

Title: Not just a wedding
Text: Matthew 25.1-13
Theme: distracted living is deadly
Series: Matthew #113
Prop Stmtnt: Distracted living is eternally devastating.

Read Text:

Charles Mauer and his 10-year old daughter Cassy were on their way home from the library. A 17-year old girl was using her Smart Phone to post something on her Facebook account, while she was driving. Passengers in her car kept telling her to stop using her phone. She didn't stop using her phone. She also didn't see the red light and the car with Charles and Cassy going through the intersection until it was too late. Charles and Cassy were killed. This week the driver was charged with criminal vehicular homicide.

We say it to our kids. Don't text and drive. We put it on billboards, in news stories, in PR campaigns by the Ad Council and yet, if you talk to any truck driver, they will tell you that they see it all of the time. Why, after story after story after story, do people continue to text and drive? This week, I asked a couple of the staff pastors here to ask some of you that question. Here is what you said:

I just read messages. I don't type them.

My texts are real short.

I only text 1 or 2 characters at a time.

It won't take me long.

I only text while driving slow.

I can do both because I put the phone up on the wheel so I can see my phone and the road.

It's not a big deal I've got my knee on the wheel.

I can still pay attention so I won't be surprised.

I can react quickly if something happens.

I've never crashed into anything.

Nothing bad has happened yet since I've been doing it.

Now, many of these are symptomatic responses aren't they? Do you know what I mean by that? Why am I so tempted to believe these excuses? Let's dissect this for a bit. Are you ready? Here is the issue that we are dissecting. Why is it, when my phone tells me that I have a text that I want to check it, even if checking it means I will put myself and others in danger? Right there I am making a decision about risk and reward. If I choose to check my phone, it is because I have calculated in that moment, that the reward of checking my phone is worth the risk. The reward of checking my phone has made me a promise. And when I believe that promise, I give power to it and what I perceive as the power of that reward is now greater than the power of the risk. Now, it is obvious that the power of the risk is great. So that means that whatever power I have ascribed to the phone is even greater. So, what is so powerful, so compelling about posting to Facebook, or sending or receiving a text that lures me into believing that it is worth the obvious risk?

I don't think that most people go that deep, but we should. Do I want affirmation and approval (likes) so much that I am willing to risk my life and the lives of others in order to get it? If so, then why? Why am I so needy of affirmation and approval? Why do I think that I need to be noticed, need to be responded to, and need the comments and approvals of others? Why do I think that I have to stay noticed right now? Am I really that shallow that I cannot even wait until I am done with the drive to check my phone?

Life is a series of moments. The decisions that you make in those moments define your life. You do not need to wait for a defining moment for your life. You are in one, right now. Your life is the sum total of the decisions that you make in those many, many moments. Each decision is related the one before and the one after. The decision that you just made influences your moment now. The decision that you make now will influence the one to come. If I chose to text and drive and nothing bad happened, then I am tempted now to do it again. If I do it now, then I will be tempted to do it again.

Distracted driving is dangerous. Distracted driving is deadly. But I bring this up not as a public service announcement. It is an illustration of something that is infinitely worse. What could be worse? And what could be infinitely worse? Distracted living is infinitely worse. You may never text and drive but some of you are so distracted by things in life that you do not pay attention to what really matters. You want to believe that when the time comes that you really need to pay attention, that you will. However, if you do not pay attention in this moment, there is no guarantee that you will whenever you imagine that important moment comes. In fact, you may not ever know when that moment is because you will be so distracted.

I visited a lady in the hospital who had been told that she was coming to end of her life. There was no time for small talk. I asked her if she was ready to die. She began to tell me about the "things" that she hadn't done yet. Those things consisted of making a list of who should get her stuff, and telling people where certain papers were. She could have given more instructions about her funeral, etc. I said, "I'm not talking about that." Are you ready to die and meet God? You are going to meet God. She had a blank look. I told her to put her oxygen mask on and just listen because those other things were not nearly as important as the gospel. There are times when I tell people the gospel, they listen as if they are gripped by every word. Other times I feel as if I am speaking in a foreign language. She listened, but did not really seem to hear. Her series of moments had been spent on other things, and now, it seemed to me as if that was all that mattered to her.

