



Chapter 25

Preparation or procrastination? These are two options, but many times we are more inclined toward only one rather than the other. Some of us live by the idea that *if we wait until the last minute then it only takes a minute to get it done*. Others start packing a suitcase several days before a trip.

Icebreaker:

1. Are you someone who prepares ahead of time, or do you tend to procrastinate? Share an example with your group that illustrates your tendency.

In many cases, procrastination is just as valid an option as preparation (although the preparers around you may disagree!). Chapter 25 of Matthew, however, is not one of those places! The beginning of this chapter continues the theme left off last week about preparation of a spiritual kind. Here, there really is a right and wrong way!

Verses 1-13

All of this chapter is still part of Jesus's response to the disciples question in verse 3 of chapter 24. Altogether, it's known as the Olivet or Apocalyptic Discourse—the last of Matthew's five long sections of Jesus's teaching. These first 13 verses emphasize the absolute necessity of spiritual preparation, or readiness, for Jesus's return. Jesus begins by saying, "Then, the kingdom of heaven will be like," which sets up the parable.

The five wise women and five foolish women are, of course, the major characters in the story. Weddings were multiple-day celebrations, and included, according to Grant Osborne, a first night where "the groom is on the way to the bride's home in order to escort her back to his home." As his journey is delayed (v. 5), all of the virgins (i.e., young women serving as bridesmaids who would meet the groom half way) "became drowsy and slept." As they doze, we can imagine the oil burning down. The sudden cry in v. 6, then, means that the moment has arrived!

2. Have you ever been in a situation like this, where you had to be ready in an instant or you would miss something critical?

There's a stark contrast between the foolish bridesmaids in these verses and the wicked servant in 24:48-49. Both, though, were found to be unprepared.

3. We cannot know when Jesus is returning, so what does it look like to be prepared for something that has such an uncertain timeframe?

The command in v. 13 to "Watch" conveys the need to be spiritually alert or ready rather than apathetic or careless. We need this alertness or readiness at all times since we "know neither the day nor the hour."

Verses 14-30

These verses paint a similar scene about the Kingdom, yet with an even greater emphasis on the accountability of each person to make the most of what has been given as we await the return of the King. Since a single talent was equivalent to around 20 years of wages, the master has incredible wealth. The three servants are given a different amount, “to each according to his ability.” This likely refers to the different spiritual gifts and capacities God has sovereignly and graciously distributed to His people.

4. How have you observed or experienced the different abilities God has given? Are you aware of how God has gifted you and are you aware of the gifts of others? Take a few minutes to talk about this in your group.

The period between the master’s departure and return is described only “after a long time” (v. 19). In the meantime, the first two servants demonstrate a drive and industry to make the most of what has been entrusted to them. Consequently, both are rewarded mightily for their actions. The descriptions of “little” and “much” in verse 21 is strange since the servants had actually been given so much at the beginning. In comparison, though, their reward is about to be so much greater!

The third servant, though, loses everything that was originally entrusted to him. This servant did not trust the character of the master and is deemed to be “wicked and slothful.” He has nothing to show for what was given and now he will lose even that. The result is condemnation.

5. Everything we have—spiritual gifts, financial resources, job skills, relationships, etc.—are to be used in service for the Kingdom. Talk about one or two ways this takes place in your life.

6. People sometimes think that we can simply have a “salvation moment” where we begin to follow Jesus and then live life any way we want after that because “we’re saved.” How do these verses challenge that idea?

Verses 31-46

Unlike the previous sections, there is no waiting involved here. This scene of final judgment further emphasizes the importance of the kind of lives we live. How we live now has eternal ramifications for where we live eternally. It’s a picture of universal judgment with “all the nations” separated out into one of two categories.

The six criteria initially presented in verses 35-36 can easily be construed as a call to social action. We should be careful, though, to note the phrase “my brothers [and sisters]” in verse 40. As Grant Osborne puts it, “Jesus’ message is that the world will be judged on the basis of how it treats those ‘little people’ whom God is sending to it.” Likewise, Donald Hagner calls it “deeds of mercy done to disciples.”

7. In verses 40 and 45, Jesus equates the treatment of His followers with treatment of Himself. How should that principle shape us as a community of believers? How should it impact the way we handle things like conflict and meeting each other’s needs?

8. What are you currently doing to help meet the needs of your fellow believers who are in need (locally and/or globally)?

Tying the Bow

This marks the end of the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24-25) and the last major section of Jesus’s teaching in Matthew’s Gospel. In them we’ve seen at least several essential points:

- Jesus's return is not something we can predict, nor are we encouraged to try!
- Jesus's return will be sudden and unmistakable. We won't have to look for it.
- Our lives have eternal consequence. The decisions we make in the present will reveal whether our faith is the kind that saves in the end.

9. Take time to pray together, asking God's Spirit to shape you into the kind of people who are not spiritually apathetic or self-absorbed. Ask Him to give you an unquenchable desire to live lives that yield an abundant and eternal return.