Matthew 25:1–13 Study Handout

Introduction

Jesus tells a story about ten young women waiting for a bridegroom. They all expect him to arrive, and they all have lamps. But only five have prepared for a longer wait. When the bridegroom finally arrives, those who are ready join the wedding celebration. The others discover that their preparation was incomplete.

The parable reminds us that faith involves more than expecting Christ to return. It involves living in a relationship with Him that remains faithful through uncertainty and delay.

Background

- Matthew 25 is part of Jesus' teaching about His return and the responsibilities of His followers while they wait.
- Ancient wedding celebrations could include evening processions, making lamps or torches necessary.
- The bridegroom represents Christ, and the wedding celebration points toward the joy of God's promised kingdom.
- The delay reflects the uncertainty surrounding Christ's return.
- The next two teachings in Matthew 25 connect readiness with responsible service and practical love for others.

Matthew 25:1–4: The Appearance of Readiness

All ten women possess lamps and expect to participate in the wedding. The difference is that five bring additional oil, while five do not.

Their preparation reveals an important distinction between outward participation and genuine readiness. Just as the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7 both build houses, these women initially appear equally prepared.

Consider: Religious familiarity can support faith, but it cannot replace a living relationship with Jesus.

Matthew 25:5–7: Preparing for a Longer Wait

The bridegroom is delayed, and all ten women fall asleep. When his arrival is announced at midnight, everyone wakes up.

The wise women are not praised for staying awake. They are ready because they prepared before they became tired.

Consider: Spiritual watchfulness doesn't mean constant anxiety. It means remaining faithful through the normal rhythms and uncertainties of life.

Matthew 25:8–9: A Readiness That Cannot Be Borrowed

The foolish women ask to borrow oil, but there isn't enough to divide among everyone.

The oil illustrates the necessity of personal preparation. Jesus does not specifically identify it with the Holy Spirit, good works, or religious accomplishments. Its purpose is to distinguish readiness from neglect.

Consider: Others can encourage our faith, teach us, and pray for us, but no one can respond to Christ on our behalf.

Matthew 25:10–12: The Wedding and the Closed Door

The bridegroom arrives while the foolish women are away. Those who are ready enter the celebration, and the door is shut.

The closed door is a serious warning that our response to God's invitation matters. The bridegroom's statement that he does not know the late arrivals recalls Matthew 7:21–23.

Consider: Jesus offers grace freely, but He does not treat our response as unimportant. The time to turn toward Christ is now.

Matthew 25:13: Keep Watch

Jesus concludes by reminding His disciples that they do not know the day or hour of His return. He does not ask them to predict the future. He calls them to live faithfully in the present.

Consider: We prepare for Christ's return through our relationship with Him and the lives we live because of that relationship.

Wesleyan Emphasis

Prevenient Grace: God takes the initiative, reaching toward us and enabling us to respond to His love.

Justifying Grace: We receive forgiveness and reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ, not through our religious accomplishments.

Sanctifying Grace: The Holy Spirit continues transforming us as we grow in love, obedience, patience, and holiness.

Means of Grace: Prayer, Scripture, Holy Communion, worship, Christian fellowship, and works of mercy help us remain receptive to God's ongoing work.

Human Freedom: God's invitation is genuine, and our response matters. Grace is freely offered, but love does not force a relationship.

Living the Passage

Spiritual readiness begins with trusting Jesus Christ and continues as we allow His grace to shape our lives. We cannot earn salvation by doing more religious activities, but we can develop habits that help us grow in faith.

Faithful waiting also involves caring for others. We prepare for Christ's return when we forgive, serve, encourage, welcome, and demonstrate God's love through ordinary acts of kindness.

The question isn't whether we have accomplished enough to impress God. It is whether we are continuing to respond to the grace He has already given us.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between expecting Christ to return and actually being prepared for His return?
2. Why is it important that all ten women fell asleep?
3. What can other Christians do to help strengthen our faith? What can they not do for us?
4. How does this parable challenge the idea that attending church is the same as following Christ?
5. How does Wesleyan theology help us understand readiness without turning salvation into something we earn?
6. What are some ways our congregation can help people remain spiritually prepared?
7. What is one spiritual habit you would like to strengthen while waiting faithfully for Christ?

Thought to Remember: We cannot know the hour of Christ's return, but we can know the Savior who is coming.