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Living Ready

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom

Matthew 25:1-13

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We live today in what is often referred to as an instant society. Want to send a message? You can do that instantly. You need a cup of coffee? There's instant coffee for that need. A good healthy meal quickly? There's instant ramen for those—maybe not healthy—but it is instant, isn't it? We live in a frenzied world at a breakneck pace, constantly striving after our chaotic schedules, hoping we can catch up, but always failing. Our world moves quickly. It's because of that, that I think we as a people really struggle to wait. We don't like to wait very much. You know, just recently, I was at a stoplight, and I will confess to you that when the light turned green, and I was behind someone that waited about half a second too long, it bothered me a little bit. What are we waiting for? We struggle to wait. But most of our life includes a lot of waiting.

Even our faith includes a lot of waiting. As we have walked through this series on the kingdom, we talked the very first week about how the kingdom is the kind of thing that there are many aspects of it that are *already*, but there are many parts of it that are *not yet.* And so we live in this in-between period, and we are waiting. We are waiting for the coming of the kingdom. But we don't like to wait, and we don't wait that well. Sometimes we get pretty annoyed when we have to wait. So if we are a people that are called to live in this in-between moment, to await the full coming of the kingdom, the *not yet* part of the kingdom, the question for us that is very important is, "What does it look like to wait well? How do we wait well?"

That's the question that is going to be posed to us by Jesus' parable that we are looking at today in Matthew, Chapter 25. So, turn with me there in your Bibles, as we explore this parable together. Ever since Easter, we've been looking at Jesus' kingdom stories, these parables, and we've been considering, "What does it mean to live *in* the world but not *of* the world, to be part of a different kingdom, ultimately finding our life and our source from a different place.

Last week, Bryan reminded us that part of what that means is that we don't live according to the values of this world. We keep our eyes focused on that which is eternal. We have a kingdom perspective. We reject the kingdom of this world, and we embrace the values that are eternal. That's what our life is supposed to be about.

Now, as we near the end of this series this week and next week, our tone is going to shift a little bit, because Jesus' tone shifts as well towards the end of His ministry. As we get to Matthew 24 and 25, what we find is that Jesus is nearing the end of His time on earth and His earthly ministry. And as He is doing that, as He is making His way to the cross, tensions are mounting, and He is starting to become a bit more confrontational in His interactions with the leaders of Israel. Much like a prophet of the Old Testament, He is moving from kind of a corrective tone, a rebuking tone, to a tone that is announcing judgment and what is going to come for those leaders. Now His disciples pick up on this change, and so you can imagine how excited they were getting because they probably wondered, "Okay, is this now the moment that Jesus' government (just another word for kingdom) is going to be installed? And maybe they even asked at one point, "Hey, could I be

the secretary of the state?" "Could I be the vice president?" "You know, we wanted to kind of start to figure out who will sit where on your cabinet, Jesus."

The questions they asked, as things became more tense, was what led to what is called the Olivet Discourse, which is just a fancy way of saying the talk that Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives. That's what chapter 24 and chapter 25 of Matthew contain. At the beginning of chapter 24, I'll just read it to you. It starts this way, which kind of sets the tone for the entire message. In Matthew 24, verse 3, it says this:

> **As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** (*NASB, Matthew 24:3)

"Jesus, we've been following you all along. You've told us a number of things, but tell us when is this going to happen? And how will we know it's starting?" It's a pretty logical question, pretty understandable for them to want to know an answer to that question. And so it's in that context that Jesus begins His discourse. And as He teaches over the course of chapters 24 and 25, He, of course, does some straightforward teaching. But as is always the case with Jesus, He includes a few parables, and one of those parables is called the Parable of the Ten Virgins. That's what we're going to study here in Matthew chapter 25. So in the introduction to this parable, in verses 1 and 2, Jesus says this:

> **"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent."** (Matthew 25:1-2)

So here at the beginning of this parable, the introduction is really kind of setting the scene of the parable, and Jesus' tone kind of changes from His typical parable pattern. He often begins parables by saying something like, "The kingdom of heaven is like…," but here, as appropriate for these kinds of teachings that He's giving that can pertain to the future, He changes that a little bit. He said, "**The kingdom of heaven will be comparable…"** or will be compared to. In other words, there will be a moment when all of this will come to fruition. And here is what the disciples can expect it to be like, at some point in the future, when the kingdom comes in its fullness.

