

The Parables of Jesus, Teacher's Guide

Week 8: Readiness

Matthew 25:1–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This is one of the three heaviest weeks of the study, and the doctrine must be both clear and carefully bounded. The parable teaches the certainty of Christ's return, the hidden timing of that return, the absolute necessity of personal readiness, and the finality of judgment when He comes. Teach all of these plainly. The bridegroom will come; no one knows when; readiness cannot be borrowed at the last moment; and when the door shuts, it shuts. These are weighty, sobering truths, and the parable means them to land.

Be equally careful about what this parable does not teach, because Matthew 25 is a magnet for speculative end-times schemes. There is no secret rapture here, no two-stage coming, no future earthly thousand-year political reign. The New Testament presents the return of Christ as a single, visible, glorious event: the reigning Lord comes once, the dead are raised, the living are gathered, and all are judged (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; John 5:28–29). The kingdom is not a future earthly government to be set up at His coming; it is the reign Christ already exercises, established when His church began at Pentecost and over which He rules now from the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:32–36; Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44). So we do not wait for an earthly political kingdom; we wait for the return of the King who already reigns. Hold this line gently but firmly, and do not let the lesson drift into date-setting or end-times charts.

Then aim the whole weight of the parable at formation, because that is exactly where Jesus aims it: "Watch therefore." The point is not to satisfy curiosity about the timing of the end but to produce a life that is ready now. The oil that cannot be borrowed pictures a personal, well-supplied walk with Christ that no one else can provide for us. Press your students past appearing ready to actually being ready, with a faith that is genuinely their own, and send each one home with a concrete step toward a readiness that does not depend on having more time.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus tells this parable to teach about the coming of the bridegroom, ending with, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (v. 13). What does the parable teach us about the certainty of Christ's return and about the fact that its timing is deliberately hidden from us, and why does He join those two truths together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the two truths Jesus binds together in his closing command: the bridegroom is certainly coming, and no one knows when. Both halves matter. The certainty rules out the scoffer's assumption that He will never come (2 Peter 3:3–4). The hiddenness of the timing rules out any presumption that we can know the schedule or delay our readiness until the signs line up.

Teach why Jesus joins these. If we knew the date, we would be tempted to live carelessly until the last moment and then scramble. By keeping the hour hidden, the Lord calls us to a constant readiness, a life always prepared rather than a deathbed or end-times scramble. The unknown hour is not a cruelty; it is a mercy that keeps us awake.

Warn gently against date-setting, which has embarrassed the church repeatedly and contradicts Jesus' plain words. "You know neither the day nor the hour" closes the door on every prediction. Our task is not to calculate the time but to be ready at all times.

Apply it to ordinary life. A readiness that depends on advance warning is no readiness at all. Help students see that the hidden timing is precisely what makes daily faithfulness so important; the bridegroom may come at midnight, when no one expects him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of Christ's return against the scoffer's doubt (2 Peter 3:3–4)
- The deliberately hidden timing of His coming (Matthew 24:36)
- Constant readiness rather than a last-minute scramble
- The folly and disobedience of date-setting

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus join the certainty of His return to the hiddenness of its timing?
- How would knowing the date actually tempt us to live carelessly?
- Why is the unknown hour a mercy rather than a cruelty?

Question 2

Student Question:

The foolish virgins assumed they had time to spare and were caught unprepared. Be honest about your own heart: are you living each day truly ready for the Lord's return, or quietly assuming it is far enough off that you can attend to it later? Where is that assumption showing up in how you live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question presses the foolish virgins' fatal assumption: that there was plenty of time. They were not hostile to the bridegroom; they simply did not reckon with a long delay or a sudden arrival. The question asks whether the student lives in that same assumption.

Help students notice how the assumption hides in ordinary procrastination. We intend to deepen our walk, deal with a sin, reconcile a relationship, get serious about prayer, later. The trouble is that later is precisely what no one is promised. A faith perpetually postponed is the foolish virgins' faith.