In this text, Jesus tells a story. It is one of four stories or examples that he gives that all emphasize the importance of being ready for his return. He told the story of the master of the house who was not vigilant and a thief broke into his home one night. The master of the house did not realize that this would happen. He told the story of the steward who did not realize that the master would not come back so soon. Now Christ tells the story of this wedding from the perspective of 10 virgins (bridesmaids) who did not realize that he would wait so long to come. We do not have look hard for the meaning of this story because Jesus tells us in v.13. Watch! Pay attention! Be ready, for at any moment the

Bridegroom (Christ, Son of Man) can return. You do not know the day or the hour. Do not presume that certain things have to happen before Christ can return. He can return at any moment. It will be sooner than some expect. It will be later than some expect. But, he is coming. But even though we know this, some of you don't believe it. In other words, your life does not reveal that you actually believe it. I pray that this story that Jesus told will help you see that.

I. **The wedding** (1)

The Kingdom of heaven will be like (in contrast to "is like" chapter 13)...

You do not know have to be familiar with all of the aspects of wedding culture in 1st Century Jewish life in order to understand this parable since Jesus tells us what the point is in verse 13. But, what we know is helpful even if what we know is not all that much. Historians are not aware of any documents that have been preserved that have detailed explanation of wedding protocol. After all, everyone back then apparently knew what was done and everyone did it the same way. So, we really do not know that much, but here is what we know.

Weddings were preceded by a betrothal. It is easy to assume that a betrothal was like an engagement. But, in reality it was more. A betrothal, while not the actual wedding, was like the first phase of the wedding. An engagement today is a social matter, but not a legal matter. A betrothal was a legal matter. A couple that was betrothed was not married, but neither could they opt out of the relationship except through a divorce. When it came time for the actual wedding, the bridegroom would arrive at the home of the bride with his attendants and family and friends and the wedding would take place. This would happen on a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin and on a Thursday if she was a widow. There were times when the bridegroom and his party would meet the bride and her party at a location other than her house. But then, after the wedding was over, the bride and her party would go back to her home and the bridegroom and his party would go back to his home. It was now the bridegroom's responsibility to get ready for the reception. In fact, the betrothal period was the time when the bridegroom was preparing the place for the two of them to live. Now, he is going back to put the finishing touches on the banquet that is going to be held, which we would call the wedding reception. When all is ready, the bridegroom would come to the home of the bride and would get her and her party and they would go in procession to his home for the wedding reception that would last for up to seven days (on his tab). (I've got one more daughter to get married and I'm thinking of telling the guy who wants to marry her, that I think they should have a biblical marriage.)

Most of the time, apparently, this procession from the bridegroom's home to the bride's home and then back to the bridegroom's home would take place at night. This is still done today in some countries (pics). Part of the reason is because torches at night make the event a bit more dazzling. This is all helpful to know because it adds a bit more color to the words of Jesus in John 14 when he said that "I go to prepare place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

So, here is the scene. There are 10 girls of marriageable age who are part of the bride's entourage. They have their lamps and they go out to meet the bridegroom and his entourage as they are expected to come to the house of the bride. Having set the stage, Jesus now sets the hook as he always does with his stories.

II. The story (2-12)

Jesus lets us know immediately that half of the girls were foolish (stupid). They brought torches but they did not bother to bring extra oil for their torches. If you are going to be in the bridal party, it means that you are going to be in the parade and if you are going to be in the parade, you have to have a torch and you have to have a torch that works. You cannot be in the parade and not have a lit torch for that is the very purpose of the parade. The torch was probably a piece of wood that had a rag wrapped around the one end. The rag was dipped in olive oil and as such could burn for about 15 minutes or so. If you needed it to be lit longer than that, you needed more oil. The foolish girls had their torches but they failed to bring along extra oil.

The other half of the girls were wise. They were prepared for what might happen in case the bridegroom was delayed. And he was. They had extra oil for this contingency. The girls all went out and were no doubt excited about the parade and the festivities to follow. They went to where they had all agreed to meet and at the time they thought he would be there. However, the bridegroom was delayed longer than any of them expected and they ended up all falling asleep. One ancient writer suggested that the delay was caused by the fact that the groom and the parents of the bride were still in negotiations over the dowry. That is certainly possible, but Jesus does not give any hint for the reason for the delay other than the fact that the bridegroom was delayed. The girls are waiting, their torches all previously lit, had burned out and they waited and then fell asleep.

