



How much oil is in your lamp?

Jesus said

"You too must keep watch!

For you do not know the day or hour of my return."

(Matthew 25: 12-13]

Main Point:

We keep our cars filled with petrol, even paying exorbitant prices to do so and we plug in our phones to recharge every night. But are we as vigilant to ensure our spiritual lamp is always topped up and ready to fire on all cylinders throughout our lives?

Intro |

If you are anything like me, you have habits that you do every day. We clean our teeth. We shower. We cook our meals, eat them and clean up. Every night I plug my phone in to recharge, knowing that if I forget it will be nearly completely flat in the morning.

Most of us used our car to get to church this morning. Before we jumped in and turned the ignition, we probably checked the fuel gauge to make sure we had enough in the tank to get us to where we want to go. We all know, if we let the fuel tank run dry, we won't get very far – even if our car is in top condition.

As we listen to Jesus preach, He is in the middle of teaching his disciples about what is going to happen in the final days prior to his return. And there is one major truth Jesus keeps emphasising over and over again. *"Be ready all the time for the Son of Man will come when least expected."* [Matthew 24:42, 44, 25:13].

Then Jesus shares a story to illustrate his point. He begins by explaining, that there are two types of people who wait for the arrival of their Saviour. The first ensure they are prepared the other type do not. Jesus calls those who are prepared, wise. But those who are not prepared he calls, fools.

More specifically Jesus bases their preparedness on how seriously they take their individual responsibility to ensure their lamps have sufficient oil. Because we are not familiar with what a first century Jewish wedding festival involves, it is easy to miss the obvious responsibility each bridesmaid held in their hands.

Bridesmaids in the first century were not part of the wedding party just to wear pretty dresses so they looked beautiful in the wedding photos!

Bridesmaids had an important responsibility. It was their job to hold a light in the darkness which would show the way for the groom to travel safely to the wedding banquet.

Of course, everyone listening to the story knew this was the bridesmaid's primary responsibility. That was their one big job - not making sure the bride's dresses didn't run along the ground - rather it was to ensure their lamp did not go out!



Point 1 | Are we like the wise or foolish bridesmaids in Jesus' story? If we want to be wise, we must be vigilant to keep our spiritual lamp full.

But five of the bridesmaids were foolish as they did not look after their lamps. They allowed their lamps to dry out, burn up and become empty. Although we can only guess why they failed on their primary responsibility, Jesus said their lack of preparedness was due to their foolishness. So, obviously they had not taken into consideration the likeliness of the bridegroom being delayed, or they may have rationalised, 'never mind, we'll just ask someone else for their oil, if we run out'.

As confronting as it is for us to consider, at the beginning of the story all the bridesmaids looked the same - they all had lamps, and their lamps were all shining brightly. So Jesus is revealing there are going to be those in the kingdom who do not endure to the end. Those who tire when His return is delayed. There are those who allow the world to lull them to sleep, through distraction, misguided priorities, or continual difficulties. The sad reality is, there are many people who attend church who appear to have all the preparations for heaven in hand.

They go through the motions, week after week following the religious ceremony, singing all the right words: they look like Jesus' disciples; they can talk like Jesus' disciples; But inwardly their lamps are empty, the oil has run dry. Like when a candle runs out of wax, all that remains is a thin trail of smoke.

Point 2 | We are like the bridesmaids awaiting our Saviour's return. It is our individual responsibility to ensure our spiritual lamps are always burning brightly to show the way for Jesus' arrival.

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, in the dead of night, a voice cries out: "... *Here's the bridegroom! Come out and meet him!*" (Matthew 26:6)

This is what Jesus referred to earlier. Just a few minutes ago, we read Jesus saying everyone *"will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather His chosen ones from all the world."* (24:30b-31)

Now, the wise bridesmaids who had plenty of oil in their lamps, were ready to greet the bridegroom. But the foolish ones, after being awoken from their sleep, saw that their lamps were empty, and they quickly scrambled to find more oil! Talk about major stress! All their well laid out plans had suddenly gone up in smoke! They were caught unprepared. So, they pleaded to their friends, "Give us some of your oil." (v7)

But the wise, knowing how precious the oil was that they had carefully stored for this very time, answered, *"No. We don't have enough for all of us. Go and buy some for yourself."* (25:8-9)

You may ask, 'Isn't that a bit selfish? They should have just shared some of their oil? But, to understand why it wasn't that easy, we need to delve into the symbolism of what the lamp and the oil really represent.

What's our lamp and what's the oil? How do we keep our lamps filled?

Point 3 | The lamp represents our human spirit and the oil, the presence of God's Spirit in our heart.

The lamp in the parable represents our human spirit. Inside the heart of every person is their spirit. The human spirit of the person who has not submitted their life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, has a spirit that is like an unlit candle or an empty lamp. Although, the human spirit was created by God for the sole purpose of being enlightened by the Spirit of God, it remains unlit until God blows His Holy Spirit into a person's heart.

When we welcome Jesus into our lives, and make him both our Lord and Saviour, He blows His Spirit into our heart, igniting our lamp. From that point on, the light of Christ shines through our lives so that others can see Jesus in us. You will remember Jesus said in Matthew 5 that the light of Christ which is seen by others are the good deeds we do which are inspired by the Spirit of Christ who is at work within us (Matthew 5:16).

So what is the oil? Throughout Scripture, oil represents the Spirit of God's anointing or empowerment for service and power (see 1 Samuel 16:13, Isaiah 61:1-38). So, the oil in this parable represents the presence of God's Spirit in our life, that keeps our spiritual fire burning brightly. That's why the wise bridesmaids couldn't just give some of their oil to the foolish ones. You can't bundle the Holy Spirit in a bottle and give it away - only God can impart His Spirit into a person's heart.

Fine! 'But, hang on', I hear you ask. Does that mean that the Spirit of God leaks out of us in some way? Just like the more we use our cars, the more regularly we need to fill up our tanks with petrol, we need to be regularly plugging into God to recharge our spiritual batteries or top up our spiritual lamps. That's why the Apostle Paul exalted the believers in Ephesus, "to be continually filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

But, why did Jesus say the foolish bridesmaids could purchase more oil? Does that mean, we could start selling bottles of the Holy Spirit in our Bazaar? Unfortunately, not! It does, however, mean there is a price to be paid to obtain this spiritual oil.

This tells us how we are to apply Jesus' story to our lives.

Application | It is our responsibility to 'plug into' God every day ... ensuring our spiritual lamp has plenty of oil to burn.

Obtaining the oil of the Holy Spirit is costly and it will require the currency of time, effort and obedience to have the presence of God burning in our hearts.

- it will require regularly spending time fellowshiping with our saviour.
- it will require spending time meditating on God's word.
- it will require spending time giving praise and thanksgiving to God, rather than giving in to complaining, curling up and giving in.

The truth remains, only those who sacrificially spend time, day-in-day-out, drawing on the oil of God's Spirit will ensure their spiritual fire and fervency keeps burning through the long, dark nights.

So, let us be like the wise and diligent bridesmaids who keep our lamps filled with oil – so we are found ready upon our Saviour's return.