

引言 INTRODUCTION

Being late for something important can have serious consequences. All his life, Bob has a sleeping problem. He tried many things to help him go to bed – a warm shower, soft music, counting sheep, but nothing worked. He could not fall asleep until it was late in the night. By the time he woke up, he felt as if he were a dead meat. His boss warned Bob multiple times because he often showed up late for work. Bob finally decided to see a doctor. The physician prescribed him some medicine. For the first time in his life, Bob could actually sleep soundly. He was full of energy when he got up. He whistled as he walked by his manager’s office. Bob peeked his head inside and proudly said: “Know what, Jim? I had an excellent night’s of rest. I even arrive today before 8 o’clock.” Jim looked puzzled. Then he said: “Great! But where were you the whole day yesterday?” From now on, perhaps Bob has to set three alarm clocks to make sure that he will get up in time. But there are others things that we cannot make up for if we are late. The parable we will study today is about Jesus’ second coming. At this point in time, Jesus was about to go to the cross. He still had one critical matter to inform His disciples. His departure would not be forever because He will return in the future. Bible scholars call the period between Jesus’ ascension to heaven and His second coming as the end times. Therefore, we are in the end times. In fact, we are getting closer and closer to Jesus’ return. The Lord teaches the disciples what will happen before His second coming in Matthew chapters 24 and 25. Man-made and natural disasters will be on the increase. People will turn cold and hostile to the truth. We should not be scared or surprised by those signs. But the gospel will continue to spread. We need to be watchful and react accordingly. Expectation with preparation is the moral of today’s passage. Those who are ready for Jesus’ return will be blessed.

The setting for the story is about a wedding. Let us go back to the Bible times and understand some Jewish customs about the event. Much like ancient Chinese culture, at that time the parents arranged marriages for their children. In Genesis, Abraham sent a servant to his hometown to look for a wife for his son, Isaac. After a suitable girl is found, the two families will negotiate the terms. The groom’s family has to come up with a dowry. It can be a sum of money plus some jewelry. The dowry serves two purposes. First, it is a means of compensation to the girl’s family for losing a worker. After marriage, the bride will move in to the groom’s home. Second, it is a security for the bride. If her husband passes away, then she has some emergency fund to rely on. An engagement will take place after both sides has come to an agreement. The engagement is usually done well ahead of the wedding day. This will give the groom time to prepare for the banquet and to get his home ready for his future wife. An engagement is considered binding. You may remember the story of Joseph and Mary. They were engaged. God chose Mary to become the earthly mother of Jesus. She was conceived through the Holy Spirit. It was a sin punishable by death if a girl was pregnant before marriage. The Bible says Joseph was a righteous man. He did not want to publicly shame Mary. Instead, he planned to call off the wedding quietly. Later an angel told Joseph God’s plan. Then Joseph received Mary as his wife. The wedding day will come when everything is ready. The groom will be accompanied by a few groomsmen and go to the bride’s house. In the Chinese culture, we call that “snatch the bride.” The bridesmaids will demand a huge cost and they will come up with difficult questions and challenges to test the

guys. The groom gets a first taste that marriage requires great efforts! In the ancient world, people usually traveled after sunset to avoid the daytime heat. That explains why the guys in the parable arrived late at night to the bride's home. There will be a ceremony after the men have arrived. Then the whole procession will return to the groom's home for the wedding banquet. Depending on the financial status of the groom's family, the celebration might last a few days to even a week. After knowing some background, we will look at the parable.

