

Keep Watch - Induction of Cory Brock

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] We are going to have reading from the Gospel, Matthew 25 by Hamish Alexander. This is Matthew 25, the first 13 verses.

It's the parable of the 10 virgins. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.

[1 : 08] And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterwards the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered, truly I say to you, I do not know you, watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. It's good to be with you tonight and looking forward to the rest of the evening past this bit for me anyway.

And before we go back to this, look at this parable, we'll pray, let's pray together. Father God, we ask and pray that your spirit would guide and keep and protect us this evening.

We thank you for this occasion, and we pray that your name would be held high and honored as we worship you, and as we induct Corey later on.

[2 : 10] And we thank you for this part of the Bible, and we pray that we would remind ourselves that is your living word, that we would have open ears spiritually to what it has to say to us, for everyone here, from the youngest to the oldest.

And we thank you that such a great span of ages here this evening. So we pray for your Holy Spirit to guide and to direct us for a few moments together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so for a little while this evening we're going to look at this part. You might wonder whether this is an appropriate text for a passage, for an induction, but I hope you'll see it is. I'm not going to speak a lot about wise and foolish virgins, or wise and foolish bridesmaids, whoever you want to describe them.

But I think the theme of this passage is really important, and it's important for us as you enter a new chapter of the congregational life.

And it's important to recognize it in the context in which Jesus is giving it. He's speaking a lot about his second coming in the parables.

[3 : 23] There's three parables, this parable is in the middle, and they all have the same kind of theme in terms of being ready for his return. So what Jesus is doing shortly before he goes to the cross is he's giving the big picture, the macro picture of the cosmos and the significance and the importance of what he's doing in the light of that.

And the place of God's kingdom within the cosmos, between his first coming, the significance of that, which was about to happen, and his second coming. And we're in between that time.

So it engulfs us, obviously, it would anyway, but it engulfs us absolutely speaking about his kingdom coming. And there are three parables, the first one in chapter 24 is about the wise servant who made good use of his master's time and leadership when the master was away.

Then there's the ten virgins of the ten bridesmaids. And then the next one in the next section is the wise and foolish servants who are given money to invest in some use it wisely and some use it foolishly.

But they all are related to the return of the master, the return or the coming of the bridegroom. Now, interestingly, isn't it?

[4 : 42] Our micro lives, our day-to-day lives are governed by being ready, by deadlines, by being prepared, aren't they?

Lots of people have spent a lot of time preparing for this evening. There's people here be preparing for exams, for going on holiday, for a wedding, for a presentation at work, for sermons, for inductions, for your dinner tonight.

You would have prepared for your dinner and got ready for your dinner, or it would have burnt. But the brutal and paradoxical genius of sin and rebellion is that we tend to ignore the importance of spiritual readiness, being ready spiritually and being prepared for Christ's return.

It's interesting, isn't it? We're as sharp as tax in the everyday things of life. But spiritually, it's so often the case, isn't it, for us, that we're immediately wrestling with a lack of energy, a lack of urgency, a lack of motivation and desire and preparation in our spiritual lives.

It's the black wisdom of the enemy, is that we so easily fall prey to our sinful inclinations to ignore the big picture of life and focus our attention on the minutiae, on the day-to-day, the micro things, which I'm not saying are unimportant, but must be seen in the light of the bigger picture for us.

[6 : 27] Isn't that why Christ had to come? He had to come because we can't see, because we're blind, because we focus on the material in the everyday, at the expense of a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, I'm not going to go into this parable, we don't have time tonight, and it's a story. It's a story, you all understood it. It's very simple, it's a very simple message, and I'm not going to spend time on it, but just for a moment to put it into its own context, what would have happened, because Jesus uses the story of the wedding or the bridegroom, because what would have happened, usually the bride and the bridegroom lived close together, fairly close together, most marriages were fairly local.

So the bridegroom, in the morning of the wedding, would leave his house and go to the bride's house and spend most of the day in the bride's house, various rituals and things were going on. And then later in the day, he would take his bride with him back to his home, to the family home, where she would live, and that would usually happen later in the day.

Now, usually the sun sets about six o'clock, but it was obviously there was a bit of discussion going on at this particular marriage ritual, because it wasn't until midnight that the bridegroom was taking his bride back.

And the bride's, the virgins here, would have been people who were invited to the wedding and would have had torches ready to align the procession from the bride's house to the bridegroom's house.