So what will it be like? He says, "Well, it will be like **ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."** Now immediately, from the inclusion of the bridegroom, we know that this setting is a wedding ceremony setting. Now weddings in this world 2000 years ago, the world of the New Testament, were much different than weddings as we think of them today. So we're going to need to talk about that, and we will do that in just a minute. But along with the **bridegroom** that tells us the context of the wedding, we also have these ten **virgins**. Now some of your translations may just say ten women or ten young women. Some might even say ten bridesmaids, because that's the context. But really, that word virgin is just referring to young women that would be of the appropriate age to be attendants or friends of a young bride and a young groom as they are getting ready for their wedding. Five of them, we're told, were **foolish**, and five were **prudent**. Finally, we're told that they had **lamps**. Now weddings in the Greco Roman world, and especially in the Jewish world, at this time were lavish ordeals.

We think of weddings, and we think: Okay, you know it's going be about an hour-long ceremony unless the pastor gets long winded. Then it'll go a little longer. My pastor spoke like 45 minutes at my wedding! That's a long time! *(laughter)* Maybe we'll go to a reception. It could be two, three hours at most. And at that point, we'll turn to whoever we're with, and we'll say, "Do you think we can go now?" You know, at least that's what I say at weddings. "Have we been here long enough?" Then we head home, and that's kind of the event.

But it was much different in their world. This would probably be a week-long celebration. Every single night, the entire village comes together to celebrate night after night after night. This was a big deal, and that's certainly the type of wedding we're reading about here. The festivities that would kick off this week-long celebration would begin in earnest with the bridegroom meeting his bride, and then starting to make this procession to the place that the feast or the wedding celebration will occur, either back at his house or maybe at the house of a wealthy relative, or maybe just at a wedding venue, something like that. And it was along the way, as they were walking to that location, that these attendants, these young women, would meet the bridegroom and would essentially escort him and his bride back to the festivities to kick it all off. And so we need to understand these young women were not just observers of a wedding; they were critical participants in the wedding. They had a very clear role to play, and it is an honor still today, isn't it to be invited to participate in a wedding? If these weddings had a kind of program, you would have seen the names of these ten young women in the program. They were a critical part of the entire festivity, and their role was to let everyone know the party is about to begin. It was a great honor to meet the bridegroom, and all that seems well and good. But we're told ten of the five of them were **foolish**, and five were **prudent**. So what exactly does that mean? Verse 3:

> **"For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep."** (Vs. 3-5)

So another facet or feature of these ceremonies was they'd often begin late at night, and would go late into the night before everyone would take a break. They would gather again the next day and do it again. As I said before, these young women had the role of meeting the bridegroom and helping him and his bride make their way to the celebration. They would meet him with lamps because it would be the dead of night, and obviously, in a world with no electricity, it would have been pitch black outside. So they had their lamps with them. And we're told all of them brought lamps, but we learned that only the prudent, only the wise, brought extra oil along with them. The foolish did no such thing.

Can you just imagine what a spectacle these weddings would have been? Pretty beautiful, really, when you think about it. It's this moment where the bride and groom kind of come together. They start marching their way through the dark night, and then all of a sudden, they would see before them all of these lamps burning, lighting up the night. These lamps probably wouldn't have been small little lamps. These were probably something more like torches, the kind of thing you see Indiana Jones carrying through a cave, right? This is a stick or a branch with cloth wrapped around it, and that cloth is dipped in oil in order to burn, and it does. It burns hot, and it burns bright…but it also burns fast. We know torches like this often only stay lit for 15 minutes…not much time…and so you would need to bring extra oil. We're told that five of the women did bring extra

oil. These women would meet this bride and this bridegroom in the middle of the night, and they would start walking their way to the party. The party would kick off, and the whole city would start to celebrate. The whole night blazoned with the glow of these torches, a beautiful and dramatic scene!