解釋 EXPLANATION

The story is about some ladies waiting for the coming of the groom. They represent people waiting for the second coming of Jesus. The main focus is on comparing two groups of virgins. By "virgins" it simply means that they were unmarried ladies. We call them bridesmaids in today's term. Since it was late at night, they carried lamps. They needed illumination for the trip back to the groom's house. At that time, a lamp could be a torch. People tied a rag to the end of a stick. The cloth is then soaked in oil and is lit up. More fuel will be added continually to keep the fire burning. Jesus called five of the girls foolish because they did not have any spare oil for their lamps. The other five were described as wise because they had extra oil. The two groups faced contrasting outcomes due to their preparation or the lack of it. Here we can derive the first lesson from the story. It is about **preparation** for Jesus' return. The foolish bridesmaids could not excuse themselves for not preparing ahead. A lamp without oil is like a car without fuel. It is useless. I had a nerve-wrecking experience when my car almost ran out of gas. I was on my way to the church one morning. I knew my car needed to refill gas. You know I am a cheap man. The gas prices around our church are always lower than those near my home. I estimated I should be able to make it. Before long, a warning light came on. Therefore, I stopped at a station and added just one gallon of gas. The problem was, the light did not disappear! Worse still, I saw from a distance that there was a traffic jam. I was so nervous because my car was still burning fuel when the engine was idling. By God's mercy, I managed to get to the next gas station (that sold cheaper gas!) to refuel my car. Lesson learned: do not bet on chance. Make preparation ahead of time. Wise people will prepare for Jesus' return. Many people think that the world is coming to an end. Population is on an exponential growth, hence the demands for food, water and electricity. Moreover, some crazy dictators overseas always try to get rid of their enemies. All it takes is the push of a button to fire a missile. An attack will be offset by a counter-attack. That chain-reaction may bring mankind to an end. The return of Jesus for a rescue mission is a good news. However, merely dreaming of His coming without preparation is useless. The five wise maids were well-prepared with enough oil. What does the oil represent? Christians throughout ages had different interpretations. Some people say the oil represents the Holy Spirit because it is a common metaphor used in the Bible. If that is the case, how should we reconcile the fact that the foolish ladies did have some oil? Did they only have a fraction of the Holy Spirit? Also, we can share oil with others, but we cannot share the Holy Spirit in us with others. Others suggest that the oil stands for good works, love, joy or grace. None of those answers seem to be ideal. We will explain what preparation we need when expecting Jesus' second coming later.

The second lesson from the story has to do with **procrastination**. In the parable, the ladies knew that the groom was on his way. The foolish girls procrastinated in getting enough oil. They thought they could buy more oil later since the guys had yet to show up. The groom was delayed by some unknown factors. The bridesmaids dozed off while waiting. They were not blamed for

feeling tired. Being watchful does not mean the girls had to stay awake the whole time. Suddenly, someone called out at midnight that the procession was approaching. Then the foolish girls finally realized that they were low on oil. They asked the other five ladies to lend them some oil. Their request was denied. We may think that the wise girls were being selfish. They could also share the light on the road by walking closer to each other. Those are not the issues Jesus wanted to address. The key point is that there will be a consequence for procrastination. It was too late to buy oil when the groom had arrived. Jesus' return seems to be delayed like the groom in the story. But 2 Peter 3:9-10 tells us that God has His purpose: **9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.** Peter describes the second coming of Jesus is like a thief sneaking in at night. Jesus and a few other Bible authors also use the same analogy. It can happen unnoticed at any time. Wise people will take precautions to prevent thieves. We shut windows and lock doors at night. Some may set an intrusion alarm before going to bed. Likewise, we must stay alert for Jesus' return. Peter says that people ridiculed by saying: "Is Jesus really coming back? I don't see it happens yet." It has been 2,000 years since Peter wrote this letter. People throughout history had the same question in mind. The sovereign God has His schedule. He is giving people more time to repent. He hopes that more people will believe in Jesus. Of course, Satan hates to see that. He has been spreading a lie in people's mind all along that Jesus will delay indefinitely. A story was told that Satan was having a board meeting. He was looking for new ideas to fool people. One demon suggested: "We can tell people that there is no heaven." Satan responded: "It won't work. Who doesn't want to go to heaven?" Another agent proposed: "I can convince everyone that there is no hell." Satan disliked it: "Bad idea. They all know hell is real." A third devil advised: "I will mislead people that there is always another tomorrow. There is no need to hurry to believe in Jesus." To that, Satan sat back with a satisfied smile. Since then, many people buy into that lie. But the fact is that no one can predict the future. The Bible says today is the day of salvation. Confess your sins and accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord today! After the door is close, no one can enter.