But, around midnight someone cries out that the bridegroom is coming. Perhaps one of the girls awakened by the sound of the bridegroom's procession approaching is the one who screams. The girls frantically attempt to light their torches in order to participate in the parade, when half of them realize that their torches will not light because they have no oil. Meanwhile the other girls who have oil have soaked the ends of their torches in them and are ready. The girls who did not bring any extra oil go from frantic to panic. They are not going to be able to be in the wedding procession. This was their job. This was their honor. This was their friend, their family, their neighbor, and probably as a little girl, it was their dream and now, they don't have any oil and they panic. They plead with the other girls if they will share with them, but they can't. In fact, it is not even fair to ask. We were prepared and if we share with you then everyone will run out.

All three of my children love Cedar Point. If we had a Mecca it would be Cedar Point. My son is a youth pastor in Louisville, KY. Louisville has an amusement park, but it is not Cedar Point. Louisville is only an hour and half away from Kings Island, but Kings Island is not Cedar Point. So my son brings his youth group all the way up from Louisville to our house, where they spend the night and go the next day to Cedar Point,

then come back to our house and the next day return to Louisville. The other two places would be a whole lot closer and quite frankly, would not leave my refrigerator and pantry looking like the Egyptian locust plague just went through, but I understand. We love Cedar Point. Part of the reason for that is that our youth group goes to Cedar Point every year. We have this policy that when it is time for the busses to leave, they leave. This is true no matter who you are, even if you are the pastor's kid. One Memorial Day morning, I drove one of my kids to the church to catch the bus to go to Cedar Point. The busses had left. My child did not have the correct time. My kid was not simply disappointed, but my kid was in despair. I am leaving out names here to protect the innocent, but I called the youth pastor and said, where are you and are you going to stop at all before you get there? He said we will be stopping at a rest area. I said I will be there. Then I looked at my kid and said, "Whenever you think that your dad doesn't love you, remember this moment." And off we went. That was Cedar Point. That was one day. There would be other opportunities to go to Cedar Point. This is a wedding and this couple will never get married again. This is not a day at an amusement park with friends, this is an event of the entire family, the community, and with everyone that is significant to the lives of these girls. This is important. You can't miss this! But, they had no oil.

Run! Run and buy some oil. The shops will still open on nights like this and they were. The girls were able to buy some oil, but while they were gone, the bridegroom came and the procession went on without them. They went and got the bride and all went back to the home of the bridegroom and the festivities began. Meanwhile the five foolish bridesmaids got their oil, lit their torches, but missed the parade, and in fact, were not even allowed in to the reception. When I read verse 10, I feel it in my chest. I feel the door shut. I hear the bolt lock. It is like the door on the ark before the flood. It closes and that's it. It is final. The foolish girls finally get there, but the door is closed. They plead. But the groom says that he never knew them. But this is not just a wedding. Jesus began this by saying that this is an illustration about the kingdom of heaven. This is about being ready for the return of the king.

III. **The points** (13)

A. **To be ready means not to be distracted about lesser matters.**

You are immersed in a world full of lesser matters. The curse of prosperity is that you are inundated with options. Most of these options are "lesser matters." You will not do important things unless you have to do important things, or unless you plan to do important things. For example, you have to eat. So you eat. You have to work or have to go to school or have to go to the hospital, so you do those things. But, do you have to pray? Do you have to read the Bible? Do you have faithfully attend church? Do you have to fellowship with the body? Do you have to witness? Do you have to faithfully give? Well, yes! These are all biblical descriptions of gospel fruit. But, you will not do any of those unless you plan to do them.

Now, here is where I have to be very careful to say this correctly and you have to be very careful to listen carefully. Does faithful church attendance make you a follower of Christ?

No! But, can you be a follower of Christ without it? Probably not. Whoa! Here is what I mean by that. What is a follower of Christ? A follower of Christ is someone who has been reborn by the Spirit of God. Jesus called that being born again. Being born again is when the Spirit of God breathes spiritual life into a previously spiritually dead person. This person now professes faith in Christ. This person trusts in Christ as Savior and King. This person now follows Christ. But, this person does not follow Christ by him or herself. The Spirit of God not only gives new life but immerses this person into the body of Christ. Every believers is commanded to be part of a local assembly of believers and is commanded to not forsake the responsibility of gathering together in order to hear the Word together, to serve one another, to pray for another, to bear one another's burdens, to care for one another, to admonish one another, to encourage one another, etc. You cannot obey the most basic commands of your Savior if you choose to do other things than gather with his people. A person who consistently chooses not follow Christ is delusional if he thinks he is. In other words, I am a follower of Christ who does not follow Christ.