But at the beginning of this parable, Jesus lets us know there are two little problems, two obstacles. The first is that the bridegroom was *delayed*. Now it was really common in this time for the bridegroom to be delayed. And I just need to make it clear, it wasn't because he was, you know, playing soccer with his friends or something like that. He had business to do on the day of the wedding, so he would need to go procure the place that the wedding would be. And he'd need to talk to the bride's parents, and there'll be all of these interactions with all of these meetings, and often they'd go longer than expected. So it was common; it was quite expected that the bridegroom would be delayed. And that's precisely what happened here. Verse 5 tells us the bridegroom was delayed. In fact, it seems as though that delay was no big surprise to these ten women. They weren't shocked by that fact. In fact, they said, "You know what? He's a little delayed, so let's lay down and take a little snooze. Let's catch a little nap here before these festivities kick off. We have a long week ahead of us." But that brings to the surface the second obstacle.

The second little conflict we see in this story will become immediately apparent that this is not going to be an efficient process. These lamps are going to need to burn for quite a while. And that brings up the problem because we're told the foolish took their lamps, but they did not bring any extra oil with them. So all of Jesus' listeners, at this point, would have said, "Oh no, this is not going to go well for them." Verse 6:

> **"But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.'"** (Vs. 6-9)

Understand that this was the moment everyone was waiting for. This essentially kicks off the party. People see the bridegroom and the bride coming and they announce, "Here comes the bridegroom." That cues the women to go out and meet him and begin to escort him and his bride back to the party. But we're told that the foolish were not ready. In this moment, the folly of the foolish became absolutely clear. The very thing they were supposed to do (This is their entire role.) is to meet the bridegroom and meet the bride and escort them back to the celebration. The very thing they were signed up to do, they were not ready for. They were not prepared in that moment for the very moment for which their role existed. I can imagine that moment just being filled with panic for these five young women, as they realize they don't have any oil. Their lamps can't be lit, and so they turn to the prudent that have oil—that have extra oil—and they say, "Hey, can we borrow some of yours?" But the prudent deny the request.

And we need to understand their denial is not callous; it's not selfish. The prudent were wise; they understood the whole situation. They had adequately prepared, and they knew that if they were to give up their oil, then, essentially, we're all going to run out of oil. There's not going to be any lamps, any torches, any light to greet this bridegroom and the bride, and usher them back to the

party. The only solution isn't to share. The only solution is for the five that don't have any oil, are going to have to go find some. They're going to have to go find it in the city, and that would be a difficult thing to do. It's late at night. But it wouldn't be impossible because, of course, everyone knew where to buy oil in the city. But the other thing is that the whole city knew this celebration was going to happen, so everyone would have been awake. And so the five foolish women had to go find oil. The only question, at this point, is whether or not they would find it in time. Would they find it in time to fulfill the role for which they were chosen? Verse 10:

> **"And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'"** (Vs. 10-12)

That's sobering! They found the oil, but they didn't find it in time. They missed the moment. The bridegroom arrived on his way to the celebration. Only fifty percent of the people that were chosen to be there, were there. But, nevertheless, they said, "We are going to continue anyway." And so they continued the procession to the place where the celebration would occur. They reached their destination. They entered in, and the feast began, and the door was shut. So on the one side of that door was celebration, feasting, joy, and warmth.

But then we learn in a sobering moment, that the dramatic moment as the door was shut and the party began, that the other women finally arrived. So, they found the oil, but they found it too late. They finally arrived; they knock on the door, **saying "Lord, Lord, open the door to us."** But he responds, **"I do not know you."**

Now what you need to understand in this culture is that this was an honor and shame culture. And we need to understand this would have been a very shame-inducing thing that occurred for this bride and this bridegroom. They selected these close friends, these intimate friends, to participate in their ceremony and then five of them—five of them—didn't do what was asked of them. So this would have been a hard reality for the bridegroom and the bride. He says, "**I do not know you**."

So the story ends with this dramatic scene, this dramatic contrast. On the one side you have this warm room filled with all of the people of the village celebrating, and on the other side you have the five foolish young women left to walk away with the words of the bridegroom echoing in their ear. "**I do not know you**." A sobering story.

The question, of course, for Jesus' listeners and His disciples, as they sat on the Mount of Olives was, "What are we to do with this?" And as Jesus brings this parable to a close, He summarizes His main point. Verse 13:

> **"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour**."

Throughout Jesus' ministry, there were plenty of things that He helped His disciples understand. He gave them insight. He pulled aside the twelve and he'd say, "Hey, here's what this means. Let Me interpret this for you." There were many things that He told them, many things that they were privileged to know, and there were also many things He made very clear they would *not* know.