Permission is the third lesson we can learn from the parable. The five foolish maids went to buy oil. But they were denied entry to the house on their return. Listen to the conversation in verses 11-12: **11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'** The groom gave permission to those who could enter because it was his wedding. Unfortunately, once the door was shut, it could not be reopened. We may think that the groom was too cruel. It was a celebration. Why ruined everyone's mood? Notice the groom did not say to the ladies: "Sorry, you are late. The party has started." But he said: "I do not know you." Their failure to prepare such an essential supply as oil showed that they were not ready for the celebration. Jesus makes a similar remark in Matthew 7:22-23 – **22 "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"** The context is also about the Lord's return. He is about to begin the final judgment. Many people will claim that they do a lot of work in Jesus' name. They may state: "Oh I know Jesus. He is the Son of God. He is the Christmas baby. He died on the cross." They firmly believe that they are qualified to go to heaven. But Jesus replies: "I never knew you." Having some knowledge about Jesus and

even doing work in His name cannot save them. Suppose I were a little kid begging on the street. One day the CEO of McDonald's drives by and he sees me. He pulls over and hands me a hamburger. It is very kind of him. But a sandwich may only feed my hunger for a few hours. What if he does something really extraordinary? He asks me to hop on to his car. He tells me that he is going to adopt me as his son. After filing the paper work, I become a member of his family. He even includes me in his future inheritance! There is a huge difference between knowing a rich man and having a personal relationship with him. Likewise, God does not only want us to know certain information about Him. He invites us to be a member of His family. The Bible says God adopts us as sons and daughters through Jesus. That guarantees us a place in heaven in the future. Not only that, the Heavenly Father watches over His children every moment when they are still living down here. Here is the key: we prove that we belong to His family by obeying Him. Jesus says in verse 21 of the passage: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”** Those who love God will do what He says. Do you see any change in you after you became a Christian? Do you reflect the values of your Heavenly Daddy in your thoughts, speech, actions, goals, and everything else? Do not assume that you are a Christian. You have to live like one! Of course, we are not saying that we have to be perfect. We can never achieve perfection in this life. The keys are first, do you have the desire to become more like Jesus? Second, are you growing to become more like Him? Are you pursuing after Jesus' attributes such as humility, honesty and mercy? Can the people around you feel that you are a better person because you are a follower of Jesus? Growth takes time and determination. You must make up your mind and put on the new self in Christ. Most definitely you will still stumble. Mistakes and even sins will humble us. Those setbacks remind us that we can never walk this path of righteousness by our own effort. We need to constantly go back to God, ask Him for forgiveness and His strengthening grace.

結論 CONCLUSION

Jesus is arriving. All the Biblical prophecies about Jesus have been fulfilled except His second coming and subsequent events. Jesus never lies. If He said He will come back, then it will happen. Expectation of His return must be accompanied by our preparation. What preparations does Jesus require of us? There are two facets of it. First, you must receive Him by faith. He is the only doorway through whom we can go to heaven. You must admit that you are a sinner, believe that Jesus died for your sins and commit your life to Him. Second, you must live for Jesus by faith. In other words, you must conduct your lives by following Jesus daily. You show others through your study or your work that Jesus is your Lord each and every day. You serve Him through the roles He puts you in in school, at work and among your friends. You obey His Word in your church life and private life. If you make those preparations, then you are ready to go to heaven any moment when Jesus calls you home.

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遲到可能會導致嚴重的後果。小王一直都有睡眠問題。他嘗試了很多方法來幫助自己入睡：洗熱水澡、聽輕鬆的音樂、數綿羊，但都沒有效果。他要到深夜才能睡著。當他醒來的時候，他感覺好像打完一場仗一樣。老闆多次警告小王，因為他經常上班遲到。小王終於決定去看醫生。醫生開了一些藥給他。小王有生以來第一次睡得安穩。當他起來時，他充滿了活力。他吹著口哨走過經理的辦公室。小王把頭探進去，自豪地說：「老張你知道嗎？我昨晚睡得真好。我今天甚至八點前就到了。」老張看起來很困惑。然後他說：「太好了！但你昨天一整天都跑到哪裡？」從現在開始，也許小王必須設定三個鬧鐘才能確保自己能準時起床。有一些事情是我們錯過之後無法彌補的。今天我們要學習的比喻是關於耶穌的再來。當耶穌講這個故事的時候，祂快要上十字架了。祂還有一件重要的事情要告訴門徒。祂的離開不會是永遠的，因為祂將來會回來。聖經學者將耶穌升天到祂第二次降臨之間的時期稱為末世。因此，我們正在處於末世。事實上，我們距離耶穌再來已經越來越近了。主在馬太福音二十四章和二十五章教導門徒，在祂再來之前會發生什麼事。將會有更多的天災人禍。人們會對真理變得冷淡和反感。我們不應該對這些跡象感到害怕或驚訝。但是福音仍會繼續傳播。我們需要保持警醒並做出適當的回應。帶著期待的準備是今天這段經文的教訓。那些準備好迎接耶穌再來的人將會受到祝福。