[7 : 54] And there are, you know, the rest is history. The rest is easy to understand, because some were ready for the bridegroom coming and some weren't. Now, it's not an allegory.

It's not a story where everything in the story represents a corresponding spiritual reality. So we're not going to go into lots of detail about what this might symbolise and that might symbolise.

It's just a story. It's a parable. Because Jesus is wanting to get across one very important truth. And in this case, it's how to live in the light of Christ's return, that Christ is coming back.

And I think that's important tonight. It's important tonight, as you start a new chapter, to recalibrate our lives a little bit towards that, if they need calibrating in such a way.

Briefly. What is Christ calling His disciples and you and I? What's He calling us to do? Well, the first place, I think, is encouraging us to think about our perspective in life.

[9 : 02] And He wants us to have a perspective in life which takes into account that Christ, in the future, Christ is coming back. Every time we take the sacrament, we're remembering that's these significant truths.

Christ came and died in the cross and Christ is coming back. Christ rose again, ascended and Christ is coming back until He comes. And that's to be the perspective that governs and that embraces and envelops everything that we are and everything we do.

He's staking here the bigness of His claims about who He is and about why He is at the center of the universe and at the center of the future of the cosmos.

Everything, everything in this world is gravitating magnetically towards that momentous event, Jesus coming back.

And He wants us to lift our eyes above the merely physical and the merely material experiences of this life. And rather to look at them, it's not that we ignore them or reject them or regard them as meaningless, they're not their good, they're important, God gave us them.

[10 : 16] But to look at them through a spiritual prism and through a spiritual time, time scale and a spiritual understanding of God's calendar which is so important.

And that's what He wants us to do in our lives. He wants us not to forget that significant reality and to have that perspective. So in the context of tonight, in the context of an induction, everything should be looked at through that prism.

Induction is not an end in itself. Our lives here are not an end in themselves. We're all moving towards that day when Jesus Christ returns, whether it be in our lifetime or not beyond that.

So your involvement in the church has this... it's called to have this perspective in it and it's called to have this directional focus in everything.

Corey's leadership is to have that focus and that reality. Your life as you leave the building, as you leave on a Sunday, as you live out your life, is to have that perspective of living in the light of Christ's return and the glory that He deserves because of that.

[11 : 35] The church's strategy of the leadership should bear that in mind. We should be governed by that perspective, governed by that urgency. There's a day of reckoning coming. There's a day of glory.

There's a breathtaking future for us as believers that we can be excited about. But we're to recognize and know that and live with that spirit, that invisible spiritual direction in our lives that Christ is coming back.

That's primarily the perspective that Jesus is wanting to instill within His disciples through these parables. Now, you've often heard this from me and it might be the last time you'll hear it from me, from the pulpit here.

But your life and my life, however short or however long it is, is really just the first line on the first page of the introduction of the rest of your existence.

Remember that because that perspective changes everything about who we are and what we do in our joys, in our sorrows, in our gains, in our losses, in our youth, in our aging.

[12 : 43] Whatever it is, this perspective of recognizing God and Christ's return should transform how we live and how we think.

That's the first thing. The second, I've only got two things. So, I'm not like Cody, he's 27 things. He says he's only got three things, but there's usually at least 27 within that three. We know that. He knows that himself.

But secondly, and I've only got 15 sub points here, so you're all right. Not only are we to have that perspective, but we're to understand the implications of having that perspective.

The implications, not just of this parable, but of the two surrounding parables, the sandwich as it were, with the parable of bridesmaids in the middle.

We have to understand the implications of this perspective to our day-to-day Christian life. That's what I want to leave you with.

[13 : 45] There's one major implication. There's one main implication that Jesus wants to get across from that perspective, and that is be prepared. Be prepared. Be ready. Be prepared.

I've made it longer, really, than Jesus. That's typical, isn't it? He says, you know, truly I truly say to the last verses, watch therefore. Be prepared. Keep watch, could be translated.

For you do not know the day nor the hour. But what I'm saying, as you unfold these, the emphasis of these parables is that be prepared for a long delay, and yet be ready if Christ returns in the morning. That's the kind of paradox that Christ is getting across here.

You're saying, be prepared for the long haul as a Christian, but be ready every day just as if Christ will return in the morning. And that's the kind of paradoxical truth that He wants us to have from this truth that He's sharing with us.

So to Corry and to the elders specifically as leaders in the church, you have to keep watch. That's your calling. That's what you have to do. You have to keep watch.

