

RESOLVED: Readiness

Matthew 25:1-13

1. **Faith**

- Hebrews 11:1; Romans 8:24-25

2. **Anticipation**

- 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Corinthians 8:12

3. **Preparedness**

- 2 Timothy 3:7, 4:1-2a

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“How could you possibly trust a 19 year old kid with a 40 million dollar military jet?” That was the question I asked my friend, Terry McAffrey, shortly after I’d started being the pastor at our Nazarene Church in Mountain Home, Idaho. There is a large Air Force base outside of town, and Terry was one of the men in my church and was an F-15 pilot. I was excited to get my first tour of the base, along with an inside look at his squadron, in the hangar, and up close and personal with the jets. This was twenty years ago, and at that point the F-15 was the newest tactical fighter jet with the latest technology for that time – it was incredible, and it all came together at a \$40m price tag. He let me and my boys climb up and look into the cockpit and he showed us the instrumentation, the fuel tanks and the bombs and the rockets that would all be attached. As he was showing us in and around the plane, I noticed the crew that was working on his jet. These were young men and women, some as young 19 years old. I couldn’t help but ask him, “If something isn’t fixed right or something goes wrong, it could mean a failed mission, could cost you your life, not to mention a lot of money. How could you possibly trust a 19 year-old kid with a 40 million dollar military jet?”

Terry eventually retired as a Colonel, and he’s now the Emergency Management Director for Volunteer Florida. But I’ll never forget what he told me. He said in answer to my question, “We *don’t* trust a nineteen year old kid. We trust *our training* of that 19 year old kid!”

If you’ve been in the military, or even if you’ve been in the scouts, you know how important readiness is. But I would suggest that of all people, Christians should be the ones who understand readiness *the best*. We ought to always be poised, ready, and prepared to do anything the Holy Spirit leads us to do, in a moment’s notice.

Last week we began a new series called “Resolved,” because we want to be resolved to always be ready.

With the new year we always think of “resolutions,” right? Those are decisions we make about our actions that we hope to start or stop practicing. The problem is, despite the best of intentions, we don’t often follow through with them. But in this series we’re *not* talking about decisions we *hope* to keep; we are talking about decisions that have *already* been made when it comes to being a Christian.

The word “resolved” means two things: one meaning is to make up one’s mind; to have a firm determination about something. The other meaning is when the solution for a question or dilemma has been arrived at or determined; that question or problem has been solved, or resolved. This series is not about making *more* decisions that you may or may not keep; this is about *living in what has already been resolved* in your life. If Christ is in

your life, you have everything you need to succeed in your Christian life – *if* you will be ready to do whatever God asks of you.

You are going to need to be ready in the coming year. There are struggles you will face, there will be temptations you'll need to overcome, there will be doubts and attitudes that you will want to avoid, especially with everything that is going on in the world today, because your family, your neighbors, your co-workers and classmates all need to see Jesus in you; *God has resolved for you, Christian, to be the presence of Christ in this world.* He's given you his Holy Spirit so you can do that.

And it's more than just *your* life, God has a vision for our church and this community in which we live, and that vision is exciting, it's bold, and it's clear. As a church, we see it and are moving toward it.

This series, by the way, aligns with the ways we asked you to begin praying back in November, so hopefully it will resonate with you. We have been doing this to prepare us for some incredibly exciting things that our church is about to engage in. I want to make sure you are aware that on February 9th we will embark on something together unlike anything we've ever done before, and it will take all of us being resolved to see it through as God will work miraculously through all of us together. These are adventurous days; this year we will launch a major initiative that will propel us forward in the mission statement that we have faithfully followed all these ten years that I've been here: *to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to equip people with a faith that works, and to live as people with purpose.*

Last week we talked about having eyes to see – the importance of *resolved sight*, having spiritually opened eyes, focused on Jesus. Today we want to talk about readiness.

Readiness is required of every believer in Jesus. Jesus teaches us this in a series of stories in Matthew 24 and 25. I'd like us to look at one of those stories in Matthew 25. To help us honor God's Word and focus on it, would you stand with me while I read it? Thank you.