這個故事的背景是一場婚禮。讓我們回到聖經時代，了解猶太人的一些婚姻習俗。就像古代的中國社會一樣，當時猶太人的婚姻是父母安排的。在創世記中，亞伯拉罕派了一個僕人到他的家鄉為兒子以撒尋找妻子。找到適合的女孩後，兩家人就會談條款。新郎的家人必須拿出聘禮。它可能是一筆錢加上一些珠寶。聘禮是賠償女方家庭失去一個工人。因為結婚後，新娘將搬進新郎家。雙方達成協議後將進行訂婚。訂婚通常是在婚禮之前一段時間完成的。這樣新郎便有充分時間安排婚宴，並為未來的妻子準備好他的家。訂婚被視為具有約束力。你可能還記得約瑟和馬利亞的故事。當時他們已經訂婚了。神選擇馬利亞成為耶穌在世上的母親。她是透過聖靈懷孕的。如果女孩在婚前懷孕，這是可判處死刑的罪。聖經說約瑟是個義人，他不想公開羞辱馬利亞。於是他打算悄悄取消婚禮。後來，一位天使告訴約瑟神的計劃。並吩咐約瑟按照原來的計劃娶馬利亞為妻。當一切準備就緒後，雙方便會進行婚禮。新郎會在伴郎的陪同下前往新娘家。在中國文化中，我們稱之為「搶新娘」。伴娘會要求巨額紅包，並且會提出難題來考驗男士們。新郎第一次體會到婚姻是需要付出很大努

力的！在古代世界，人們通常在日落後遠行，以避免白天的炎熱。這就解釋了為什麼比喻中的男士們在深夜才到達新娘家。全部人都到達後將舉行典禮。然後，整個隊伍將返回新郎家舉行婚宴。根據新郎家庭的經濟狀況，慶祝活動可能會持續幾天甚至一周。了解了一些背景之後，讓我們來看這個比喻。

解釋 EXPLANATION

這個故事是關於一些女士等待新郎的到來。她們象徵等待耶穌再來的人。主要重點是比較兩批童女。「童女」是指她們仍未結婚。我們今天稱她們為伴娘。由於已經是半夜，她們拿著燈。他們在返回新郎家的路上需要照明。那時的燈可能是一根火把。人們把一塊布綁在一根棍子上，然後將布浸入油中並點燃。要維持那個火便需要不斷加油。耶穌稱其中五個童女是愚拙的，因為她們沒有多準備燈油。另外五個人被稱為是聰明的，因為她們有額外的油。因著兩批人的準備或缺乏準備，她們得到截然不同的結局。在這裡，我們可以得到這個故事的第一個功課，就是關於為耶穌再來做**準備**。愚拙的童女沒有藉口不事先做好準備。燈沒有油，就像車子沒有汽油一樣沒用。有一次我的車子真的幾乎用光汽油，讓我差一點心臟病發。一天早上，我在去教會的路上。我知道車子需要加油。你知道我是一個小器鬼。教會附近的汽油價格總是比我家附近的汽油價格低。我估計我應該可以安全地開到目的地的。但是沒多久，警告燈亮起來了。因此，我在一個加油站停下來，只加了一加侖汽油。問題是，警告燈沒有滅掉！更糟的是，我看到前面塞車。我很緊張，因為車子停下來之時仍然在燃燒汽油。感謝神的憐憫，我好不容易撐到下一個加油站（那裡賣的汽油很便宜！）。經驗教訓：不要靠運氣，必須提前做好準備。同樣，有智慧的人會為耶穌的再來做好準備。許多人預計世界末日終於會來臨。人口不斷增長，因此對食物、水和電力的需求也不斷增加。此外，有一些瘋狂的獨裁者總是想除掉他們的敵人。他們只需按一下按鈕就可以發射飛彈，然後對方同樣會發射飛彈作還擊。這種連鎖反應可能會導致人類的滅亡。耶穌回來拯救人類顯然是一個好消息。然而，沒有準備，只是想著祂的來臨是沒有用的。五個聰明的童女準備好足夠的燈油。油代表什麼？歷代基督徒都有不同的解釋。有些人說油代表聖靈，因為那是聖經常用的比喻。如果是這樣的話，我們該如何理解愚拙的童女的確實有一點點油呢？難道她們只有一部分聖靈嗎？而且，油可以和別人分享，但是我們無法與別人分享聖靈，因為聖靈是神所賜的。另外有些人認為油代表做好事、愛心、喜樂或恩典。這些答案似乎都不理想。我們等一下會解釋我們該做什麼準備來期待耶穌的再來。