Move toward present readiness. The cure for the assumption is not anxiety but daily faithfulness, attending now to the things we keep deferring. Invite students to name where they have been assuming there is time, and to take one matter off the someday list and onto today's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fatal assumption that there is plenty of time
- Procrastination as the everyday form of foolishness
- Daily faithfulness as the cure, not anxiety
- Moving a deferred matter from someday to today

Discussion Prompts

- Are you living truly ready, or assuming the Lord's return is far off?
- Where does the assumption that there is plenty of time show up in your walk?
- What is one thing you keep deferring that you could attend to now?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus says, "the bridegroom was delayed," and during that delay all ten fell asleep (v. 5). What does this teach us about the interval between Christ's first coming and His return, and about the spiritual danger of growing lax and drowsy precisely because He has not yet come?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the delay, a theme Jesus deliberately builds into the parable: "the bridegroom was delayed." Teach that the interval between Christ's ascension and His return is real and may be long, and that the New Testament anticipates it. The delay is not a failure of God's promise but an expression of His patience, giving time for repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Name the spiritual danger of the delay. Precisely because the bridegroom tarries, the temptation is to grow lax, drowsy, and worldly, to live as though He is not really coming. Jesus elsewhere warns of the servant who says, "My master is delayed," and begins to misbehave

(Matthew 24:48–49). The wait tests whether our readiness is genuine or merely a burst of short-lived enthusiasm.

Note that all ten slept, and the wise are not condemned for it. The issue is not wakefulness but preparation. A long delay exposes who brought oil and who did not; it does not, by itself, doom anyone. The faithful endure the wait supplied; the foolish are caught empty.

Apply it to a church two thousand years into the wait. The delay can dull urgency across generations. Help students see that the length of the wait changes nothing about the certainty of the coming, and that faithful endurance through a long delay is exactly what Jesus is calling for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real and possibly long interval before Christ's return
- The delay as God's patience, granting time for repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
- The danger of growing lax and worldly during the wait (Matthew 24:48–49)
- Endurance through delay as the mark of genuine readiness

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus build a delay into the parable?
- What spiritual dangers arise precisely because the Lord has not yet come?
- How does a long wait test whether our readiness is genuine?

Question 4

Student Question:

It has now been many centuries since Jesus promised to return, and the delay can quietly dull our urgency. How has the long wait for Christ's coming affected your own readiness? Where have you grown spiritually drowsy, assuming that what has not happened yet will not happen soon?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the delay to the student's own urgency. After many centuries, the wait can quietly erode our sense that Christ really will return. The question asks the student to examine where the long delay has made them spiritually drowsy.

Help students see the symptoms of drowsiness: a faith on autopilot, obedience that has gone slack, a horizon that has shrunk to this life only, a quiet practical assumption that the return is a doctrine to affirm rather than an event to expect. The delay tempts us to file the second coming under things that will not actually happen in our lifetime, and to live accordingly.

Then call for waking. The remedy is to let the certainty of the coming reawaken expectancy and faithfulness. Invite students to name where they have grown drowsy and to take a concrete step

to wake up, renewing a discipline, addressing a slackness, living this week as those who truly expect the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How the long delay erodes our sense of Christ's coming
- Symptoms of spiritual drowsiness and faith on autopilot
- Reawakening expectancy through the certainty of the return
- A concrete step to wake from slackness

Discussion Prompts

- How has the long wait affected your own readiness?
- Where have you grown drowsy, assuming the return will not come soon?
- What would help you live this week as one who truly expects the Lord?

Question 5

Student Question:

When the cry came, the foolish could not borrow oil from the wise; each had to have her own (vv. 8–9). What does the oil that cannot be shared teach us about the deeply personal nature of genuine readiness for Christ, the preparation that no one else can do on our behalf?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws out the central image of the parable: the oil that cannot be shared. When the cry came, the foolish asked the wise for oil, and the wise could not give it, not from selfishness, but because some things simply cannot be transferred at the last minute. Each had to have her own supply.

Teach what the oil represents: the personal reality of a life prepared for Christ, a genuine, ongoing relationship with Him, a faith that is truly one's own, a character formed by years of walking with God. These cannot be borrowed in the final hour. No one can give us their relationship with Christ, their obedience, or their readiness.

Press the deeply personal nature of standing before God. We may share many things in the body of Christ, encouragement, teaching, fellowship, but no one can believe, repent, or be faithful for us. On the day Christ comes, the question will be whether our own flask is full, not whether we stood near people whose flasks were.