The question that prompted this entire discourse in Matthew 24 and 25, this discourse on the side of the Mount of Olives, was this. "*When* will the coming of the kingdom happen? And *how* will we know that it's happening?" Again, "When will it happen, and how will we know?" It's an important question, and I think we can all acknowledge it's an important question.

I think for those of us that have been walking with Jesus for a number of years, that question actually resonates with us, doesn't it? We, too, want to know, "When is it going to happen? How is it going to happen?" There are great multitudes of books describing how it's going to happen. In light of the news and all that's happening in Israel, (We just prayed about it.) and in light of the growing persecution in Asia, all of these things raise this question, because we're told at the end of days—in the last times—persecution will rise. About a month ago, I was in Asia, in South Asia, and learned that one of my friends in South Asia has been imprisoned twice over the past year because he is a Christian. Although that's not our world, at least not right now, maybe it will be. Suffering and persecution *is* their world.

And so you say, "Okay, does this mean it's all going to happen?" We look at what's happening in Israel, and we get many questions. Bryan, Jeff, and I receive emails with the question, "What does this mean?" And our answer has to be, "We don't know. We're not sure. Maybe." But Jesus makes it really clear that we're not going to know *when* and we're not going to have all the indicators for *how*. That's not something that we are privy to; we don't get to know all those details. Very easily the answer could be, "Yes, Jesus could come back in a year." "He could come back anytime He wants." "He could come back 50 years from now." "We don't know exactly when." I know throughout history, there have been a number of predictions about when He's going to come back, and all of them, thus far, have been wrong.

So where does that leave us? Does that mean that we just sit back idly, stare out the window and say, "Well, you just never know." So, what *can* we do? Jesus makes it abundantly clear throughout this parable, and in verse 13, He answers that question emphatically and clearly. He says, "We're going to have to wait and find out. But we need to wait well, and this is what it looks like. Be on the alert…be on the alert!" Let me translate that. "Focus. Be intentional. Live in a constant state of readiness." The Lord could come back at any moment. His delay may last longer. But none of that matters. What matters is that we are to, "Live in a state of constant readiness. We're to be on the alert, stay focused, and keep our eyes on Him. Don't get distracted. Stay focused."

This is precisely what these wise young women did. They were prudent. Their prudence was marked by a constant state of vigilance and readiness. They knew what they were called to. If the bridegroom had come immediately, you know what? They would have been absolutely ready. If the bridegroom had waited longer, you know what? They were ready, because they brought extra oil. They were ready; they were prepared. It could have occurred at any moment, and none of it would have mattered because they were living ready.

You can't say the same thing about the foolish. The foolish were not prepared, even knowing that the bridegroom would often delay. They didn't make adequate provision. They didn't live in this state of readiness. They were caught off guard. They had to go scramble to get the goods they needed to do their important role at the very last moment. Everyone knew that you needed to have

oil to meet the bridegroom. Everyone knew it was an honor to participate in the festivities. But it seems as though at least five of these women didn't take that honor very seriously—the incredible opportunity to participate in the wedding and the feast of the bridegroom. What a privilege! But their posture seems to suggest that they didn't quite see it as the privilege that it was intended to be. They didn't take it that way. They didn't receive it that way.

We said in the very first week, when we started this series, that parables are stories with intent. Jesus always had an intent. He was focusing on something, and He was driving a central point home. Parables aren't really allegories, where every single thing in the parable refers to something else. And so we don't need to say, "Well, what does the oil signify? And what does the wedding venue signify?" None of that stuff is the point. But there is a very central point that Jesus is making in this parable.

There will be a day that the Bridegroom will return. There will be a day that the kingdom, the *not yet* aspects of the kingdom will come in their fullness. But that is a day we won't know when it will happen. It could happen at any moment. The Bridegroom could return at any moment. The King could come on His march at any moment. And we, His disciples, those who follow Him, we are to live ready for that moment. We are to live ready for that moment today. We are to live ready for tomorrow. If it delays ten more years, we're to live ready for it all, all ten of those years we're to live in a constant state of readiness. We don't need to know when; we just need to live ready.

So, as we consider applying this parable in each of our lives, the thing that I have to say first is, I don't know everyone's particular circumstances. I can't know that. And so I don't know what that means for you at your work or in your neighborhood or in your family. I don't know what living ready means in the specifics. But I do know this. Jesus sent His Spirit to teach us and to guide us. So I believe that if we asked, He will tell us, "This is what it will look like." And we can start to follow where He leads us and prompts us what to do. So, I trust He will do that.