這個故事的第二個功課與**拖延**有關。在比喻中，女士們知道新郎正在路上。愚拙的童女拖延不去準備足夠的油。她們以為可以等一會去買油，反正男士們還

沒有出現。新郎因著一些未知因素而耽擱了。所有童女在等待的過程中打瞌睡。她們並沒有因為感到疲倦而被指責。保持警醒並不意味著必須一直保持清醒。半夜忽然有人喊叫說隊伍快到了。這時，愚拙的童女終於發現她們不夠油。她們請其他的童女借她們一些油。她們的要求被拒絕了。我們可能會覺得聰明的童女很自私。她們還可以在回程時彼此靠近來分享燈光。這些都不是耶穌要強調的重點。關鍵問題是她們的拖延是會有後果的。當新郎到達時，就來不及買油了。耶穌的再來也似乎被延後了。但彼得後書 3:9-10 告訴我們，神有祂的心意：**9 主所應許的尚未成就，有人以為他是耽延，其實不是耽延，乃是寬容你們，不願有一人沉淪，乃願人人都悔改。10 但主的日子要像賊來到一樣。那日，天必大有響聲廢去，有形質的都要被烈火銷化，地和其上的物都要燒盡了。**彼得形容耶穌的再來就像夜間的小偷。耶穌和幾位聖經作者也使用同樣的例子。賊可能在沒有人注意的情況下進來。聰明的人會採取防範措施。我們晚上關窗鎖門。有些人在睡前設定警報器。同樣，我們必須對耶穌的再來保持警覺。彼得形容，人們嘲笑說：「耶穌真的要回來嗎？我怎麼還沒有看到呢？」彼得是在 2000 年前寫這封信的。歷世歷代的人心中都有同樣的問題。至高的神自有祂的時間表。祂情願給人們更多的時間來悔改。祂希望有更多的人相信耶穌。當然，撒旦不願意看到這一點。他一直在人們的心中散播謊言，說耶穌會無限期地延遲。有一個故事說撒旦召開會議。他正在尋找新的法子來愚弄人們。一個邪靈建議：「我們可以告訴人們沒有天堂。」撒旦回答說：「這行不通。誰不想進天堂呢？」另一個代表發言：「我可以騙人們相信沒有地獄。」撒旦搖搖頭：「壞主意。誰都知道地獄是真實的。」又有一隻小鬼提議：「我會誤導人們，讓他們以為總是有另一個明天。不用急著信耶穌。」對此，撒旦帶著滿足的微笑坐了下來。從那時候起，很多人都相信這個謊言。但事實是，沒有人能夠預知未來。聖經說今天是拯救的日子。今天就承認你的罪，並接受耶穌為你的救主和生命的主吧！門關上之後，誰也進不去。