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't bring oil for them. But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil.

When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.'

Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.'

But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, because if we share with you, there won't be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

Later the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us.' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore, keep alert, because you don't know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:1-13, ceb)

Thank you – you can have a seat. I have to say that I chose this translation on purpose because it calls these ten women “bridesmaids.” Your Bible might call them “virgins.” That is an accurate translation, but in that culture, a bridesmaid was *also* a virgin. These were younger unmarried women who were of marrying age, relatives and friends of the bride, and because they were unmarried they were expected to be virgins.

I needed to tell you that because if you didn’t know that, then you might wonder why these ten women are looking for the bridegroom. I promise you; this is not some kind of ancient version of a TV show like the Bethlehem Bachelor or something. Neither is this story about a guy who is going to have multiple wives. These women were bridesmaids – they were bridal party attendants who had a certain job to do in the wedding. Besides, I like the term “bridesmaids” better because, then, if your children are in here with you today, you don’t have to try to explain what a virgin is (or I guess now you do).

Let me set the stage with this passage before we apply it to our lives today.¹ Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew’s Gospel are the final collection of Jesus’ teaching material. The disciples asked Jesus what the sign would be of His coming and the end of the age, so Matthew 24:36-25:51 is Jesus’ response. Please hear this: the main thrust of Jesus’ teaching here is that *His followers should not worry about a sign but should be most concerned about being ready for his coming*. The same is true for us; quit watching for every sign and start living ready.

So there are four parables: one is about a slave managing his master’s servants, then this story we’re looking at, then what’s called the parable of the talents (about servants managing the master’s resources), and the parable of the sheep and goats – about a shepherd separating his flock between the two. They are all about living ready.

This story is about five wise bridesmaids and five foolish ones and is all about living ready. Jesus starts the story saying that the Kingdom of God is like these ten bridesmaids. Now, if this were Jesus’ only story about his coming, we might be tempted to think that this is *only* about his second coming. But there are plenty of other times that Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God had now *arrived* because of his life and death and resurrection (4:17; 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47). The Kingdom of God is already here – it isn’t just something that comes after we die or he comes back. **So this story is as much about how we live for Christ today as it is about being ready for his return.** Got it? That’s important, otherwise we’d be tempted to just hold on and wait for his return. But this is about living out his Kingdom *now*.

So here’s what was going on: the job of the ten vir – I mean the bridesmaids – was to wait with the bride for the groom’s arrival. They would then accompany the couple as the groom took the bride to his home where the final ceremony and celebration would happen. Often the rest of the neighborhood would join in on the procession so it became this growing parade to the groom’s house. If the celebration happened after dark, it was the bridesmaid’s job to carry torches along the way for the couple in a kind of parade of lights.

¹ Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students in the Wesleyan Perspective* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 293–297.

Robert Snow, Arseny Ermekox, *Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, The Foundry, 2019), 357-361.

These torches were large sticks with rags soaked in oil wrapped around the end of them. Then they would carry a jar of oil so that when the oil started to burn off, they could trim the rags, or add new ones, dunk it in the jar of oil, and then light it and carry it along the route.

Five of these bridesmaids were wise enough to be ready with enough oil. The other five were more concerned about the party right in front of them and less concerned about their responsibility.

It was getting late in the night and the ladies all fell asleep. When they were awakened with the announcement of the groom's arrival, five of them had enough oil for their torches, but the others did not. There was not enough oil for all ten of them, so the five of them have to go looking for oil in the middle of the night, with no luck. When they tried to get into the party, the doors were shut. The groom apparently doesn't want to be bothered with these selfish and foolish women and won't let them in, saying "I don't know you," meaning, "Only people who took responsibility and were ready will be a part of this celebration."

So with that context, there are three elements of readiness that I think this story tells us, and you and I need these if we are going to be ready for whatever Jesus asks of us in this coming year. The first is...

