack what it means to wait well. Now, when you're waiting for someone, you've got to do a couple of things if you want to wait properly.

[5 : 01] You've got to listen to what the person has told you to do. You've got to trust that they are going to do it, that if they've told you to wait, that they're going to come back, if they've left you, that they are coming back.

And then you've got to prepare properly. And this parable is about wise waiting. And we'll notice how the story goes. It says, so, chapter 25, verse 1, At that time, the kingdom of heaven would be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

And this whole story is about what the kingdom of heaven is going to be like at that time, in the in-between time of waiting for Christ to return. It says, five of them, five of the virgins were foolish, and five were wise.

And so it's putting two camps, two sets of people together, or comparing or contrasting them. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.

The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. And the bridegroom was a long time in coming. They all became drowsy and fell asleep. Now that long time in coming, that long delay, is the key of the story.

[6 : 10] If the groom had arrived quickly, it wouldn't have been a problem. And so they had to reckon on what to do when there's a delay. And same with Jesus' disciples, and in the New Testament era.

They had to work out, Jesus said he's coming back, but we expected him to come back really quickly. And if you read Matthew chapter 24, all of those signs were fulfilled in AD 70. And Jesus is saying these things in AD 30.

So even there, there's a little bit of a delay, but not a long delay. It's 30 years. Maybe they thought he was going to do it much quicker than that. But now we've been waiting for 2,000 years already, and so how are we to make sense of that?

Nevertheless, the bridegroom is going to arrive, even if there is a delay. And so there's wise waiting. We have to prepare for Christ's return and wait wisely.

But it compares wise waiting with foolish waiting. Now, wise, what does it mean to be wise? It means to listen, to know that it is going to happen, that there is going to be this delay.

[7 : 16] Wisdom, Jesus has already spelled out what wisdom means in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew chapter 7, he says, Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

So being wise means listening to the words of Jesus or listening to the words of the Bible so that you can put them into practice. So listening well means that, or being wise, waiting wisely is being prepared for an unexpected delay and dealing with it well.

You're focused on the return. You know that the groom is going to return. But you don't do crazy things knowing that there might be a delay. You don't run off into the night.

You just wait patiently. You might fall asleep, but that's okay. When he arrives, you're ready for him. It means, waiting wisely then, means taking the steps to ensure that what is needed for you to do, for you to get things done, gets done.

You've prepared well. There's a trust knowing that the groom is going to come and that you want to be part of the festivities, that you want to do your job well. So being wise in this parable is listening to Jesus.

[8 : 34] He's the bridegroom figure. And it's specifically about who he is. We've got to listen to the Gospels, that Jesus is the king, that he's come to establish God's kingdom, that God's kingdom has, in fact, been established, that it has started.

Yes, he's gone to heaven now, but that doesn't take him away from his power and authority. In fact, it enhances his power and authority, but that he is coming back to finally establish it as it's meant to be.

But the important thing is that there is a kingdom, it has been established, and God and Jesus is currently reigning. And the reason that's important is because if we don't listen to Jesus well, we make up our own ideas about how the New Testament speaks about these things, we can think that, yes, Jesus has died for my sins, but the whole kingdom project is kind of on pause, and nothing is happening until Jesus comes back.

Or even worse, Jesus died for my sins, he's my king, but he's going to take me away from this world and live with him in heaven. We don't even think that he's going to return.

And so that in many Christians' minds, we haven't listened properly to the words of Jesus. We've made up our own idea of what it means to wait, and it kind of, just kind of wait around doing nothing, waiting to go to heaven.

[9 : 54] I've got one Christian friend who's, I don't think we're being serious, but they said they would like to, they're just wanting, sometimes they just feel so, life is so hard, they want to kill themselves and go to heaven because then it'll all be okay.

And they forget that Jesus has given us tasks to do on earth, in his kingdom, while we wait for him to return. So wise waiting then, is trusting that the person who said he's going to return is going to return, and that will result in preparing properly, so that whatever the goal is, you're ready to do it well.

You'll notice the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins in the story. The wise virgins carried extra oil. They were prepared that there may well be a delay, and the foolish virgins didn't. They said, oh no, it'll be fine, it doesn't matter. And they were caught out. And the wise waiting in the parable isn't something spectacular, just having extra oil. It's kind of getting on with ordinary everyday life, making sure that you're prepared for the delay, essentially.

And so, you know, Christians that are waiting for Jesus take one of several tracks. So there are Christians who think Jesus isn't returning, the kingdom hasn't really been established, and we're just waiting to go with him to be in heaven.

