

Pop Quiz: Judgment Day

Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV)

¹ "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' ⁷ "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' ⁹ " 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰ "But 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. ¹¹ "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' ¹² "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' ¹³ "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Matthew's Gospel has a big section concerning End Times. It began as a private conversation in Matthew 24 with the disciples asking Jesus, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3) Jesus tells them to look for many signs: wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, people pretending to be the returned Christ, persecution of the followers of Christ, God's Word preached to the whole world, and more. Then Christ will return. When Christ returns, that very day the world will end - Judgment Day.

You probably recognized that those signs that Jesus gave to his disciples that would signal Judgment Day have all already happened. We are living in the End Times. Jesus can return at any moment, and as Jesus told his disciples, no one, except God the Father, knows the day or hour of Jesus' return. So, keep watch for it.

Are you keeping watch for Judgment Day? Are you ready for it? If Jesus were to return today and judge you, asking why he should let you into heaven, how would you answer? What would you say? I mean, this is it. Your eternity, your forever, is on the line. There are no do-overs. There are no second chances. This judgment is forever. What's your answer? Would you say, "I tried to do what is right. I was a pretty good person. I went to church quite a bit, took some Bible classes. I was a pretty good Christian."? Would you say, "I see Greg made it in. Greg will vouch for me."? Would you say, "Well, I didn't know you were going to return today. So, I'm not really ready. Can we do this again another day so that I have time to prepare and can do this over?" These answers are as lame as they sound. The doors of heaven will be shut to you if you give God any of these reasons.

Judgment Day, in a way, feels like a professor or teacher who closes class as the bell rings saying, "There may or may not be a quiz tomorrow. Sleep in fear." You leave class, and you weigh your options. What's the likelihood he will actually give a pop quiz? Should I study tonight? Do I have enough knowledge stored up that I'll get a passing grade without studying? How much will a quiz really affect my grade? Do I need to prepare at all? And every subsequent class you have where no pop quiz is given, you are tempted to grow more and more lax in studying for a pop quiz that you figure will never be given.

That's basically what's happening in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins. Parables are earthly stories meant to convey a truth about God and how he operates, to help us understand God and his teachings by using earthly terms. Many of the elements of the parable are obvious. The bridegroom, the one who is coming, represents Jesus. The bridegroom's arrival in the parable represents Jesus' return on the Last Day, Judgment Day. The wedding banquet is a picture of heaven. The ten virgins waiting to escort the bridegroom to the wedding banquet (heaven) represent all people – some are believers in Christ as their Savior (the wise ones) and others are not (the foolish ones) as evidenced by the outcome of the parable.

I wrestled with pictures of the lamps and the oil and the falling asleep. My consolation is that at least I'm in good company because many respected theologians also wrestled with those pictures and came to different conclusions. Instead of trying to painstakingly pin each of those items into a representation of something else, let's focus on the point Jesus wants to make to us. He says in verse 13: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." So, let's take the lamps, the oil, and the falling asleep all as part of the picture that shows we, as people of the world, do not and will not know the day or hour when Jesus will return for Judgment on the Last Day. It will take us all by surprise, like that time the teacher actually gives the threatened pop quiz.

Why is Jesus telling his disciples and us this parable? It's meant to make us examine where we stand with God. Will I be shut out from the wedding banquet like the foolish virgins who didn't have enough oil for their lamps or will I enter the wedding banquet

with the bridegroom as one of the wise virgins who was ready for him no matter how long it took him to arrive? Will I be the one who is ready for the pop quiz or am I a person who is going to wing it and hope for the best? When Jesus returns to judge the world on the Last Day, will I be judged worthy to be with Jesus forever and ever or will I be shut out of heaven as one who is not worthy?

Some would teach you that you don't really need to be ready for Judgment Day, that there's another chance after Jesus returns to judge the world, a way to improve your grade, so to speak, like extra credit. They teach that there's a place where you can still eventually be allowed in to heaven, like through tutoring. It's wishful thinking to avoid the reality of Judgment Day as if God will pull the fire alarm to spare you from that pop quiz and give you more time to prepare before you actually take it.

That's not what Jesus, God himself, teaches. When the bridegroom arrives and the wise virgins go in with him into the wedding banquet, into heaven, the door was then shut. We hear the fate of the other virgins. "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' (verses 11-12) Their fate is sealed. There was not another chance. There was no longer any forgiveness. Try to skip the test and it's an automatic fail. There's no extra credit, no way to boost your grade. They had their time to be ready for the bridegroom, but they were not. They squandered their time to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom, and now they are shut out from the wedding banquet forever.

So it will be when Jesus returns. Those who on that day are confronted with the reality that they did not believe in Jesus and did not believe that he would come and judge them are then left with the forever reality that they are shut out of heaven. There are no do-overs. There's not another chance. Our chance to prepare for the bridegroom's coming is this life. Our chance is now. We have seen the signs of the end – the wars and rumors of war, the famines, the earthquakes, the persecution, the people claiming to be Christ, the Gospel reaching all four corners of the earth. We are living in the End Times. Christ will return and soon. Keep watch! Be prepared because the bridegroom will be delayed. Why? God says in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

God did not design his return for judgment to be mean and unfair. No, in fact, Jesus warns us in advance specifically to help make us those wise virgins who are ready for the day, even without the benefit of knowing when it will happen. God is like the teacher who keeps telling you at the end of every class that there may be a pop quiz the next day so that you will study, so that you will be ready, so that you will succeed and pass with flying colors. God tells us in advance that Judgment Day is coming on a day and hour that we don't know so that we are ready for it and will be ushered into heaven.

How can we be ready for Judgment Day? The wise virgins had that extra oil, but what do we do to be ready to meet God and be ushered into heaven? To know that answer is to know why God lets anyone into heaven. We find that answer in our first Bible reading from Isaiah 52. There, God tells his people to put on garments of splendor, to free themselves from the chains on their neck. How? "Without money you will be redeemed." (Isaiah 52:3) Christ paid for our release from the captivity of sin by the payment of his perfect life lived for us and his innocent blood shed for us. Christ himself paid the penalty of our sins. God gave you and me garments of splendor when he redeemed us with his life and his blood, garments that God clothed you with in your baptism. It's like he took the test for us and aced it. His "A+" is marked in the grade book for us. You and I are ready for Jesus' return when we are immersed in this truth over and over again.

Jesus' garment of splendor, his perfection, covering over us – this is what makes us ready for his return. It's what he has done for us that ushers us into heaven. This is the message we need to hear every single day because we don't know the day or the hour when Jesus will return to judge us. The best way to be ready for that potential pop-quiz is to study before every class. In that same way of thinking, the best way for us to keep watch and be ready for Jesus' return is to be constantly reminded of what God has done for us, how he has bought and freed us from sin, that his garment of splendor covers us. This is what we do by continuing to come to worship together week after week. This is why we go to Bible class and Sunday School. This is why we talk about the sermon on the way home. This is why we put up our baptism certificates on the wall to remember that day when God clothed me with his righteousness and made me holy and perfect. This is why we regularly partake in the Lord's Supper because it's given and poured for us for the forgiveness of our sins. This is why we fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ to keep us immersed in this truth and to keep us watching for Jesus' return on the Last Day.

When Jesus asks why he should let us into the wedding banquet, we have the answer. The answer is not found in us, but in what God has done for us. We will answer Jesus on our day of judgment that you, Christ, will usher me into heaven because you lived for me and you died for me. You conquered sin, death, and the devil for me. You have made me wise for salvation through faith in you. I'm ready today because of what you have done for me. So, I pray, come, Lord Jesus, and take me to heaven. Amen.