But I can, in this moment, speak in some generalities about what it means to wait well, and what it means to live ready. The starting point for living ready is choosing to follow Jesus. I just know that in this room this morning, there are probably people that are just on the fence with Him. You're not sure whether you're all in with Jesus. You like some of what you hear from Him, but you aren't sure you want to go all the way with Him, because you're not sure it would work out well. Maybe you're saying, "You know what? I'm just going to take a few more years before I make that decision." So maybe for you, living ready means coming to the point of decision with Jesus.

Jesus is going to return. There is a day when He is coming back, and He is calling those who are participating in the work that He's doing, to live in a state of readiness. And the very first step of being ready is taking Him seriously, and choosing to follow Him saying, "I am going to follow Him. I'm going to listen to Him. I am going to orient my life around Him because there is nothing better. He is the wisest. He is the smartest. He is the only One that can forgive me for my sins. He accomplished it, and He is the One who reigns now. I'm going to follow Him!"

For many of us that may be the first step of readiness. Readiness begins with commitment to Jesus. Maybe today is the day for some of you. My bet, though, is that most of us have made that decision maybe some time ago. So, the question about what it looks like to live ready is going to be different

for us. And maybe you're like me. Maybe you see what's happening in the world, and you struggle, at times, and want to say to Jesus, "Hey, what is taking You so long? Don't you see what's happening?"

So, what does it look like for us to live ready? The first thing would be to ask yourself, "How are you waiting? Are you living ready?" Would that be the way you would describe your life? And in the quietness of your own heart, as you're considering that with Jesus, would you say you're waiting well? Or are you just getting annoyed and frustrated? What does it look like to live ready?

You know, it was a few years ago that we launched what we call a *Renewed Vision*. That's what we called it at the time. I think it was the summer of 2021. I can't remember exactly; I guess I should have looked it up. Our mission statement is never going to change. For 25 years, the mission statement of Lincoln Berean Church has been: ***"To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ."*** That will always be our mission; it comes straight from the pages of Colossians. Every person, then, would come into a saving faith with Jesus Christ, and they would move towards maturity, move towards completing the work that He will finish, and where we are aimed. We did, a number of years ago, though, say, "You know what? We'd like to give some fresh language to that." And so we launched what we call a new vision statement that kind of spells out a little bit of what that process looks like. We repeat it often. We say: ***We want to be people coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and to help others do the same.*** I want to suggest to you that maybe living ready means to not just let that be Lincoln Berean Church's vision statement, but let it let it be your vision statement for your life. Maybe personalize it and say, "That's what I long for in my life, I'm committed to that." Maybe it looks like this: To live ready is to commit to ***coming together*** to embrace the fellowship of the saints. To say, "I am going to gather, and I am going to rejoice when I gather with fellow brothers and sisters, gathering in this corporate body worship experience, where we come, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with other people that have the same exact value and the same exact focus. And I am going to commit to that. That is precious to me." To live ready is to do that, to engage in that and embrace that.

But it's not to stop there. It's to also say, "I'm going to embrace authentic community. I'm going to invite people into my life. I'm going to invite intentional community." We call that Life Groups here. "I'm going to take a step inviting people in, and these people get to talk to me about how this stuff is being worked out in my daily existence. I'm going to commit to that. I'm going to embrace it, going to live ready in that way." But we don't stop there.

Of course, the vision statement moves on. Living ready could also mean that I am going to embrace this call ***to know Jesus.*** That's why we gather. There are gatherings happening all over the world, and all of them are fine. But there is one unique gathering, where the sole focus is lifting up the name of Jesus Christ, to magnify His name, to glorify Him, and to help more and more people come to know Him deeply. It's a unique gathering. We don't just gather together. We gather to know Jesus. When we talk about knowing Him on a personal level, we're not talking about just making sure that we can win the Bible trivia game, or not knowing just the details. That's important. That's the starting point. But we're talking about knowing Him deeply in an ongoing interactive way. Living in constant relationship with Him, growing in knowledge of Him year after year, so that we can look back and say, "You know what? I know Jesus better today than I did a year ago.

And by God's grace, I will know Him better in one more year than I know Him right now." I am going to live in a state of readiness, seeking to know Him more. It's what I long for.