Now, that is not how people see it, is it? They think, "Hey, Sunday is a family day. It's not going to hurt anything if we go to the cider mill today. After all there are only so many nice days in the fall." Or "Sunday is my only day to sleep in this week. God understands that I have to get some rest and me time." Or "I feel like blueberry pancakes this morning, and they take a little more time that I figured, so, I'll listen to the sermon on-line, and I promise to go next week." Or "Rats, I did not get a chance to update my fantasy football team, and I am so close to making the playoffs..." Or "I'm part of an organization that has its meetings on the weekend." Is it a sin to make blueberry pancakes? No! Is it a sin to have a fantasy football team? No. Is it a sin to go to the cider mill, to have a family day, to go on a long run, to ride bikes, to play golf? No. In fact, I would argue that you ought to do those things and that you ought to do them to them to the glory of God and it would be a sin not to enjoy the gifts that God has given you. However, the gifts that God gives you are never to be enjoyed at the expense of the greatest gifts that God has given you. These lesser things will always try crowd out the most important things. It does not seem like a big deal in the moment. But what happens? They distract you! They take your attention. They take your affection. They take your time. They become your habits. And what I am saying is that a person who is a genuine follower of Christ is going to be characterized by following Christ. A person who is not a follower of Christ is vulnerable to having his life dominated by lesser things that distract him from what matters. Lesser things will distract you from the most important things. A person whose life is characterized by distraction, will not be ready for Christ's return and the consequences of that are eternal. If you are a genuine follower of Christ, then live like it. Following Christ is not convenient. It was never meant to be. Following Christ is not something that you sort of fit in your schedule when you can, or your budget when you can or your priorities when you can, or your values when you can and when you have nothing else going on. Following Christ is your very life, IF you are a follower of Christ.

And that is my point. I do not want you to make it a priority to gather as a church family on Sunday because you have to. I do not want you to plan your week and prepare on Saturday nights to gather as a church family on Sunday because you have to. I do not want you to choose NOT to put your children in sports leagues on Sundays because you

have to. I do not want you choose NOT to do homework on Sunday morning, or do research for that paper that have procrastinated for 3 weeks now, because you have to. The truth is you do not have to. I only want you to do any of these things because you have to, but because you actually want to. Jesus is so glorious he is worth your affection. Jesus is not satisfied with your half-hearted motions. He is worth your affection. He is worth your priorities. He is worth your values. He is worth your love. He is worth your priorities. He is worth your plans. He is worth your dreams. I know that going to church every Sunday does not make one a Christian. But I also know this, if it is not important enough to you that it is a priority, then you ought to ask yourself and I ought to ask you, "What makes you think that you are a follower of Christ if you are unwilling to follow Christ?" Some of the people who are most vulnerable to this are those who were raised in the church and have a "well I know all that stuff" attitude. My mom taught Sunday school, my dad ushered. I used to sing the kid's choir, went to VBS, etc. What is Jesus saying here?

B. To be ready means that you cannot depend on someone else to be ready for you.

5 of the bridesmaids were not ready because while they liked the idea of being in the procession, they did not make their part in the procession a priority. So, when the groom showed up they panicked and tried to get others to share oil with them. The point is clear. Others cannot be ready for you. Just because you dress up for the wedding does not mean that you are invited in. Your entrance into the kingdom is not based on your association with others. You, have to be ready.

C. To be ready means more than saying the right words or being emotionally connected.

After the bridesmaids were able to purchase some oil, they went to the wedding reception, but were refused admittance. They cried, "Lord, lord, open to us." I read that and, like you, my heart is moved. On one level they knew who he was. On one level they knew that this was important. But, in the moments that led up to this moment, they chose not to act upon it because other things distracted them from the most important thing. And now, it is too late. One of the lies that we are so prone to believe is that "I'll do it later." There is coming a time when there is no later. You do not know when that is.

D. To be ready will be evidenced by actually being ready.

The faithful and wise servant is the one who is faithful (45-47). The bridesmaids who are wise are the ones who stay prepared for his coming, even if his coming is much longer than they originally thought. And next week we will look at the story that Jesus gave about the men who took what their master gave them and invested it versus the man who buried it. Why does Jesus spend so much time telling these stories in the final hours of his life on earth? Why did the Holy Spirit direct Matthew to take up so much space in his gospel on these stories? Of all the things that Matthew could have told us, why this? Because we are prone to live as if he is not coming and will not be ready.