



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 24

# BE READY! THE SON OF MAN IS COMING

This lesson contains several stories and so may be spread out over two or more sessions.  
The parable of the Sheep and the Goats is especially important to focus on.

## SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Matthew 24–25 contains Jesus' urgent sayings on the end times (eschatology), and describes the coming of the end of the age (apocalypse). In this lesson, we will focus on a few of these messages.

*Signs of the end of the age:* Jesus tells of the end of the world and the coming of the Son of Man in glory, as the sun and the moon and the stars go out.

*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids:* Five foolish bridesmaids (*virgins* in other translations) neglect to keep oil in their lamps in preparation for the bridegroom and so are left out of the festivities when the bridegroom finally arrives because they have no oil with which to greet him.

*Parable of the Talents:* Three servants are given portions of their master's property to care for while he is away. Two of them invest wisely and are rewarded for their care. The third does nothing and so is scolded and sent away.

*Parable of the Sheep and the Goats:* Jesus compares people to sheep, who are those who help the needy, and goats, who are those who neglect to help those in trouble. The sheep are offered a place in the kingdom, while the goats are punished. "For what you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me," says the King.

### WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

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#### In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

**Matthew 24–25** (the apocalyptic messages and parables), especially:

**Matthew 24:29-31** (signs of the end of the age)

**Matthew 25:1-13** (parable of the Ten Bridesmaids)

**Matthew 25:14-30** (parable of the Talents)

**Matthew 25:31-46** (parable of the Sheep and the Goats)

#### In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

#### **Ten Bridesmaids:**

Year A: Proper 27 (Sunday closest to November 9)

#### **Talents:**

Year A: Proper 28 (Sunday closest to November 16)

#### **Sheep and Goats:**

Year A: Proper 29 (Sunday closest to November 23)

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Apocalypse
- Service
- Being good stewards of God's gifts



## WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

God's rule is both in the future and in the present, and so is still in the process of being established. We do not know when God will call us, so we need to be ready. We do this by living righteously now, so that God's rule will already be in us when we are called out of this world, either when we die or when the end comes and God arrives in all God's glory

In Jesus' coming on earth, we are already forgiven and reconciled with God, but we need to acknowledge our redemption. This we do in how we live our lives. In these stories today, Jesus tells us how.

**In the story of the bridesmaids,** Jesus tells us that we do not need to always be awake (the bridesmaids fell asleep while waiting), only ready. We need to "have all our ducks in a row." Nor can we always count on other people to help us. The wise bridesmaids were not selfish in refusing to help; they were unable to help, because they had not taken care to have what they needed. They were not prepared. In the same way, readiness to accept salvation is ultimately a matter of personal responsibility.

**In the parable of the talents,** Jesus urges us to be responsible in our use of our master's goods (God's creation) in view of the judgment to come. We need to be working with God in making God's creation whole again. If God's creation is seen as qualities such as love and mercy, the message is that God gives these gifts in abundance and we are not to turn them into scarcity. Do not hoard God's forgiveness or God's grace! Do not bury God's abundant love!

**In the parable of the sheep and goats,** Jesus teaches a practical religion of deeds of loving-kindness, mercy and love of neighbor. Ultimately, this is how we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of the kingdom. This message is very clear. *Jesus clearly identifies service to the needy with love of Christ. The essence of our faith, and of discipleship in Jesus, is identical with care of the needy.*

So our story is moving toward the coming of God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. Our place in God's kingdom is assured when we live in readiness for God by helping the poor and the needy and by taking care of God's world.

## THE EPISCOPAL THREAD



Episcopalians tend to be a rather cheerful bunch. The Episcopal or Anglican understanding of God tells us that God is a God of compassion and mercy, forgiving us and wanting us to be with God forever. Thus Episcopalians are not so afraid of the end of life or the end of time, confident that salvation will be there and God's mercy and forgiveness will come to all.