Apply it without harshness. The wise virgins' refusal is not a model of stinginess; it is a sober statement of reality. Help students feel the urgency of preparing their own hearts now, since this is the one supply no friend, parent, or congregation can provide for them at the end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Readiness as personal and non-transferable
- The oil as a genuine, ongoing relationship and faith truly one's own
- What can be shared in the body of Christ, and what cannot
- The urgency of preparing our own hearts now

Discussion Prompts

- What does the oil that cannot be shared teach about readiness?
- Why can no one believe, obey, or be faithful for us?
- What does it mean that the decisive question is whether our own flask is full?

Question 6

Student Question:

Some things in the Christian life simply cannot be borrowed at the last minute, a real relationship with Christ, a faith that is truly your own, a life of ongoing obedience. What is the "oil" you cannot borrow from anyone else, and how full is your own flask right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to identify their own un-borrowable oil and to gauge how full their flask is. It moves the previous doctrine into honest self-assessment. Many in our pews have inherited a faith, grown up in the church, and never quite made it their own.

Help students name what cannot be borrowed in their case: a personal walk with Christ rather than a secondhand one, a conviction they hold themselves rather than one held for them, an obedience that is their own practice rather than their family's tradition. The danger is a lamp that looks lit because of the light around it, with little oil of its own.

Then invite an honest measure and a step toward fullness. How full is the flask? What would begin to fill it, personal prayer, real engagement with Scripture, genuine repentance, owning one's baptism and discipleship as one's own? The aim is to move students from borrowed religion to a readiness that is truly theirs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the personal supply that cannot be borrowed
- The danger of inherited or secondhand faith
- Honest assessment of how full our own flask is
- Practical steps toward a faith and readiness truly our own

Discussion Prompts

- What is the oil you cannot borrow from anyone else?
- Is your faith truly your own, or are you coasting on others'?

- What would begin to fill your flask this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the unprepared finally came, the door was shut, and the bridegroom said, "I do not know you" (vv. 10–12). What does this sobering scene teach about the finality of judgment when Christ returns, and about the tragedy of a discipleship that looks the part yet is not truly known by the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question handles the most sobering scene: the shut door and the words, "I do not know you." Teach the finality of judgment at Christ's return plainly. When the bridegroom comes, those who are ready go in, and the door is shut. There is no negotiating through it, no later entry. The time to prepare was before he came.

Draw out the tragedy of the foolish virgins. These are not enemies of the bridegroom; they are part of the wedding party, carrying lamps, fully expecting to enter. They are a picture of nominal discipleship, religion that looks the part outwardly but lacks the inward reality. Jesus' words elsewhere are nearly identical: not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter, but the one who does the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21–23).

Be careful and pastoral. The point is not to make sincere believers despair but to expose the danger of a faith that is all lamp and no oil, all appearance and no substance. The remedy is not anxious self-torment but genuine, personal readiness, the very thing the parable urges.

Land it on the seriousness of being truly known by Christ. To be a disciple is to be known by Him and to know Him (John 10:14, 27). The horror of the shut door is reserved for those who were never truly His, however much they looked the part. This is a call to make sure our discipleship is real.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The finality of judgment when Christ returns
- The tragedy of nominal discipleship that looks the part (Matthew 7:21–23)
- Being truly known by Christ as the heart of genuine discipleship (John 10:14, 27)
- Exposing a faith that is all lamp and no oil, without breeding despair

Discussion Prompts

- What does the shut door teach about the finality of judgment?
- Why is it so tragic that the foolish were part of the wedding party?
- What does it mean to be truly known by Christ rather than only to look the part?

Question 8

Student Question:

The foolish virgins were part of the wedding party, carried lamps, and fully expected to enter; their faith was real enough on the surface but unprepared underneath. Is your faith genuinely your own and well-supplied, or are you in some way coasting on the faith of your family, your upbringing, or your church? What would it take to make it truly yours?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question confronts the danger of inherited, secondhand faith, the very condition the foolish virgins picture. Many who have grown up in the church, in a believing family, or in a strong congregation can drift along on the spiritual momentum of others without ever owning the faith themselves.

Help students discern the signs of a borrowed faith: convictions they could not really explain or defend as their own, obedience that is mostly habit or expectation, a spiritual life that runs on the energy of family or congregation rather than personal conviction. None of these inheritances is bad in itself; the danger is never making the faith one's own.