[11 : 08] That's not waiting wisely. You haven't listened to the words of Jesus properly if you think that. But other Christians are waiting for Jesus to return, and they're very, very, very focused on the signs, and they're very consumed with the signs, and looking at the signs and wondering when Jesus will come back.

But Jesus, in this parable, is teaching us to kind of live a normal life. Just realize I'm going away, that I'm coming back, but just be prepared for that eventuality.

But I have established my kingdom, and I want you to continue my kingdom work. But that kingdom work is kind of going to look ordinary and mundane. There's a famous story of Martin Luther, who was asked by a farmer, and he said, If Jesus is coming back tomorrow, what must I do?

And Luther replied, Well, what farmer? Who are you? I'm a farmer. What do you farm? Well, I farm apples. So Luther said, Well, go plant an apple tree. In other words, he's expecting people to live an ordinary Christian life, even though Christ could return at any moment at that time, which is true for us as well.

How does Jesus want us to live in waiting for his return? Well, it's living in life, that the kingdom has been established, and that the king has returned, and that he's given us a job to do in the meantime.

[12 : 23] If you look at all the parables that we've been looking at, many of them carry this theme of something that's been started. Think of the farmers. He's throwing the parables about farming.

He's throwing the soil, and it's growing. But he's going to come back. There's going to be a harvest. Think of the parables of the master of a house, and he's speaking to his servants, telling them what to do, and then he goes away, and expects them to grow his property.

And he comes back, and he wants to see how they've been doing, and it's no different with Jesus. Waiting here is not a passive thing. It's actually an active thing.

One commentator says this, readiness is not a matter of passively waiting, but of responsible activity, producing results which the coming master can see and approve of.

The period of waiting was not intended to be an empty, meaningless delay, but a period of opportunity to put to good use for the kingdom.

[13:26] And so wise waiting looks kind of like ordinary, everyday Christian life. Now that's not spelled out in our parable, but the context does give us some help.

There's two more parables to come in chapter 25. The one is of the parable of what's known as the parable of the talents. Again, it's of a master who goes away and tells his servants to put their talents to use, and that's not our talents, it's money, it's just the name for money.

And then in chapter 25, there's the parable of the sheep and the goats, and that's all about helping the poor. They're giving them food and giving them water. And so in the context, waiting well and getting about kingdom business is making sure that you're productive for the kingdom in your money and your business, and making sure that you're helping the poor.

Now that's something we've been seeing over the last few weeks, hasn't it? With the parable of the Good Samaritan and other parables that Nick has been teaching us. And so waiting for Jesus to return can look very ordinary and mundane.

And that's not something to be sneezed at. That's just good Christian living. The book of Thessalonians, well this is spelled out all over, but specifically in Thessalonians it helps us because Thessalonians is concerned, it's Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, and he's concerned with letting them understand about the return of Christ and what's going to happen.

[14:52] And he says this, even though Jesus is going to return and they must watch out for that, it talks about being awake and aware and not getting caught out. It says this in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, it's God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that's from verse 3, so just don't mess around while you're waiting for Jesus.

And verse 11, make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. You should mind your own business and work with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anyone.

So in the context of waiting for Jesus, we don't run around looking for signs and not getting on with daily life. No, get along with daily life. And don't go crazy, don't do your own thing, do what Jesus has been telling you to do.

Be normal, in other words, but be good. Be a citizen of the kingdom and go about kingdom business. It's not really rocket science, you know. But we do need Jesus' words in Scripture because we do need to know how to live properly.

And so this is where the listening bit comes in. We need to constantly go back to the Bible and read it again and again to have Jesus' words constantly in our minds and hearts to tell us how to live a Christian life because we're so good at not living it well.

[16:13] So why is waiting for Jesus means listening and reading His word and then taking it on board and just doing it doing what it says. Okay, so that's wise waiting.

Wise waiting takes into account that there will be a delay and then it listens to how you're supposed to wait. It means being prepared properly. It means ordinary everyday Christian living. Foolish waiting is maybe too focused or thinking that there won't be any delay or that the return will come now and then not preparing adequately or preparing inadequately not preparing properly for that. And so there's many, many Christians that think that Jesus is going to return right now. Now it's true that Jesus can return at any time but they're so focused on the signs and every little sign that they think that they pick up in the world around them every little vibration and it could just you know, it's an earthquake but that means that Jesus is coming back.