Now we believe that if we do that, something will happen, we will ***become more like Him.*** To live ready is to actually become more like Him, to actually experience inner character transformation, such that we don't just try to manipulate the outside. No, Jesus is changing the inside. He's changing us internally, such that we follow Him, and we obey Him. And we have more and more joy as we do that, because He's changing our very hearts. He's restoring us, renovating our heart, changing our passions, changing our loves. We are experiencing transformation. We're actually becoming more like Jesus. And the goal of that transformation is Jesus Himself, that each one of us will look more like Him. I know I can say with certainty that is Jesus' intent for every single person in this room that is committed to Him. Jesus intends to make you more like Himself. And so to live ready is to say, "I'm all in on that. I am going to commit to that. I'm going to commit to You, Jesus, the work that You want to do in my world, to change me into a different kind of person. You've already begun that work, and I believe You're going to continue, and I'm going to agree and partner with you in that work that comes about by Your grace."

Maybe that, in a general way, is what it looks like to wait well for each one of us to live ready. And of course we do all of that, right? We do all of that in order to look at ourselves in the mirror and say, "Look at us. Aren't we amazing!" That's why we do it, right? Of course not! The statement continues… ***and help others do the same***. The Lord makes it very clear. There is intent behind the delay. He is delaying so that more will be saved. That's why He's doing it. And so we live readying, by living ready. We say, "This isn't just about me." We believe that there are people out there right next to us, in our families, in our workplaces. There are people all around us that are not living in relationship with their Creator. They don't know Him. They're not experiencing this interaction with Him. They're not experiencing transformation into His likeness. And as they miss out on those things, they are missing out on the greatest opportunity of a lifetime: to know Jesus, to live in relationship with the Creator who made them, and who formed them in the womb.

And so we seek to ***help others know Him.*** Maybe that starts by helping little kids know Him at VBS. Maybe it starts by really intently praying for our neighbors. We live ready by saying we are going to seek to make Him known, and ***help other people become disciples of His,*** because being a disciple of Jesus is the greatest opportunity of a lifetime. It is what human beings were made for. There will be a day when these *not yet* parts of the kingdom will be made manifest. They will come in fullness, and we long for that day. But until that day, we wait…and we wait well. We don't twiddle our thumbs. We live ready.

I don't know exactly what that looks like in your world, but we love to tell stories here at Lincoln Berean. And, often, those stories are looking backwards at what God has done, and we rejoice and celebrate those. Sometimes, though, we'd like to tell stories that are kind of like right in the middle of them occurring. We want to tell you a story today that is like that. Because of that you're not going to see any faces. You're not going to hear any names, because we want to honor the integrity of the story, and the fact that it's all still unfolding. We don't know what God is going do with it, but we think it's a great example of what it looks like to *live ready.* I do want to warn you though. Our video team did a great job of reenacting some of what transpired in the story, and so you're going to hear some fireworks. You're going to hear some gunshots. I just don't want that to catch

you off guard. I've already warned our security that there's going to be a gunshot, okay? I just want to say that living ready doesn't have to look heroic. Sometimes it can look very simple. Maybe for you, it will look something like this:

(Video): Dialogue only:

"I live out in the country, outside of Lincoln, and we have a neighbor. And there always seems to be a tension with that guy, just one of those neighbors that you don't really trust. You know, there's always something going on. And this has gone on for years.

Well, then one September he and a bunch of buddies just started lighting fireworks, like huge, booming fireworks, and our goats were all frightened and scared. You know, what's going on? So I went over and was like, "Hey, can you not do that?" And he immediately got defensive. And so I got mad and I just yelled at him, like, I don't even know what I said, but I yelled at him. After I left, he went to his front porch and just started firing off his gun. And I started looking at our barn like, "Is he shooting this way? Like I didn't know where he was shooting, and I'm like, "Are there holes in the barn?" You know, you'd be able to see, but no, I think he was just showing his aggression. Like, I've got guns, you know?

Well, then he just kept doing it, like a couple times a week, he'd just be out shooting, and I think he was just trying to intimidate me. All winter it goes on. And then we have a guy that attends here at Berean, and he does a bee-keeping class, and we'd told him he could have his bees out at our place. So in February or March, he brought the bees out, and then he starts his bee class in May. So, the first bee class, there's all these people that came out to this bee class on our property, and they're right close to the road. They're basically by our driveway or road, so they're close to his house. While they're all out there having the bee class, he is shooting off his gun the whole time.