1. ***Faith***

Often, when we say we "have faith," I wonder if sometimes we think that means we have a system of thought or a philosophy of ideas that we agree with. "Christianity is my faith." Or, we might think that faith is simply wishing hard enough for something in the hopes that it will come to pass. Some people teach that you need that kind of faith if you want God to bless you, so you can't ever allow a negative thought and you've got to positively speak things into existence. If you have enough of *that* kind of faith then God is obligated to reward you with whatever it is you want. But the Bible seems to have a different understanding of faith. Here's a good summary that I came across of what the Bible calls faith: Faith is an "active trust and belief displayed through obedience...(in the Bible,) faith is typically understood as involving the whole self—mind, heart, and body—in a relationship with God that expresses trust and a grateful response to His loving initiative."² In other words, faith is an all-in relational response of obedience to what God has already said, or established, or resolved out of his love for you.

That's what the Bible is talking about when it says:

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1, niv)

The rest of Hebrews 11 talks about people who lived out their lives for a reality that they hadn't yet experienced. As a result they saw great spiritual victories, they saw God work in powerful ways, and they even willingly faced suffering and persecution and death.

² Kyle A. Roberts, "Faith," in *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

Readiness, then, means that ***we live presently in a future reality***. We live today, living out the Kingdom of God values and ways, even though it seems no one else does. Even if it produces struggles or suffering. It means that we live in obedience to what God wants from us *today*, even if we are not yet seeing it or experiencing it. Notice though that we are living out what *God* wants – not what *we* want. We don't manipulate God so we can get what we want; we live in obedience to what we know he wants. And in the process, he promises to give us what we need. That is part of readiness.

Five of the bridesmaids acted on a future reality in the present moment. All ten had fallen asleep when the groom showed up. Falling asleep wasn't the problem; it's that five of them were not ready for what happened when the groom arrived. They should have known it was going to happen, but their actions showed that they either didn't care, or didn't think it would actually happen.

In fact, I would say that the five wise women slept much better than the foolish ones, because they were ready. They acted in faith for something that they knew was a reality; they just didn't know when it would happen. *Five of them slept in peace; five of them woke to stress and anxiety*. There is peace in the hard work of readiness.

We need that kind of confident readiness, living our lives in the reality of God's Kingdom now, even if the world around us or our culture seems to be the furthest thing from it.

That also means we must think ahead; we need...

2. ***Anticipation***

The five foolish women were only living for today; they were not anticipating what was coming, even though everything in the story indicates that they *should have known* what was coming. *That was their job!* So when the groom comes in the middle of the night, they can't light their torches. They ask the five wise ones if they can use their oil, but there's not enough to go around – there is only enough oil for five torches. Had they been living in faith, they would have anticipated and been prepared for whatever eventuality.

The Apostle Paul told his young disciple Timothy that he needed to prepare himself so that God could use him most effectively:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”
(2 Timothy 2:15, niv)

That means that we must always be willing to do whatever God asks, whenever he asks, anticipating what God wants. Anticipation is the kind of willingness that is exactly what God wants:

“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.” (2 Corinthians 8:12, niv)

It means being willing to do in advance of being asked. What God asks of me won't be the same as what he asks of you but that's not the point: willingness is the point. That is anticipation.

So readiness is not only to live presently in a future reality, we do it ***as if it were to happen now***. We train ourselves so that at any moment, we can obey.

Readiness was a way of life for the folks on Mountain Home Air Force Base. Back then when we were there, the base was what was called a “composite wing.” Today, our air bases are organized around key functions, like bombers at one base, or fighters at one base, or drones, or whatever. Each base excels in one area. But at that time Mountain Home was something innovative; it was essentially an entire Air Force. At that time the base had air-refueling tanker planes, F-16 air to air fighters and F-15 C and E air to ground fighters, and also the B-1 bombers. The mission was that the base trained to be a single Air Force, so when needed, the entire base, from medical to food service to bombers could all deploy in a moment’s notice and fight a war together. They trained all the time every day and for weeks at a time in scenarios to be ready.

Then 9-11 happened. Mountain Home Air Force base deployed, and in the first 6 months of Operation Enduring Freedom against Al Qaeda, 60% of the bombs that were dropped in Afghanistan were carried out by Mountain Home Air Force Base. If anybody knew readiness, it was our friends and church family in Mountain Home.

