

The Illusion of Permanence

1. Warm-up question: What is something that has changed a lot in the world during your lifetime?
2. This week's parable is a reminder that the world as we know it will not last forever. Change is coming! Jesus promised that someday he will return and transform our current flawed reality into something far better. Today's parable is meant to teach us how we should live while we await that future transformation. Read Matthew 25:1-13, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The groom in this story, who represents Jesus, shows up far later than anyone expected. What's the significance of that? What point was Jesus trying to make?
 - b. Five of the bridesmaids anticipated that the unexpected might happen and brought extra oil. What's the significance of that? What point was Jesus trying to make?
 - c. Often in the Bible, oil represents the Holy Spirit. Assuming Jesus intended that symbolism here, what does it mean for us to stock up with extra oil while we wait for Jesus?
 - d. At the end of his story, Jesus states the most important point he wants us to take from it: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day, nor the hour." Matthew 25:13. What does it mean to keep awake? What's the difference between someone who's living awake and someone who's not?
3. Jesus specifically tells us that we'll never be able to figure out the timing of his return. He says so at the end of today's parable – "for you know neither the day, nor the hour" – and also in Matthew 24:36, "About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Matthew 24:36.
 - a. Does it make sense that Jesus himself didn't know the when and how of his own eventual return? Why do you think Jesus didn't know? Is it possible that the when and how has not been predetermined, but is up to the discretion of the Father as history unfolds?
 - b. Jesus' warning that we will never be able to figure out the when and how of his return hasn't stopped countless people from trying. Why do you think so many people are so obsessive about figuring out what Jesus said we and won't?
 - c. Some Christians believe the world will go from bad to worse eventually forcing Jesus to return to save us from cataclysm. Others believe the world will gradually get better and better, culminating in Jesus returning when we're finally ready for him. Some Christians believe Jesus' return will happen in a sudden dramatic moment when he will appear in the sky and touch down on earth kind of like the landing of an alien spacecraft. Others believe his return won't happen directly,

but rather indirectly when his message and goodness eventually triumph over evil through his followers. In this view, Jesus reigns through his followers. Which of these theories most resonates with you – and why? Does it matter which theory is right and which is wrong?

- d. How does talking about the Second Coming make you feel?
4. On Sunday, Jeff suggested that the most important point to draw from biblical end-time prophecies is a keen awareness that our current reality is not permanent – a big change is coming! Our temporary earthly reality will ultimately give way to a greater eternal reality.
 - a. Hebrews 13:14 says, “We have here no continuing city, but we look for a city that is to come.” What do you think that means? Why is it important that we internalize this perspective? How does it help us to live with this perspective? How does it hurt us to live without it?
 - b. To help us better understand the significance of eternity, Jeff used a really long string to illustrate the timeline of our existence. He suggested that our entire life on earth takes up no more than an inch of the timeline of our eternal existence. What thoughts or feelings did that illustration evoke in you?
 5. At its most basic level, the doctrine of the Second Coming reminds us that the earthly phase of our existence is only temporary. The same principle can be applied to the various seasons of our earthly life. Whatever season of life you find yourself in right now – whether good or bad – it won’t last. Jeff suggested we should take away two key points from all of this. ***First, savor the beauty of what is right now – because it won’t last long. Second, push through whatever hardship you’re facing right now – because it won’t last long either.***
 - a. What is something really beautiful in your current season of life that you want to truly savor and fully appreciate before it’s too late. Are you savoring it?
 - b. What’s something really hard in your current season of life that you need to face and push through to get to the other side? Are you pushing through?
 - c. If our earthly life is merely a prelude to something even greater, that puts suffering in a whole new light. Jeff compared it to running bleacher laps in order to get ready for the big game. Viewed in isolation, bleacher laps make no sense. Viewed in the greater context of the coming big game, they make perfect sense. Does this explain why so much of life is so hard? Is this a helpful way of viewing hardship? Why or why not?
 - d. Generally speaking, do you feel you’re living in a woke state, with a keen appreciation that current reality will soon give way to something much bigger? Or do you feel you’re overinvested in the illusion of permanence?

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."

⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." ⁹But the wise replied, "No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." ¹²But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'