

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**  
**Title: Keep Watch, Because You Do Not Know the Day or the Hour**  
**Lesson: Matthew 25:1-13**

**25** "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup> "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> "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.' <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' <sup>13</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Someday, everyone has to deal with the end of life, which means facing death. But we can't know when it will happen. That's why we usually aren't ready for it when life comes to an end. Through today's message, I hope and pray that you become individuals who are always attentive and prepared.

This story was found on the internet:

A human-resources director arrived at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter mentioned, "We've never had a human-resources director here before. So, we'll let you spend a day in heaven and one in hell, and you can decide where to stay forever."

"I'll go to hell first and get it done," said the HR director.

Surprisingly, she had a fantastic day in hell, playing golf with her former colleagues on a beautiful course and enjoying a delicious meal. However, when she returned to heaven, it was a bit dull, just sitting on a cloud and playing a harp.

St. Peter asked, "Have you decided where you'd like to spend eternity?"

"Yeah," she replied, "heaven was nice, but too boring. I choose hell."

"Okay," said St. Peter, "off you go."

The next time she arrived in hell, everything was barren. Confused, she asked Satan, "Where's the golf course? And where are my friends?"

Satan smiled, "Yesterday we were recruiting you; today you're staff!"

Matthew 25 begins with a parable from Jesus about the kingdom of heaven. In his story, there are ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. Their role is to light their lamps when the bridegroom arrives, illuminating him brightly for the guests at the feast.

The wedding ceremony officially starts when the bridegroom arrives. However, as they wait, there's no sign of the bridegroom, despite their anticipation. The ten bridesmaids are divided into two groups. Five of them prepared enough oil along with their lamps, while the other five, though they had lamps, did not bring enough oil. Perhaps, thinking that the bridegroom might be delayed, they assumed they could get more oil later. They might have even been considering borrowing some from their friends who had brought extra.

They would have discussed and practiced where they should stand when the bridegroom arrived, how to present the bridegroom as the significant person of the day.

However, the bridegroom still hadn't arrived. Waiting for him made them tired, and they soon became drowsy and fell asleep. They got really tired, and eventually, they fell asleep because they had been practicing all day while waiting for the bridegroom. Jesus doesn't blame them for falling asleep because God created the night to allow us to rest. Instead, God understands our weakness, tiredness, and forgives our mistakes, incompetence, and weakness.

As time passed and midnight approached, someone urgently announced that the bridegroom had arrived, saying, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (6).

Upon hearing this, all ten bridesmaids woke up, trimmed their lamps. However, while the lamps of the five ladies who had prepared enough oil shone brightly, the others ran out of oil and soon went out. The bridesmaids with extinguished lamps were in a state of emergency. So, they hurriedly tried to borrow oil from their friends, but their friends refused. Then, they suggested going to buy oil from those who were selling.

It seems like we need to understand a bit about the wedding culture of that time. Back then, weddings were huge parties in the village that lasted for days and nights. Everyone celebrated the newlyweds, and because these parties attracted lots of people, the markets stayed open late, selling stuff.

The five ladies went to the market to get oil. But soon after they left, the bridegroom arrived at the wedding house, and the door was closed. When the ladies came back with oil, they reached the door just as the wedding started. They tried knocking, but the door stayed closed, and they couldn't join the celebration.

Some might think missing a wedding party is not a big deal. But in that culture, being invited to and taking part in the village's most important event, the wedding, was seen as an honorable thing. On the other hand, not getting an invite and not being able to join was considered embarrassing.

The five bridesmaids continued to knock on the door, asking for it to be opened and searching for the bridegroom. However, the response they received from the bridegroom was that he didn't know them. In other words, the bridegroom stated that the bridesmaids who hadn't prepared enough oil had no connection with him.

Friends, there were ten bridesmaids. However, only five could participate in the wedding feast, while the remaining five could not. What made the difference among them? The key difference was whether they had enough prepared oil before the arrival of the bridegroom. This difference in preparing enough oil or not had a significant impact, extending to their relationship with the bridegroom. The preparation of oil or lack thereof was deeply related to their relationship with God.

In the end, Jesus tells us, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (13) What does "keep watch" mean here? It doesn't mean staying awake at night and not sleeping. When Jesus says "keep watch," it means to prepare enough oil before the bridegroom comes. Being awake implies preparing well before that day, before God's appointed time. It asks us to consider how we should live before the arrival of the bridegroom.

The five bridesmaids who didn't prepare enough oil actually resemble us. Sometimes, as we walk through the journey of faith, we make excuses like "I was too busy to prepare enough oil" or "I thought I had enough oil, but the bridegroom arrived too late."

However, when the bridegroom arrives, no matter how many excuses we make, it will be too late. While God may forgive us for falling asleep due to tiredness, He does not view positively our lack of earnest preparation for His coming. There's a saying I like, "Better late than never," but it doesn't apply well to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells us, "Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

There's a movie titled "If Only," around for about 20 years now, telling a story about a lovely young couple. The woman seeks love, but her partner, a workaholic, takes her for granted, prioritizing his success and job over her love. An accident happens, and he loses her. Regretting not loving her more while she was alive, something remarkable occurs the next day. They go back to the day before the accident. Realizing he has limited time to love her, he seizes the opportunity, and they spend the best day together.

Jesus says: "Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Friends, please keep watch. Prepare enough oil before the bridegroom arrives. To prepare enough oil means to love each day to the fullest. Love God, love your family, and love the dearest people around you, your neighbors, because we do not know the day or the hour. Amen.