That same kind of readiness is what is required of *every* believer in Jesus.

That means we live in faith, we anticipate what God wants, living in a state of...

3. Preparedness

When the ten bridesmaids fell asleep and were suddenly awakened, the foolish ones wanted to use the oil of the wise ones, but like we said, there was only enough oil for five torches. You might hear that and think that the five wise bridesmaids should’ve shared or given away their oil. And yes, in other places the Bible does tell us we need to be generous and willing to give. But that’s not the point here. The point here is that the five foolish bridesmaids should have been prepared, *because there will come a time when it’s too late*. In the middle of the night when the time arrived, they didn’t have any oil.

The wise ones tell the foolish ones to go see if they can buy some oil. But there was no Walmart in first century Palestine; everyone’s in bed. There were no AM/PM torch oil stores. The hard reality was that because the women had not properly prepared themselves there was now nothing they could do. The emphasis is not on sharing the oil; the emphasis is on the personal responsibility of the bridesmaids – a responsibility that the foolish ones ignored or didn’t take seriously. They knew everything they needed to know; they just didn’t act on it. These are people like the ones Paul talked about in 2 Timothy 3:7 – “always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 3:7 niv)

These people know it all, but never act on it.

Instead, we are to be prepared at all times. That’s what Paul meant when he told Timothy – and us:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season...” (2 Timothy 4:1-2a, niv)

Again, the problem with the five foolish women was that they had a responsibility to be prepared, and they were not. *We* must be in God's Word and maintaining an active prayer life, living out God's love, so we are prepared at any moment to obey anything God wants us to do, without hesitation. That is our responsibility. So we not only live presently in a future reality as if it were to happen now, but ***we live as if it depended on you.*** We accept full responsibility of living out our faith all the time, prepared for whatever God asks of us.

The Apostle Paul knew about this kind of personal responsibility to be prepared when he wrote these words to the Christians in the city of Corinth:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, niv)

The five foolish bridesmaids *looked* like bridesmaids. They even half-heartedly went about their job. But in the end, because they were not ready, they were disqualified. I don't want to be someone who *looks* like a Christian, and by appearances is a Christian. I don't want to be a Christian that only half-heartedly goes about my Christianity. I want to be all-in, ready at a moment's notice. Then I can rest peacefully, and I can join the party wherever and whenever Jesus shows up.

I have a friend who has taught me this. Some of you have met him, and some of you have heard me tell this story before. My friend is now retired from the medical profession. He went into the field because that's what he wanted to be – a doctor. He was wired for that and felt he had a calling for it. But he was also motivated by something else: he wanted to get rich. He knew that doctors made a lot of money (at least back then!). The problem was, he had this nagging thought in the back of his mind that God wanted him to be a missionary. He ignored that thought because he wanted to be a doctor and he really liked the idea of being rich. But the thought got louder and louder, all through medical school, until finally in his last year, he gave up. He told God, “Fine. I'll quit medicine and prepare for the mission field.” And he distinctly sensed God saying, “Good. I'll let you know when. In the meantime, keep doing what you are doing.”

So my friend went into private practice, then over the years he built his practice, then added some other doctors, then built a several story building that many medical professionals rented from him, then eventually sold his business and retired. He is a multi-millionaire. And he *has* gone on medical mission trips, but he still hasn't become a full-time missionary. However, *every day* of his life he begins by praying, “Is today the day you want me to give this all up and go to the mission field?” If you asked him if he thinks he'll ever go to the mission field (which I have asked him), he'll tell you, “I don't know if I'll ever do that, but I do know this: if I didn't live in that constant state of readiness, I wouldn't have all this wealth in the right perspective. Even today, I'm willing to give it up in a heartbeat.”

And I'll tell you what, he lives every day like a missionary, living out his faith. And, he is one of the most generous people I know. Time and time again God has asked him to help

people, to give significant amounts to important causes, and to give large sums to his local church's generosity campaigns. All because he lives in a state of readiness.

Resolved readiness will require radical obedience. Don't be caught in the dark. Don't be left out of the party.

Pray