For this reason, the Burial Rite is an Easter liturgy, celebrating resurrection and life as well as mourning death. At the end of the service, the celebrant commends the deceased person to God in a prayer that asks God to "receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light." (BCP, p. 499). And at "The Committal," when the body is laid to its rest, the celebrant begins by saying, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ..." But Jesus tells us to "be ready!" Following Jesus' example in ministry and words, a large part of

“being ready” is our call to serve the last and least of the people around us. The Episcopal Church has a strong focus on outreach and social justice, thus Episcopalians are continually reminded to serve the needy among us so that we will come to the Lord at the end of time in the spirit of servanthood, as Jesus did.



## WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Jesus cautions us to be prepared for the coming of God, as we actively prepare for it as well. This was advice for the end times, but the mindset is just as relevant to us as we work to build God's Beloved Community today.

Are we ready for the coming of God when our society and its institutions are not ready? For the coming of God's Beloved Community, God calls us not only to be inwardly prepared but to do our part to prepare our society by working to fashion its institutions – its “bones” – to reflect the values of God. Note that the title of the parable of the sheep and the goats is “Judgment of the Nations,” not “Judgment of You.”

- *What are some examples of ways we are not prepared?*
- *What are little ways to push for our society to be prepared?*
- *How can you hold steady in your values when surrounded by those who don't want to “stay awake”*



# Weaving God's Promises

## MATTHEW 24 and 25

Jesus told many stories about the end of time, when everything on earth will end and there will only be God in heaven. He tells these stories because he wants us to be ready for God. He wants us to do what God wants us to do, and be the people of love that God wants us to be, so when we meet God, God will be familiar to us. Oh, yes! I have been living a life of love—now *here* is Love itself! I have been helping the poor—now *here* is the one I have been helping all along!

**Here are some stories that Jesus tells about when Christ will come to us, and how.**

### **First, when everything ends (Matt 24: 29-31)**

*In Matthew, Jesus talks about when everything on earth will end. He calls it “the end of the age.”*

The disciples ask Jesus, “When will you come back to us, and when will be this end of the age?”

Jesus says, “There will be wars and earthquakes and starvation and bad times. People will suffer hardship and pain and even death. The sun will go dark and the moon will go dark. The stars will fall from heaven. Then the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven down to earth, with power and great glory. Angels will come with trumpets, and God’s people will be gathered up into heaven.”

*Who are God’s people? Think about whom God created—those are God’s people. All will eventually be gathered into God’s arms.*

### **Ten Bridesmaids, five smart and five foolish (Matt 25:1-13)**

*Jesus tells a story about being ready. In this story, he is the bridegroom who*

*will come to meet the bride.*

Ten bridesmaids pick up their oil lamps. They are going to meet the bridegroom. It will be dark when the groom comes, and they need a brightly lit lamp to meet him.

But only five of the bridesmaids took some extra oil with them. These bridesmaids know that if the bridegroom is late, they will need to refill their lamp to keep it burning.

The other five aren't thinking. They just pick up their lamps and go out, with only the little bit of oil in their lamps. Maybe the lamp is even half empty. But there will be enough time. We won't worry about that.

The bridesmaids wait and wait. It gets dark. The women light their lamps. Then it's midnight. They hear a shout, "Look! Here comes the bridegroom! It's time to come and meet him!"

The bridesmaids get up in a hurry. Five of them look into their lamps. The oil is almost gone. Their lights are getting dim and will go out soon. They go to the other five women and say, "Please give us some of your oil! Our lamps are going out! There's no more oil in them!"

But those five women with the extra oil said, "No, we can't do that. We brought some extra oil for ourselves, but not enough to share with you. If we give some of our oil to you, all of lamps will go dim. There's just not enough for all of us. You need to go buy some oil for yourselves."

So the five women hurry off, with their lamps getting dimmer and dimmer. They are going to the store to buy more oil.

But while they are gone, the bridegroom shows up. He is met by five bridesmaids, all with brightly shining lamps. They meet the bridegroom and he invites them inside to share the wedding banquet with him and his bride. Then he shuts the door and locks it.