許可是我們從這個比喻學到的第三個功課。五個愚拙的童女去買油。但他們回來時被拒於門外。請聽第 11-12 節的對話：**11 其餘的童女隨後也來了，說：『主啊，主啊，給我們開門！』12 他卻回答說：『我實在告訴你們，我不認識你們。』**新郎是決定誰可以進去的人，因為那是他的婚禮。很可惜，門一旦關上，就無法再打開了。我們可能會認為新郎太殘忍了。那是一個慶祝，為什麼要破壞大家的心情？請注意，新郎沒有對女士們說：「對不起，妳們遲到了。派對已經開始了」。他說：「我不認識妳們。」她們沒有準備好油這個必需的東西，這表明她們根本沒有為慶祝做好準備。耶穌在馬太福音 7:22-23 說過類似的話：**22 「當那日必有許多人對我說：『主啊，主啊，我們不是奉你的名傳道，奉你的名趕鬼，奉你的名行許多異能嗎？』23 我就明明的告訴他們說：『我從來不認識你們，你們這些作惡的人，離開我去吧！』」**耶穌即將執行最後的審判。

許多人會聲稱他們曾經奉耶穌的名做了許多事情。他們可能會說：「我認識耶穌。祂是神的兒子，祂是聖誕嬰孩，祂死在十字架上。」因此他們認為自己有資格上天堂。但耶穌卻回答說：「我從來不認識你們。」對耶穌有一些了解，甚至以耶穌的名事奉無法救他們。假設我是一個在街上討飯的小孩。有一天，麥當勞的總裁開車經過看到了我。他把車停在路邊，給我一個漢堡包。他很有同情心。但是一個三明治只能醫飽肚子幾個小時。假如他為我做了其他意想不到的事情。他邀請我上他的車，並且說他打算收養我為兒子。當他辦好手續之後，我就成為他家庭的成員。他甚至把我的名字加在他的遺囑裡！知道一個富翁和與他建立個人關係是有很大的區別。同樣，神不只是希望我們了解有關祂的某些資訊，祂邀請我們成為祂家庭的成員。聖經說神藉著耶穌收養我們成為祂的兒女。這保證我們將來能上天堂。不但如此，當我們還活在世上時，天父時刻都看顧我們。關鍵是：我們必須透過順服神來證明我們是祂的家人。耶穌在這段經文第 21 節中說：「凡稱呼我『主啊，主啊』的人不能都進天國；惟獨遵行我天父旨意的人才能進去。」愛神的人便會遵行祂的話。成為基督徒之後，你覺得自己有什麼改變嗎？你是否在思想、言語、行為、人生目標和其他事情上反映天父的價值觀？不要只是口頭說你是基督徒，你必須要活得像一個基督徒！當然，我們並不是說我們必須完美。我們這一生永遠無法達到完美。關鍵是，第一，你是否渴望變得更像耶穌？第二，你是否變得越來越像祂？你有沒有追求耶穌的謙卑、誠實、憐憫等屬性？你周圍的人能夠從你的好行為察覺你是耶穌的跟隨者嗎？成長需要時間和決心。你必須立定心志，穿上在基督裡的新人。很可能你仍然會跌倒。錯誤甚至罪都會使我們謙卑下來。這些挫折提醒我們，單靠自己的能力是不可能走這條義路的。我們需要不斷地回到神身邊，請求祂的饒恕並請求祂加添恩典。

結論 CONCLUSION

耶穌快要回來。聖經中關於耶穌的所有預言都已經應驗，除了祂的再來和隨後的事情。耶穌從不說謊。如果祂說祂會回來，那麼事情就一定會發生。我們必須做好準備，期待祂的再來。耶穌要我們做什麼準備？有兩方面。首先，你必須憑信心接受祂。祂是我們通往天堂唯一的門。你必須承認你是個罪人，相信耶穌為你的罪而死，並將你的生命交託給祂。第二，你必須憑信心為耶穌而活。換句話說，你必須每天跟隨耶穌。透過你的工作和行為向別人表明耶穌是你的主。在工作場所和朋友面前見證耶穌。你在教會生活和個人生活中遵守祂的話語。如果你做好了這些準備，那麼當耶穌呼召你回家時，你就準備好隨時去天堂了。