

Knowing Your Future

Understanding Your World:

Matthew 25:1-13

July 18, 2004

Last winter as I sought the will of God for our time right now, I sensed a call to focus on something that had been greatly lacking in my life. When it came to moral issues, civic matters and societal concerns, I spoke publicly only in secular terms. I felt people would listen closer if I proved the good or bad of any matter based on the tangible (non-spiritual) consequences.

Although I believed in God and His word, I let the secularist and the atheist choose the grounds on which the conversation and thinking would be directed. Some respected Christian thinkers had exhorted me to debate this way. However, as I read Scriptures, pondered history and reflected on my experience, I became convinced that disciples of Jesus Christ are placed in our communities and societies exactly to raise the issue of God and His will.

We cannot grasp the critical facts about our world until we understand that one God, who has revealed himself to humanity, is the world's creator and governor. "***Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge***" (Proverbs 1:7). All come from Him and will answer to Him. Without regard for God and his word, we miss perspective on life. We don't see how actions and consequences are connected. We have trouble seeing all the dots and how they connect. "***Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom***" (Proverbs 9:10). What that means is that we need to know the will of Yahweh, who is the father of Jesus, you and me; and we need to carefully implement His will. Consequently, we discussed how to know his will, for he teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us through Scripture which he himself inspired, collected and preserved for you and me.

I've just summarized the first three sermons in this series "Understanding Your World" which are entitled: *Grasping the Facts*, *Connecting the Dots* and *Finding Your Way*. However, there are three more essential teachings in the Scriptures, without which people lack a critical understanding of life.

Suppose you boarded one of two planes that left this afternoon, but had no clue where either was headed. As the plane lifted from the runway, you discovered that one was headed to Tucson, Arizona, and the other to Barrow, Alaska on the Artic Ocean. I checked today's forecast in Tucson and Barrow. Tucson is expected to hit 101. Barrow might possibly reach 47. Wouldn't it have been good to know where you were headed and whether to pack sunscreen, sandals and shorts, or coats, gloves and hats? Wouldn't it be nice to know where you are going to stay, what you are going to eat, how long you are going to stay and how much money to bring? And that is just domestic travel! What if the plane was headed to an international destination where passports, immunizations and currency exchanges were important? Isn't the future, especially the immediate future, relevant to now? Don't we work for future paychecks, educate for future opportunities and invest for future returns?

God speaks in his word repeatedly about our future and destination. The most repetitious theme in the New Testament, more than love, faith, prayer or anything else, is the future return of Christ. It is raised more than 300 times. Do you think God is trying to get a message through to us? Do you think God is trying to get through to our community? Repeatedly, Jesus and the apostles admonish their listeners and readers to be ready for Christ's return. That is our future. The journey you take in life does not end with death. It ends, as we know it now, with the return of Christ. From the perspective of the Bible, death is not inevitable. Death and taxes may seem inevitable, but the return of Christ actually is inevitable for every individual and every people.

What does that mean? Just as it requires one type of preparation to go this afternoon to Tucson and another to go to Barrow, so it also requires a type of preparation to welcome the immanent return of Jesus Christ.

Jesus told the story of five wise virgins and five foolish virgins who not only were all invited to a wedding, but they all believed the invitation was important and recognized it was soon. All ten gave it their immediate attention. All ten got appropriately dressed and equipped themselves with lamps so they could light the way of the bridegroom and take part in the wedding feast. That was their duty and privilege. However, something went terribly wrong. Five young girls were shut out from the wedding feast; only five were included. Why?

The bridegroom came later than anticipated. All the girls fell asleep. All their lamps exhausted the supply of oil. Only five brought extra oil. Only five were prepared to fulfill their call with the delay. What was Jesus' point?

Jesus admonished his hearers that it is time right now to prepare for the wedding feast. It is important to get at the task right now. The end is near. However, be wise. Don't be tripped up or suckered by a delay.

Do you all remember how a delay undid King Saul? This first king for Israel started his reign in such a promising way. He understood that he was called by God and accountable to God. He sought God's favor. However, at one point God delayed in answering his prayers. King Saul had three thousand special troops. Two thousand accompanied him and a thousand were led by his son Jonathon. Jonathon was a bold leader and with his thousand troops, he attacked and destroyed the garrison of the Philistines in the city of Geba. The result was that the Philistine rulers understood that Israel would no longer live under their demands. Saul knew his three thousand troops were inadequate, so he called up the entire Israelite army. The Philistines,

however, mustered a massive and overwhelming force. When the Israelite soldiers saw all the enemies and observed that Saul had no plans, except to wait for Samuel to arrive at a set time to offer a sacrifice, they became frightened and deserted in mass. The desertions were so extreme that Saul not only lost all the troops that he called up, but also most of his 3,000 special troops. Only 600 Israelite soldiers faced 3,000 Philistine chariots, 6,000 horsemen and innumerable foot soldiers. Saul did what was expedient to stop his soldiers from deserting. Claiming special circumstances, he ignored the timing God had set for the sacrifice and offered it without Samuel. As a result and in view of the delay, he acted disobediently and untrustworthy. Although God delivered the Israel, King Saul experienced judgment and lost his kingdom (1 Samuel 13).

Jesus told the story of the 10 virgins because he was concerned with how we, who believe in his return, will cope with his delay. Will the delay empty of us our faith like it did King Saul? Will circumstance cause us to marginalize God's word so that we still offer the sacrifice, but we do so more in unbelief than faith?

The Bible focuses on the return of Christ. God says over and over again that Jesus will soon return and judge all. Therefore, now is the time to repent. Now is the time to respond to God's invitation. Now is the day when grace and mercy are extended to you. Tomorrow may be too late. Now is the day to obey. This message is critical for individuals, communities and nations. Christ is coming, and all will soon give an account. All will soon explain themselves to Jesus.

Jesus warned people that they need to prepare for a delay. They must anticipate it. They will be tempted to disobedience. They will be tempted to unbelief. Do you have the reserve oil of faith to believe and obey when circumstance goes contrary to faith and when the answers to your prayers are delayed? See your future now and prepare now... even for delays!