

## The Parables of Jesus: Stories About the Last Day Sunday, 8/11/19

**1** Jesus told parables as an engaging way to teach spiritual truths in simple story form, generally with one main point. After reading so many parables this summer, we've begun to see a pattern. By using simple objects like yeast, seeds, weeds, fish, nets, pearls, and paychecks, Jesus contrasted the way things were in the world today with the way they were becoming as God's Word, Spirit, and people began to transform the world. Contrary to our expectations, the Kingdom of Heaven starts with the smallest of things and grows to benefit most those who are least likely to enjoy the perks of the current social order. Not everybody chooses to follow Jesus, but those who do lay aside their selfish choices will discover a treasure and inheritance through a living faith in Jesus that will outlast the fleeting treasures we hoard today. We've already looked at some teachings and parables about judgment on the last day, but today we're focusing on the question of the return of Jesus. If Jesus is going to return (and he did promise that he would), then when is he coming, and what are we to do in the meantime?

**2** Have you seen the movie "27 Dresses" with Kathrine Heigl? If you haven't, go watch it. If you have, then I'm embarrassed to admit that the bridesmaid's dresses from our wedding thirty years ago were a pretty close match to one of the 27 bridesmaids dresses Kathrine Heigl wore in the movie. No, not this one. Look for the one in teal green.

Weddings do tend to have costumes, as well as rituals and schedules. Most weddings have rehearsals because there are so many people doing something entirely new for the very first time. Nobody wants to be that one person that's called out every year when the wedding video is replayed and they say, "Oh! Here it comes! Tom is going to trip over the wagon with the ring bearer again!" In the time of Jesus, there were definitely unique social customs regarding weddings, and you might be interested in reading about them in your study Bible. But none of that is really necessary to understand the parable of the bridesmaids. What's more helpful, perhaps, is a modern retelling. Here's one in comic strip fashion from a user on storyboardthat.com.<sup>1</sup>

**3** [First comic frame]. *There were ten students about to take an exam on their laptops.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboards/hannk/the-parable-of-the-ten-virgins--modern-version>

*Five were foolish. Five were wise.*

**4** *The foolish students did not charge their laptops the night before whereas the wise students' laptops were at full power.*

**5** *The students dozed off while waiting for the examiner to arrive and awakened to the sound of the bell ringing.*

**6** *When the foolish students opened their laptops, they noticed that they were almost dead. The foolish asked the wise to lend them their chargers, but the wise told them that they did not bring their chargers as theirs were already charged.*

**7** *The wise students told the foolish that they should go find chargers because they needed their laptops. The foolish students left to go find chargers and while they were gone, the examiner arrived and shut the door and locked it because late students were not allowed in after the exam had begun.*

**8** [Last comic frame]. *The foolish returned and asked the examiner to open the door but the examiner refused saying that the rules did not allow them to do so.*

**9** Whether it's wise and foolish students, wise and foolish bridesmaids, women grinding at the mill, men working in the field, or the overseer of a kitchen, the point Jesus is trying to make is the same. The bridegroom, the master of the house, the Son of Man (that is, Jesus), although delayed, will be coming back, and there's zero chance that you and I can know when that will be. Since we know that there will be a separation on that day of those who love Jesus from those who love evil, it's in our best interest to live each day as if today is the day that Jesus will return. And guess what. It might very well be today. So what are we to do while we're waiting? Jesus tells us to be vigilant and to be prepared.

Being vigilant means more than just staying awake. Vigilance implies a kind of waiting that's active and alert, that anticipates future events with all our senses, ready to patiently wait at attention as long as necessary and then spring into action when action is called for. We are to be as vigilant to the coming of Jesus as we would be if we knew a burglar was about to break into our house and steal our stuff, or as vigilant as a bridesmaid should be when waiting for the processional music to signal her entrance into the church sanctuary.

Each Sunday, we pray for Jesus to return when we pray, "thy kingdom come." The

Kingdom of heaven can't possibly come in its fullness until Jesus returns. So what happens when we finish that prayer and walk out of the sanctuary this morning at 10:00? Are we really expecting Jesus to return? Are we watching? Are we anticipating, not with fear but with joy? Waiting for the bridegroom to arrive is a joyful thing. Are you eagerly waiting for Jesus to return, or are you content with the way things are, carrying on as usual, like the contemporaries of Noah were before the flood?

**10** Unlike the earliest Christians, we're not crying out to God to deliver us from an occupying army of Roman soldiers. But we do still cry out to God in anguish because of any number of the many ways the current world order falls short of God's perfection. Global warming, the forced migration of millions of people due to warfare and famine, new diseases that ravage our minds and bodies. The list goes on and on. The abhorrent acts of violence last Sunday in El Paso and Dayton are just the latest reminders that things could be a whole lot better than they are.

We're going to watch a music video now that's based on one of the songs that I like to play when I feel discouraged by the brokenness of this world. The band is Superchick, and the song is "We Live."<sup>2</sup> It reminds me that becoming cynical and dropping out of life in the face of pain is not what Jesus had in mind when he told us to be vigilant and prepare for his return. Let's take a look. **{Show We Live by Superchick, 3:21}**

**11** "We live. We love. We forgive and never give up." That's a pretty good rally cry for any follower of Jesus. It reminds me of this passage from Paul's second letter to Corinthians:

*7 We now have [the] light [of Christ] shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. 9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. 10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies...16 That is why we never give up...17 For our present troubles are small and*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=092EBCNU>

*won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! 18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.<sup>3</sup>*

**12** As Christians living in a broken world, we walk in a tension between our desire for Jesus to return and heal creation, and our mission to be agents of that healing in the world today. Since we don't know when Jesus is coming back, it turns out that today is really the only day we have to be concerned with. Each day is a chance to offer love to someone who doesn't deserve it and forgiveness to someone who hasn't earned it; a chance to decide to be hopeful rather than cynical; a chance to choose to press on instead of giving up. I'm not claiming that it's easy, but I am saying that it's an excellent way to frame your preparation today for the return of Jesus and the remainder of eternity. The next 24 hours lie before you. Each hour is a dress rehearsal for the wedding banquet in eternity. How will you prepare?



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<sup>3</sup> 2Corinthians 4:7-18. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)