And so I was like, "You know, this isn't good." And I'd been taking a class where we were going over a book by Dallas Willard called "Renovation of the Heart," and I realized I have to live with him. He's my neighbor. And so I just started thinking about it and praying about it and so I'm going to go over and see, as apparently he is upset with me.

So I went over and I basically said, "Hey, I am sorry for yelling at you a while back when you guys were lighting up the fireworks." I said, "That was not right of me. I know that's not a very good thing to do as a neighbor." I said, "You know what? There's a lot of anger and violence in this world, and I really don't need it at home, and neither do you. I know that you will get that all over the place. You know, I don't have to have that with you. So, instead, I had noticed you had chickens here, but I think they've all gotten killed by predators or something. We have a lot of eggs, a lot of chickens, and a lot of eggs. So, instead, I can give you a dozen a week, if you want to just be our neighbors. And I just gave them to him.

And he was like, "Oh, man, I appreciate that. And I mean that was just like his heart softened immediately, just like that. Me stepping forward and just making that first step, and it softened. And then I came over every week. Then he started asking, "Hey, how's your dad doing and stuff?" And I'd just come over, and every once in a while, there's little conversations. So then the

other day he saw the ambulance, and he said, "I think I saw an ambulance; I saw a lot of lights. I know it's nobody's business, but I was just concerned." But I told him, "Yeah, my dad. We had to call," and told him just high-level stuff of what was going on. And he told me, "If he's ever on the ground, and you can't get him up, come and get me. I don't care day or night, whenever it is, and I'll help you get him back up on the bed or on the couch." And so I appreciate that, too. I'm like, here's some day or night change like that. So I give him a dozen eggs every week. Sometimes I go over and get to interact with him. Sometimes it's just, "Here's your dozen. Hey, have a good day." Then other times there's conversations. But the minute I started doing that, he quit shooting his gun off the front porch. You know, that's a way different heart, even on his side, than what would have been. So I feel like there's just a big change that's happened there with how I view him and handle him in these situations. But I guess I've just decided I can either be enemies with my neighbor, or I can show love towards him. So now there's been a repair and a restoration in this relationship with my neighbor."

Ryan:
We don't know. We don't know how that story is going to end. We don't know what God is going to do with that story. But we do know that our Savior has promised He is going to return. He is going to return, and until that day, let us be a people that embrace the call to wait well, to live ready, to live with our eyes on Him. Seeking to honor Him, seeking to glorify His name, seeking to speak His name, to speak Jesus through our words, and also through the content of our very lives. When He returns, let us be found ready. Let's pray together.

> *Lord Jesus, we long for the day when You will come again. We don't know when that day will be. You tell us we won't know, but You do tell us to be alert, to be ready. And Lord, our confession to You is we can't save ourselves from sin. And we can't obey You and follow You and live ready without an abundance of Your grace. And so we ask that You help us. Help each one of us to know what it looks like to live ready today, right where we are. Lord, we thank You that it doesn't have to be heroic. It doesn't have to be big. You take what is small and You do extraordinary things with it. So we ask that You'll help each one of us know what is a next step. We trust that You'll do this, trust that You'll do it for the sake of Your name and for the sake of Your glory and for the sake of a lost and hurting world. Amen.*

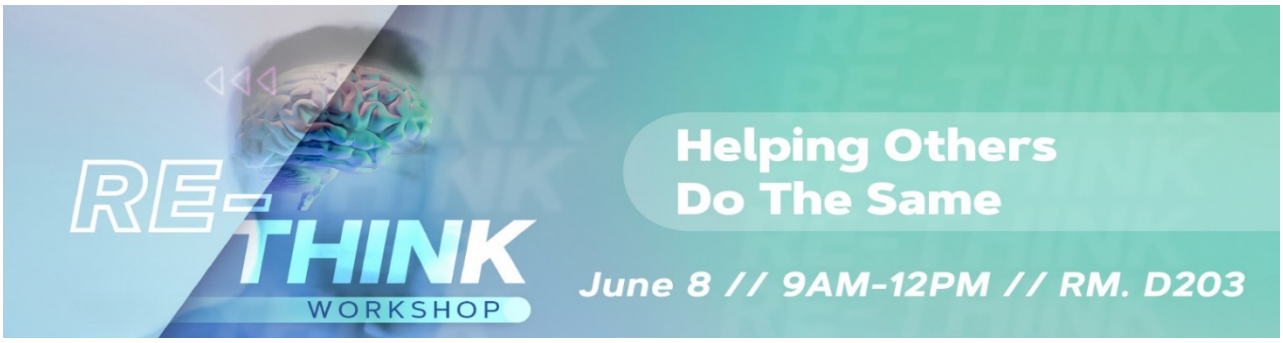
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SPRING 2024 // WEEK 7