[15 : 03] Now, I'm broadening the kind of application here because the New Testament speaks a lot about keeping watch, and it's all related to this spiritual and invisible reality of Christ's return and of our accountability to Christ.

Different verbs are used in the New Testament to convey the same idea. But in Acts 20, 28, we have these words, keep for the leadership. Paul gives this to the Ephesian elders. He says, keep watch over yourselves and the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood. So to Corry and the elders, what I say tonight is that you have this great responsibility in the light of Christ's return to yourselves.

Keep watch in all that you do. Guard your own hearts. That's tremendously important. No point leading others if your own heart is far away and distant from the living God.

Be ready. Be ready for every eventuality in the spiritual life. Be alert. Be watchful against it.

[16 : 15] And remember that you'll be under specific, often special attack because you're leaders in the kingdom of God in the local church. Not saying that it's any easier or any harder being a leader and the attacks will be different, but there are attacks on those who are leading.

So guard your own hearts. Remember that you're bought with a price. And remember that you are accountable, doubly accountable to the living God. And in your leadership strategy, remember this truth as well.

Remember to keep the main thing, the main thing. Remember that. Keep the main thing, the main thing. That's Christ. Christ is the main thing. Knowing Christ is the main thing.

Spiritual alertness is the main thing. Reminder people that they're in for the long haul. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint.

We're there to persevere. And I'll say a little bit more about that to the congregation. So there's a, in your spiritual leadership, you have to teach perseverance, but you also have to teach a paradoxical urgency.

[17 : 26] There's nothing like it, the Christian message, is it? You're saying, stick by, keep going, don't give up. And that's usually a recipe for just plodding on.

But he says, no, you've also to be urgent every day. There's to be a freshness and a vibrancy. And that's the beautiful, invisible impossibility of the gospel, isn't it?

That it asks us to do two contrary things. To persevere, to keep going, to plod on, but also to be urgent and to be fresh and to be vibrant.

And we can't do it unless you're pointing them to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit and to the newness only He can bring. And in your worship focus as leaders, especially the Sunday worship, inspire people.

Inspire them to Jesus Christ, to the message of Christ. Lift them up. It's a hard week we're in. It's a hard, miserable week. People need lifted up on the Lord's Day.

[18 : 29] You don't need bound down. They don't need punched in the face or the guts, metaphorically. They need to be built up. They need to be encouraged. They need to be challenged about the perspective of eternity.

The shortness of time, a life passing swifter than a weaver shuttle. We need to point them to the Holy Spirit and to the strength and the courage that He alone can bring.

And we need to be praying, praying, praying. So in the worship focus, keep the main thing, the main thing. Don't get sidetracked to anything else. So that's what I say to Corey and the elders.

And to the St. C's church family and indeed to all of us who may be some visiting here this evening as well. And obviously there's some members of Presbytery. What is Christ saying to us as we understand the implications of being prepared for the long haul and yet ready if Christ returns in the morning?

What's really significant? Knowing Christ in your heart is what it's all about. That's what it's all about. We recognize that, or Jesus when He's talking about this parable towards the end, they say, Lord, Lord, open to us.

[19 : 44] He answered, truly I say to you, I do not know you. I do not know you. I don't know you. That's the most significant reality that Jesus is getting across you.

There'll be a day when Jesus will say to people, I didn't know you. I didn't know you. You didn't come to me for salvation. It's not good enough looking like a Christian. You can't tell the difference between the 10 bright groom, bridesmaids or the 10 virgins.

There's no way of telling the differences. Wasn't it some of them wearing black and some of them wearing white? Or some of them were, you know, whatever. They all look the same. And it's no good looking like a Christian from the outside, speaking like a Christian on the outside.

It's who owns your heart and your desires depart from you. I didn't know you as the great cry. And within that, surely there's for not only a guarding of our own hearts, but a missional burden there, an urgency that we all recognize.

Because we know people who don't know Jesus Christ. You might know about Him, but don't know Him. And so there's this recognition that knowing Jesus in your heart is what it's all about.

[20 : 57] That's what Jesus is getting across, because when He comes back, we want Him to welcome us as brothers and sisters. And then I think, obviously, significantly, prepare for the long haul with Christ.

I think that's very much part of what Jesus is saying here. In chapter 24 and verse 48, which is the first parable, He says, my master is delayed.

He's been gone a long, long time. And in verse 5 of the passage we read, we're told that the Bringham was delayed. It's a long time before he came, much longer than they expected.

