

If God were to move in your life in an unexpected way, or if He call our church in a radically different direction, would you be ready to respond to His leading, or would you be caught unprepared?

The good news is that we don't need to worry about tinkering with our lamps, or running off to find the nearest oil seller. All we need is to turn our hearts toward Jesus, for He offers us oil that will never dry up. As we follow His teachings our lives will be prepared for whatever He has in store for us in His Kingdom. Waiting in the Kingdom is not about waiting for a specific moment in history or in life, like this season of Advent, Christmas, and birthdays, but it is about waiting for a whole new type of reality. God is using times of waiting to test our faith and to strengthen us for the day that He comes to partner with us in ministry and redemption of the world. All the bridesmaids in today's story fell asleep, but it wasn't a problem for wise bridesmaids, because they were ready for the groom no matter when he came. In the same way, when our life is filled with a living and active relationship with Jesus, we don't need to worry when God comes at unexpected times. As we wait for Him, He gives us His spirit to sustain us, direct us, and lead us in the way of eternal life even now.

Waiting is part of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. As we experience times of waiting, let us ask ourselves, "Who am I waiting for?" and "What is the quality of my waiting? Will I be prepared when the waiting is over?" Our waiting is not in vain. Jesus will definitely come back because He has already paid a large sum. He has paid an excessive price to have us as His bride for all eternity. He paid it with a life lived for God, with a death to bear our punishment, and with a resurrection that defeated death. So while we know that there will be times of waiting, we can be sure that He will return. When the waiting is over, whether we experience the coming of our Lord in this life or the next, those who have waited faithfully will experience the joy of a bride on her wedding day in the celebration of the Kingdom that is to come.

Nov. 29, 2020
The Kingdom of God (5)
When the Waiting Is Over
Matthew 25:1-13
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

The title of today's message is "When the waiting is over." Do you like waiting or do you hate waiting? Many of our daily tasks include a fair amount of waiting. We often go to great lengths to avoid the wait. We calculate the fastest way home. We anticipate the fastest checkout line at the grocery store. We watch 2 or 3 TV shows at once so we don't have to watch the commercials. The principle behind all of these things is this: Cut down on waiting time as much as possible, because when I wait, I am missing real life. We think waiting prevents us from participating in those things that are truly meaningful. This attitude carries over when we are waiting for really significant things in life.

This Sunday we begin Advent, a season of waiting, waiting for the coming Jesus. We are not only experiencing waiting in this particular season of Advent, but we are experiencing waiting in our entire life. If you are single, you may be waiting to find your special someone. If you are out of work, or if you hate the job you do have, you may be waiting in this tough job market for the next job. If your life savings has invested in the stock market, you may be waiting for the market to rebound. As we are living in the pandemic, we are waiting for vaccine and for the time of being free from COVID-19. This waiting is painful. The longer we wait, the more it becomes a test of our character and a test of our faith.

In our text today, Jesus talked about a parable of faithful waiting. The message in today's parable is that waiting is simply a part of life in the Kingdom. This story is set in an apocalyptic context, but this can apply not only to our waiting for the second coming of Christ, but also periods of waiting for movements of God, both in our personal life, or collectively as God's people. And when we encounter these times of waiting, this parable tells us that we are

measured not so much by our ability or by our willpower, but instead by whether we have sustained a life of faith and prepared ourselves for participation in the Kingdom.

From today's passage, there are two questions about waiting in the Kingdom of Heaven. The first question is "Who am I waiting for?" The bridegroom in the story represents Jesus. Today, in our fast-paced consumer culture, when we see something we want, we expect it to be ours. We expect our needs to be met within a reasonable timeframe. We bring this attitude into the Kingdom. If our waiting is too long, we think that something is wrong, or we're not doing the right things, or God is punishing us, or God doesn't care about us. But here's the thing about participating in the Kingdom of Heaven. When we become a citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven, we've given up the right to wait for the things that we want. Now we wait for the King. We are bound to His desires and His timing. This is the Kingdom of the Heavens, and He is the King. It is His choice to decide His comings and goings. So as we experience periods of waiting in our lives, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I truly waiting on God, and do I believe really that he is trustworthy?"

The second question about waiting in the Kingdom of Heaven is "What is the quality of my waiting?" In this story Jesus was telling his disciples that the quantity of waiting should not concern them, but the quality of waiting. Jesus presented ten bridesmaids to us. Five of them are wise and five of them are foolish. They went out from the bride's house to meet the bridegroom who was scheduled to come sometime that evening. It was traditional in 1st century Palestine that the groom would come after sundown to take his bride, so the bridesmaids brought with them oil lamps to light the way of the wedding procession. In today's story some of the bridesmaids brought extra oil for their lamps, but others didn't. The groom's arrival was so delayed, and all of the bridesmaids fell asleep waiting for him. When they woke up, their lamps went out because the oil dried up. The foolish ones were amazed and astonished. Oil lamps don't burn without oil. So Jesus said the people who wait

wisely in Jesus' Kingdom are those people who make the obvious preparation of having oil for their lamps.

The lamp represents the state of our heart. The question is, when it is time, will God find our hearts well cared for, and will we be ready to respond to His initiative, or will we be ill-prepared when the waiting is over? Jesus is saying that life in the Kingdom of the Heavens is not about the outer trappings of a good life, but rather it is about the condition of a person's heart. He is telling us that faithfulness is to fuel our hearts with oil that will last. We can show what looks like a good Christian life, but having lamps in our hands which once burned well is no guarantee they will burn in the future. We are tempted to have the name of Christ as the password for heaven, and then we ignore a continuing and dynamic relationship with Him and disregard His teachings that lead to eternal life. We complain that we don't know what to do to live out this faith, but we neglect to study His word, we are mentally absent during worship, and we avoid developing community with other believers. Jesus is more interested in transforming our hearts and enabling people to live in a relationship with God. Jesus is telling His disciples that preparedness in the Kingdom is bringing oil for our lamps. *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33) The oil we need in our lamps is the oil of eternal life, and only Jesus can give us this through a relationship with Him.

Are you putting the right things into your heart while you are waiting? Are you waiting in such a way that you will be prepared when waiting is over? In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus challenges us to decide. The bridesmaids couldn't share their oil, because they needed to light the procession for the rest of the guests. In the same way, we are each responsible for the state of our own hearts. Ultimately, a faithful heart will be recognized by a flame that does not go out. Jesus said, *"Let your light shine in the presence of everyone so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in Heaven."* (Matthew 5:16) Has the light of your lamp grown dim? When others look at you, can they see the light of Christ?