Life Group Questions

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom // May 18-19, 2024

Living Ready // Matthew 25:1-13



Several of the weeks in our Kingdom Stories Series have been connected to loving others and sharing Jesus with them. This summer our Outreach Team will be offering a Re-Think Workshop on the "Helping Others Do the Same" portion of our vision statement.

We want to help others know Jesus and become more like Him. It can seem intimidating at times, but it doesn't need to be! During this workshop, you'll have the opportunity to re-think what it is to share Jesus with others, not as one more thing to add to your to-do list, but as a natural part of your life.

This would be a great workshop for your Life Group (or several from your group) to attend together. Here is a Registration Link: https://www.lincolnberean.org/eventfinder/eventdetails/?id=31534. Each person will need to register on their own.

Introduction

This week we come to a parable told near the end of Jesus' ministry. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins seems like a strange name to us, but in Jewish culture it would have been readily understood as being about a wedding celebration. The virgins would translate to bridesmaids in our culture. In this parable Jesus begins to give us a picture of what it means to be a disciple of the King, living in the one true kingdom = living in a state of readiness to meet King Jesus!

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) What is one of the most fun celebrations you have ever been a part of? What made it so great?

2) How did the Personal Spiritual Exercises go for you last week? Share your insights with the group.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

Read the full passage together with your group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) **What is something that has stuck with you from the passage or sermon this past weekend?**

Who is Jesus speaking to when he tells this parable? Why is that significant? (You need to look back into Matthew chapter 24 to determine this.)

According to Pastor Ryan, what is the primary point of this parable?

In the application for this parable Pastor Ryan returned to our vision statement: "Coming together, to know Jesus, become more like Him and help others do the same." The next four questions are intended to help us evaluate our own lives in relation to these ideas. The scripture passage in each question is meant to illustrate and motivate us for that part of the vision statement.

2) Read *Acts 2:42-47*. **What do you notice about the way the early church came together?**

How has coming together both in weekend worship and in your Life Group changed the way you think about God and the way you live your life?

3) Read *Philippians 3:7-14*. (Consider also reading this passage in the Message paraphrase). **How would you characterize Paul's desire to know Jesus?**

Think about your own relationship with Jesus. **Are you pursuing Jesus in steady and fresh ways? Or are you complacent? Why or why not?**

How do these verses challenge and motivate you to keep pressing forward in your relationship with Jesus?

4) Read *2 Peter 1:1-11*. This passage is one description of what growth might look like. Think back over the past year. **What has growth looked like in your life this past year?**

How do you see God working in your life to empower you to do what you can't do on your own?

How are you seeking to become more like Jesus? What is one step you could take to do this better in this coming week?

5) Read *Romans 12:4-21*. **How does this passage help us understand "helping others do the same (know Jesus and become more like Him)?"**

How are you helping others come to know Jesus or become more like Him?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts.

Prayer Focus: This week, pray the following prayer each morning as a reminder of your desire to become more like Jesus and help others do the same.

Lord, in the silence of this newborn day,
I come to request your peace, wisdom, strength.
Today I want to see the world with eyes full of love.
To be patient, understanding, humble, gentle, and good.
To see your children behind outer appearances, as you see them also.
So that I can appreciate the goodness in each one.
Close my hearing to all murmuring.
Guard my tongue from all evil.
That only your thoughts that bless others remain in me.
I want to be so well intentioned and good that all who draw near to me feel your presence.
Transform me with your goodness & kindness Lord, and make that in this day I reflect you. Amen

Scripture Focus: Read the following passage several times this week: ***Luke 17:20-21***. Ask God to reveal to you how His kingdom is in the midst of your daily life. **What does it look like to live in the one true kingdom each day?**

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?