And then in verse 19 of the third parable, he says, now, after a long time, the master of these servants came and settled their account. So there's this great sense in which Jesus is wanting to take across that there's not an imminent return for His disciples to consider, and yet to be ready every day.

And just to recognize that as believers, maybe especially young, the young people here tonight, that Jesus wants you to follow Him for the long haul, mentally that you're going to be His for the rest of your life.

[22 : 17] However long or short that we are, or if Christ returns tomorrow, nonetheless, it's the mentality that He wants us to have that we're in a battle now until He returns. And He wants us to have a persevering spirit.

He wants us constantly to recognize that we hold on to Him, whatever's happening in our lives, whatever battles and struggles we face, it's not a quick fix. There will be struggles, there will be battles.

And again, when Jesus is expressing what He wants to get across, He speaks about it in verse 45 of the previous chapter on this parable.

He says, who then is the faithful and wise servant? That's what He's wanting us to be. He's wanting us to be full of faith and to be wise, recognizing the struggles and the battles of following Jesus.

And it's for the long haul. Don't give up the minute things go badly. Don't go up when someone speaks badly to you, or things aren't good in church. Keep on going and persevering, not just with Christ's people, but also with Christ.

[23 : 21] Don't shake your fist at Him and say, you don't know what I'm going through, or I wish you could answer my prayers the way I want, and walk away from Him. We're called to remain faithful and to be wise and to be in it for the long haul.

That means that you need to embrace the spiritual disciplines. You need to be repenting daily, and you need to be reading God's Word and praying and fellowship with Christ.

We need Him every day. If you go into a day, say, I don't need Christ today, I'll be the first chink in the armor. Be expectant as we serve Him, serve with the gifts you've been given. Pray daily for the lost, especially those God has got in your life and in your focus.

Don't focus as we start in the new chapter of the church. Don't focus on a chaff of church life. Oh, there's plenty of chaff in church life. But don't focus on that.

Love Christ deeply. Love one another with all your hearts. Go to Christ for forgiveness daily, and forgive other people daily.

[24 : 27] Listen well. Speak thoughtfully. Be at the means of grace. Come to church. It's a place that you'll be uplifted and built and encouraged.

Prioritize Sunday worship together with one another. Keep each other spiritually sharp. Spiritually sharp. Pray with and for one another.

Recognize that it's a struggle. That's why we're called to persevere. But remember He's returning. He's victorious. He's already victorious. And He's coming to take you home.

You've got to have that perspective. He's coming to take you home. He's not abandoned or left or ignored you. He'll come and take you home.

And so lastly, very briefly, within this, for the church family, remember your partnership tonight. Remember your partnership within this congregation. Again, in Hebrews 13, 17, there's have confidence in your leaders submit to their authority.

[25 : 34] Because they keep watch over you. As one who must give account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit for you.

So that's the call in the light of Christ's second coming. In the light of these passages, in the light of this induction is, support Corey to the hilt. Support him.

And your elders. Keep them accountable. Pray for them. Hold them in the deepest love and in absolute confidence. Remember the burden that Corey will bear now and make his work a joy.

Make a joy. You've done it before, for me. Now pray for Corey.

That he will receive a double portion of the Lord's blessing. And joy in his ministry here, because all of you will benefit in that sick case.

[26 : 46] Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your goodness and grace. And we rejoice in this evening and we thank you for your word. And we give thanks for the power of the gospel and for the wonder of Jesus.

So calmly before his own crucifixion, speaking about his own future. Even though he is the son who had emptied himself of his glory, didn't know the day or the hour.

And yet he was assured of the purpose and plan of God from all eternity to return in glory and in victory to usher in the new heavens and the new earth, within dwells righteousness.

It couldn't be a better theme for an induction as we consider a new chapter in the life of the church here. And so we pray for Corey and Heather.

And all the children. And we pray for all the congregation, for the elders, the deacons, the women's pastoral team, every member, every team, everyone who's part of the congregation, would connect themselves with St. Columbus.

[28 : 14] We pray, Lord God, that you would bless them mightily and that the congregation would flourish and grow spiritually and grow in every other way and that Christ would be honored and held high.

And we rejoice in the swiftness of these days of bringing Corey into the position he is. And we pray, Lord God, that you would continue to bless us and watch over us as we sing, as we fellowship, as we proceed with the induction, the formalities of the induction, which are not just formalities, but are really important in the life of the church.

In Jesus' name, amen.