We mustn't be too focused on the signs and think that that is going to tell us something least of all the signs that we make up in our own mind. I remember years ago I was living in Fishhook and there's a little mountainside in Fishhook on the Klovally mountainside and one day they did a fire break on the mountain and it went from the top of the mountain down but it went through a band of rock and so everyone woke up on one morning and it looked like there was a sign of the cross on

this mountain out of the blue and oh my goodness this is Klovelly in Fishhook and so many people oh Jesus is going to return this is a sign from the heavens I mean it made the local news but some signs make international news or maybe you've seen these signs videos online there's a person with a cam it's never steady and then this is the trumpet sound of God and then there's clouds and one of them looks like a big angel but it's you know it's obviously all made up and they're not real so foolish waiting is thinking that

Jesus is going to return now and that I can read the signs we get caught up in reading the signs and not get caught up as it were in living a consistent Christian life and going about kingdom business others are lazy they're just too lazy to get things done and some lose heart and so this parable is about perseverance as well about making sure that you are sticking there to the end because there's a reward waiting for us and so the parable ends by noting the differences between the two groups verse 10 while they were on their way to buy the oil the bridegroom arrived the virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet and the door was shut echoes maybe of Genesis and Noah's Ark when Yahweh shut the door later the others also came the foolish virgins sir sir they said open the door for us now that sir sir the NIV in the Greek it's lord lord lord open the door for us and so there's indications of course of the groom being Jesus as our lord but he replied [19:31] I tell you the truth I do not know you therefore keep watch because you don't know the day or the hour and so the parable ends up by teaching us that there's going to be an inclusion and exclusion people are going to be included or excluded in the kingdom depending on how well they waited whether they waited with wisdom or with foolishness so the ones who are ready and waited wisely are known or recognized by the groom he says oh yes come on come on thank you for helping they welcomed in and they get to enjoy the wedding banquet those who are not ready and waited foolishly are disowned and rejected and excluded from the banquet and you know that's not something you want to miss out on in one of the other parables parables we saw the the imagery of a banquet the kingdom of God is going to be a banquet in this case a wedding banquet

I don't know about you but wedding ceremonies are just the best they're the most fun you don't want to miss out on a wedding party everyone is happy it's the start of a new beginning it's exciting you know everyone all your friends are there and most of all it's got free food but really good food and the Bible uses powerful picture language of the relationship between God and his people as a groom and a bride that's why we read that passage from Isaiah 54 it says for your maker is your husband the Lord Almighty is his name the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer yes for a brief moment I abandon you but with deep compassion I will bring you back in a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you says the Lord your Redeemer and so that's not a relationship to be missed out on to have the God of the universe described as your husband as your partner who loves you we all know that the marriage relationship is a lovely picture marriages that work well of a husband and a wife it gives you that freedom you can be who you are there's loyalty there's trust it gives that foundation that solidity knowing that you've got someone who loves you unconditionally and will never want you to not be in their life and so it's so sad that there will be some because of the way they've been waiting and the way they've been living that are going to be excluded you don't want to hear the words from Jesus go away

I don't know who you are the similar parable in Luke ends with Luke saying well done my good and faithful servant so at the end of time when we give an account of our lives to Jesus he's going to say either hey Dylan good to see you hey I really enjoyed what you did there well done or he's going to say sorry who are you no I don't know you oh no I've seen how you lived I don't want you in my banquet I don't want you here I don't know you the door is shut you can't come in and you'll miss out on this huge banquet and this feast here on planet earth with all our friends and family living in the kingdom that God has always wanted and so you don't want to miss out on this final banquet this feast that God has promised to give to his people you want to be welcomed by Jesus and known by him make Jesus proud when he comes back and says well done my good and faithful servant welcome oh I know you welcome and then enjoy all the blessings that he gave that he's promised in this life which we're not going to get now well let's pray to Jesus to help us to put this into practice in our lives let's pray dear Lord Jesus thank you for your word thank you that you are our king and that we know that you're going to return but that you have established your kingdom and that our task is to carry your kingdom task forward to live

Christian lives knowing that you are going to return and that you will finally establish your kingdom Lord we want to live wisely help us to do that well we want to enter your kingdom finally and enjoy the rest enjoy the banquet and enjoy knowing that you're welcoming us in and that you know us and that we will be with you forever on earth with you and all our friends and your family that your kingdom and your kingdom of peace and blessing will finally be established Lord we look forward to that day and ask for you to keep us safe and secure in your kingdom until that time in Jesus name Amen