November 8, 2026

Matthew 25:1-13 "What Are We Waiting For?"

Some people are perfectly content waiting for things. Others, like me, have very little patience for waiting. I've been that way for most of my life. As a kid, I didn't like waiting for Christmas. I don't like waiting in line at the DMV. I don't like seeing a highway sign that says, "Road construction ahead. Expect delays." I go out of my way to avoid afternoon doctor's appointments because I figure by lunchtime they're already running forty-five minutes behind schedule. But here's my favorite. And I know you've all experienced a version of this at some point in your life. You're at the grocery store, ready to check out. (You know where this is going, right?) The self-checkout lines are ridiculously long, so you decide to outsmart everyone and find a shorter line at one of the regular registers.

The first line has a shopping cart overflowing with groceries and there are three *very* active little kids jumping around trying to sneak candy into it. Nope! Not going there. But the next line? Jackpot! One person with about a dozen items. You are going to be out of that store in no time! Except this person is arguing with the cashier over the price of a twelve-ounce bottle of French's mustard. The cashier patiently explains that the sale price is for the six-ounce bottle, but the customer isn't budging. Then out comes an envelope stuffed with coupons, half of which expired sometime during the Obama administration.

Then *finally*, everything is scanned and bagged. All that's left is to pay. You figure they'll pull out a debit card, tap the reader, and you'll be on your way. Nope. Out comes a purse containing enough cash and loose change to finance a small country. And naturally, they're going to pay the *exact* amount. Meanwhile, everyone who was standing in the self-checkout line has finished shopping, loaded their groceries, and driven home. Even the parent with the three kids is heading out the door. And you swear that one of those kids turns around, smiles, and waves to you as if to say, "You should've picked our line, buddy!" Thank goodness for

cell phones. Playing “Candy Crush” or “Words with Friends” sure does help take the edge off some of that waiting. But still … I’m not that patient.

Today’s scripture from Matthew is a parable about waiting. As is the case for most of Jesus’ parables, he begins with “The Kingdom of heaven will be like this.” He then tells a story about 10 bridesmaids who went to meet a groom. It must have been dark, because they brought lamps with them. However, five of the ten bridesmaids didn’t bring extra lamp oil. Then, for some reason, the groom was delayed and didn’t arrive when he was supposed to. But the bridesmaids got drowsy and fell asleep before they could extinguish their lamps. When the groom finally arrived, someone called for the bridesmaids to come meet him. That’s when the bridesmaids realized that their lamps burned through their oil as they slept. But remember, five of them brought flasks with extra oil. They planned ahead. They were flexible. So the five who *didn’t* bring extra oil tried to get some from the ones who *did*. But they were told to go buy their own oil because there wasn’t enough to go around. And while they were out trying to buy lamp oil, the groom came along, gathered up the five whose lamps were lit, and went to the banquet. Then he shut and locked the door so when the bridesmaids who were shopping for oil tried to get into the banquet hall, they found themselves locked out. To add insult to injury, when they knocked on the door, the groom said, “I don’t even know you.” The moral of the story? Jesus says, “Keep awake, for you don’t know the day or the hour.”

There are so many things that don’t make sense about this story including why did the five women who didn’t bring extra oil think they could find someone who’d sell them oil after midnight? It’s not like they had 24-hour Wal-Marts back then. But here’s the issue that so many people overlook – the moral of the story is, “*Keep awake*, for you don’t know the day or the hour.” Okay, fine but *all ten* bridesmaids fell asleep! So apparently staying awake *isn’t* what distinguishes the wise from the foolish. That’s our first clue that the parable is about something way more interesting and important than just staying alert.

One of the questions in this parable I want to address is, “Why was the groom delayed?” Or at least, “What is the *significance* of the groom being delayed?” When Matthew’s gospel was written, the early church was dealing with something they hadn’t anticipated. They believed Jesus was coming back, and many expected it to happen during their lifetimes. But then years passed by. Then decades. And more and more people who had known Jesus personally had died. And here were all these people waiting for this dramatic return of Christ, but it still hadn’t happened.

What were they supposed to do? Keep waiting? Give up? Start wondering whether they’d misunderstood the whole thing?
So when Matthew tells this story about a bridegroom who doesn't show up when expected, I think he's addressing a concern that was becoming all too familiar to the early church: What do we do when God doesn't seem to be working on our timetable?” Here’s something to consider though: The five wise bridesmaids weren’t wise because they knew when the bridegroom was going to arrive. They were wise because they knew they *didn’t* know. Run that by me again pastor.

Okay. The bridesmaids understood that things might not go according to plan, so they prepared themselves for the *possibility* of a long wait.
The other five apparently assumed everything would happen when it was supposed to happen. And when it didn’t, they were caught off guard.
Now, I don’t know about you, but I think there’s a lesson here that goes well beyond waiting for Jesus to return. How often do we put our lives on hold because we’re waiting for something to happen? We’ll take that vacation when we have more time or money. Or we’ll spend more time with our families when things settle down at work. We’ll volunteer for something when our schedules aren’t so busy.

And churches do the same thing. I’ve worked with congregations that were convinced their problems would all be solved if young families to started showing up. Okay, when? I don’t know. Just wait it out. Other

congregations were waiting for someone to make a large donation so they could finally do the things they'd been talking about for years. And here's what I noticed. Sometimes those congregations became so focused on what they *didn't* have that they stopped recognizing what they *did* have. They already had people with gifts and talents that weren't being used. They had opportunities to serve their communities that weren't being explored. They had relationships that could have been strengthened and ministries that could've been developed. But they were waiting. Waiting for the right person. Waiting for the right opportunity. Waiting for the money. Waiting for God to do something.

And honestly, I think the real issue didn't have as much to do with waiting, it's that they weren't really paying attention to what God was *already doing*. I've told you all about the church in Farmville, Virginia who had about 10 members in their 80s who were looking for a youth minister so they could have a youth group. Where are your youth? You can't have a youth ministry without youth. What they *did* have was a bunch of amazing cooks who eventually started a meals on wheels ministry. As Jesus said, "Keep awake! Pay attention!"

And that's what I think Jesus is getting at in this parable. Being ready doesn't mean having all the answers. It doesn't mean knowing exactly what the future holds. It means being prepared to respond faithfully to whatever comes next. Those folks in Farmville could have spent another ten years waiting for young families to move into the neighborhood. Well, the ones who had 10 years left in them. Instead, they finally recognized that they already had something valuable to offer. They had a kitchen, they had people who loved to cook, and they had neighbors who needed meals.

And suddenly, they weren't a little church *waiting* for something to happen. They were a little church *making* something happen!
Now, I'm not suggesting we should stop dreaming about the future or praying for new opportunities. Of course we should! But there's a

difference between hoping for something and putting our lives on hold until it happens. So here's what I want you to take home with you today. **Don't wait until you have everything you think you need before doing something with what you already have.**

Don’t wait until you have more time to reach out to someone who needs a friend. Don’t wait until you have more money to practice generosity. Don’t wait until you have the perfect opportunity to make a difference in somebody's life. And as a church, let’s not spend so much time wondering who’s going to walk through our doors that we forget to ask who needs us to walk through theirs. With consent of course.

Jesus tells us to keep awake. Pay attention. Be ready. Because the kingdom of God isn’t something we simply sit around waiting for. It’s something we’re invited to participate in right now. So, what are we waiting for?