Then call for ownership. A faith becomes ours through personal conviction, personal repentance and obedience, personal walking with Christ. Invite students to consider what it would take to move from leaning on others' faith to standing on their own, and to take a step in that direction this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of coasting on inherited or secondhand faith
- Signs of a borrowed rather than an owned faith
- Making faith one's own through personal conviction and obedience
- Moving from leaning on others to standing on our own before God

Discussion Prompts

- Is your faith genuinely your own, or are you coasting on others'?
- What are the signs that a faith is borrowed rather than owned?
- What would it take to make your faith truly yours?

Question 9

Student Question:

This parable calls us to watch for Christ's return, which the New Testament presents as one certain, visible, glorious event when the reigning Lord comes to judge and to gather His people (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). How does this guard us against the popular ideas of a

secret rapture, a two-stage return, or a future earthly thousand-year reign, and how does knowing that Christ reigns now and will return once to judge shape the way we wait and watch?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinally weightiest question, and it must be handled with clarity and pastoral steadiness, because Matthew 25 is constantly pressed into speculative end-times systems. Begin with what the parable and the wider New Testament plainly affirm, then mark off the errors.

Affirm first the certainty and the character of Christ's return. The bridegroom comes, and his coming is the climactic moment of the parable. The New Testament describes this return as a single, visible, glorious event. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, the dead in Christ will rise, the living will be gathered, and all will stand before Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Matthew 25:31–32). The angels told the apostles that this same Jesus will come in the same way they saw Him go (Acts 1:11). It is one coming, not a secret slipping-away followed later by a public arrival.

Then mark off the popular errors gently but plainly. There is no secret rapture in which Christ removes the church quietly and returns again years later; Scripture knows one return, public and unmistakable, like lightning that lights the whole sky (Matthew 24:27). There is no two-stage coming. And there is no future earthly thousand-year political reign for which we are waiting. The kingdom is not a government Christ will establish on earth at His return; it is the reign He already exercises. The kingdom came with His ministry, was established when the church began at Pentecost, and Christ rules now from the right hand of the Father (Mark 9:1; Acts 2:32–36; Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44). He is not a king-in-waiting; He is the reigning Lord.

Show how this reshapes our watching. Because Christ already reigns, we are not waiting for Him to win a throne or to set up an earthly capital; we are waiting for the King who already rules to return and bring this age to its appointed end in resurrection and judgment. Our hope is not political or earthly but the appearing of our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13). This keeps us from both the distraction of end-times charts and the disappointment of misplaced earthly expectations.

Land the lesson back on readiness, where Jesus lands it. The right response to the doctrine of the return is not speculation about timing or geography but a watching, ready life. We do not need to know the day; we need to have oil in our lamps. The reigning Lord will come once, certainly, at an hour we do not know, to judge and to gather His own. Therefore, watch.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's return as one certain, visible, glorious event (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Acts 1:11)
- No secret rapture and no two-stage coming; the return is public and unmistakable (Matthew 24:27)
- No future earthly thousand-year political reign to await

- The kingdom as Christ's present reign, established at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2:32–36; Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44)
- Waiting for the reigning King to return, not for Him to win an earthly throne (Titus 2:13)
- Readiness, not speculation about timing, as the right response to the return

Discussion Prompts

- How does the New Testament describe the manner of Christ's return?
- Why is there no secret rapture, two-stage coming, or future earthly thousand-year reign to await?
- How does knowing that Christ already reigns now shape the way we watch for Him?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the parable. Jesus held up two groups who looked identical until the bridegroom came, and He pressed one question: are you ready? Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this story. What is the single step you most need to take this week to be found ready whenever the Lord returns?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers up the parable and presses it toward one concrete step toward readiness. Jesus ends not with a timeline but with a command: "Watch therefore." Keep the class on that note, away from speculation and squarely on preparation.

Help students choose a fitting step. For some it is making an inherited faith truly their own. For some it is addressing a slackness the long delay has bred. For some it is filling the flask through renewed prayer, Scripture, and obedience. Each is a definite, doable step toward being found ready.

Close by reminding students that the goal of this study is formation, not information. The reigning Lord will come, certainly, at an hour we cannot know. Invite each person to name one step toward readiness this week, and let the group pray for lamps that are full and hearts that watch.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at readiness, not speculation
- Choosing one concrete step toward being found ready
- Owning our faith, addressing slackness, or filling the flask
- Watching as a way of life, since the hour is unknown

Discussion Prompts

- What one step toward readiness do you most need to take this week?
- Is your step to own your faith, address slackness, or renew your walk?
- How can this group encourage you to watch and stay ready?