The other five bridesmaids finally come back, with their lamps full of oil. It took a long time to find oil, because it was dark and most of the stores were

closed. Now it's past midnight and they are finally back. Now they can meet the bridegroom!

They come to the house. The door is locked. They look into the window and see the wedding banquet going on. One of them knocks on the door. Bang, bang! "Lord, open the door and let us in! Here we are!"

But the groom says through the closed door, "Why should I let you in? I don't know you!"

*That's the way it is with God. Are you ready for God? When God comes to talk to you, are you ready, or will you be too busy doing other things? Be always ready to greet God! God will not lock you out—remember, God stays with us, no matter what! But we will always do best if we are ready to be with God.*

## **The Talents (Matt 25: 14-30)**

*Here's another way to be ready for God.*

A rich man is going away. He calls his servants to him. He wants to give them some of his money so they can take care of it while he is gone. To one, he gives five talents, which is a kind of money. To another, he gives two talents. And to the third servant, he gives one talent. Now that's a lot of money! In our money, it takes 15 years to earn as much as one talent!

Then the man goes away for a long time.

The first servant takes the five talents and uses it to make more money. Pretty soon, he ends up with 10 talents instead of the five he started out with.

The second servant also makes more money. This man ends up with four talents instead of the two he started out with.

The third servant doesn't know what to do with this money. He's afraid he's going to lose it. So he goes off to a field and digs a big hole. Then he hides that one talent into the hole and covers it up again. Now it's safe!

When the owner of the money comes back, he asks, "Where is the money I gave you to take care of? What did you do with it?"

The first says, “You gave me five, and I made five more. Here are 10 talents for you!” The second says, “And you gave me two, and I made two more. Here are four talents for you!”

The man is very proud of these two servants. He promotes them to better jobs.

Then he turns to the third servant. “And you—what have you done with the money? Did you earn more with it also?”

The servant says, “Well, I was afraid of what would happen to that talent. If I lost it, you would be mad at me. So I went and hid it in the ground. At least you still have this one talent! Here it is!”

But the man is angry. “What? You hid it in the ground? I’m going to take that talent from you and give it to the one who ended up with 10 talents! He knows what to do with my money!”

*Now this does not sound fair to us. What’s wrong with being safe with money?*

*But imagine that these talents are love. Is it better to spread your love or to hoard it? When you spread love, it comes back to you many times over! Love creates love. But if you store it up inside of you, and do not let it out, what good is that?*

*And what if these talents are forgiveness. Is it not better to spread forgiveness than to keep it inside of you and never let it out? Jesus tells us, God gives us abundance in love, and forgiveness, and mercy, and hope. Better to spread it than to hoard it!*

### **Sheep and Goats (Matt 25: 31-46)**

*At the end of all time, God will come and judge the earth. God will separate the good from the bad, like a shepherd takes his herd of sheep and goats, and he puts the sheep at his right hand and his goats at his left hand. Or it will be like a king, who gathers his people together. The king knows who has helped the poor and who has turned away from the poor.*

So the king says to the people at his right hand, “Come with me! You will be in my kingdom, for you are blessed! When I was hungry, you gave me food. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me into your home. When I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me. And when I was in prison, you came to visit me. Blessings to you!”

But these people are confused. They say, “Lord, when did we do these things? We don’t remember taking care of you, our king!”

But the king says, “Here’s how you did it. Just as you did it to the least and the poorest of my family, you did the same to me. For I was one of those poorest and least.”

Then the king turns to the people at his left hand. He says to them, “Now go away! When I was hungry, you gave me no food at all. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I was a stranger, you left me out and never invited me into your home. When I was naked, you didn’t give me even a stitch of clothing to wear. When I was sick or in prison, you did nothing for me.”

These people are also confused. They say, “Lord, when did we not do these things to you? When did we ever see you and not take care of you?”

The king says, “Here’s how you did not take care of me. Just as you did not take care of the least and the poorest of my family, you did not take care of me. For I was one of those poorest and least.”

*When we make promises at our baptism, we promise that we will “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.” For guess what? Christ the King is in all persons!*