

“Are We There Yet? Not Yet”  
Matthew 25:1-13/ Thessalonians 5:1-11  
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I. Introduction

It was the annual drive on Thanksgiving morning to my grandparents. My dad was an only child, so we had a type of duty to visit on Thanksgiving. Once we got there, to Wilbur, Wa., it was fine. We set up the American Flyer trains my dad played with as a boy, played pool, watched football, and had a great dinner. But the challenge every Thanksgiving for years was getting there. It was more than 100 miles.....a good two hours, each way.

We would leave in the morning. My dad drove, and my mom served as a type of co-pilot, and travel host to “keep the boys busy.” My two younger boys and I sat across the back seat. There were not seatbelts or car seats then. My mom would lead a little singing. We’d then keep track of the different colors of cars that went by. Country music was playing on the radio. But sooner or later the enthusiasm for the trip would begin to wane. Boredom began to set in. It began with the complaint “he’s on my side.” The slide to chaos in the back seat would continue with a stretch and nudge, a slight kick, and then a push. Order would temporarily be restored with my dad saying, “Do you want me to stop this car?” He had “stopped the car” on occasions, and nothing good came of that, so peace was restored in back seat.....for a while.

Inevitably the question would come: “Are we there yet?” It was not really a question, as we all could see we weren’t there yet. Rather it was a protest: “This is taking too long.” My mom would patiently respond, “Not yet.” The follow up question was voiced next: “How much longer?” My mom then gave her stock response: “Not much longer.”

And so it would go; three young boys on the Thanksgiving trip, that seemed to take forever. It was probably no accident that when we did get there we exploded out of the car, glad to have finally arrived at “the Promised Land.”

“Are we there yet?” It was an expression of boredom, impatience and protest. In the world of three young boys the two hours of travel seemed like an eternity. It was longer than we expected.

II. Historic Context

“Are we there yet?” That has been a question and protest of impatient Christians wondering about the return of Christ. Crucified, resurrected, and then ascended.....the early Christians expected Christ to return soon and bring the final reign of God. There was the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans a generation after Jesus.....“Are we there yet? Not yet.” There was the fall of Rome to

the Vandals, Goths and Huns in 410CE, and the beginning of the Dark Ages....."Are we there yet? Not yet." There was Y1K.....certainly Christ would return on a nice round number like that 1000CE....."Are we there yet? Not yet." There was the Black Plague, the Inquisition, and the religious wars of Europe.....but "Not yet." There was WWII and the horror of the Holocaust, the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis.....  
.....and Hal Lindsey's book, The Late Great Planet Earth in the 70's.....he thought we were there, but "Not yet." We passed Y2K, 9/11.....and if you remember, people were wondering "Are we there yet?" Well, here we are, so "not yet." And the next date that's being talked about is December 21, 2012 (12/21/2012), a date for the end of many things according to the Mayan calendar. And as we near that time, we'll hear more impatient protest "from the back seat," "Are we there yet?" And when we come out on the other side of the Mayan end of the world we'll know "Not yet."

The crucified and risen Christ ascended into the presence of God the Father. His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit signaled the beginning of God's reign. But it is not yet complete. It has not yet come in its fullness. That will only happen when Christ returns, and sin, evil and death are finally defeated. It will be the time of the new creation, the new heaven and new earth, the resurrection of the dead, and new bodies for the new creation. It will be a time when evil comes to an end, and we stand in the beauty and wonder of God. Christians throughout the ages have impatiently protested "Are we there yet?" In Matthew 25 Jesus tells three parables that say "not yet." For the next three Sunday we'll take a look at these parables.

III. Text: **Read Matthew 25:1-13.**

IV. Exegesis

In his book, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, Ken Bailey comments that this parable fits the everyday life of a Palestinian village that Jesus witnessed many times. A wedding banquet is to take place at the home of the groom. As a great crowd of family and friends gather at the groom's house, he and his friend are making their way to the home of the bride. Everyone is dressed for the occasion. The bride then comes with the groom and his friends, and they make their way back to the party at the groom's home. However, the happy group does not take the quickest way there. Rather they take the longest way possible, deliberately wandering through as many streets as possible so that as many people as possible can see them and cheer them as they pass. The wedding feast takes place at night, and to no one's surprise, it takes the wedding party longer than expected to get there. It happened all the time.

Among the waiting guests are 10 young maidens, friends of the bride. In the moral tradition of village life it was expected that any woman out after dark would carry a lit oil lamp. Women, old and young alike, carried lamps, as their reputations, and

sometimes safety depended on the lit lamps. And knowing that the parade from the bride's home to the groom's home can take longer than expected, wise young women bring extra oil for their lamps. The wait takes a while, and the young women fall asleep. Falling asleep in this story is not a problem.

Finally one of the guests sees the joyful parade of bride, groom and friends approaching, and announces their coming to all. After a long wait, everyone gets ready. The 10 sleeping young women wake up, and trim their lamps. It's then that to their horror, 5 discover they did not bring enough oil. They had not planned for the delay. When the 5 wise young women tell them that there don't have enough to share, the 5 foolish young women go out in the village to borrow more oil. In those little Palestinian villages everyone knows everyone, so borrowing oil would not be a problem.

In the meantime the wedding party has arrived, and everyone follows the joyful bride and groom into the house, the celebration starts, and the door is shut.

And as the story ends, the 5 foolish young women return with oil and their lamps burning. "Open the door for us" they call through the door. "Sorry," replies the groom. "I don't think I know you. Maybe you are wedding crashers."

Ken Bailey's comments on the conclusion of this parable have a definite Middle Eastern flavor. He writes: "In the Middle East, the word 'no' is never an answer, rather it is an pause in the negotiations." (p.273) The hearers of the story are to understand there will be more conversation at the door. Do the 5 foolish women get in? The reader is left to finish the story.

In this familiar story from village life Jesus is the bridegroom, the arrival is the second coming, and the marriage festival is the joyful celebration in the coming of the new heaven and new earth. The 10 young women are Christians awaiting Christ's return. The wait for the coming of the wedding party is the delay in Jesus' return. The shut door is judgment.

The tension in the story is the difference between the wise and foolish young women. What does it mean to be wise? What does it mean to bring extra oil? What does it mean to wisely wait for Jesus' return? Much study and a few Ph.D. dissertations have addressed this issue. Is the oil; following the 10 Commandments? Following Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7)? Praying? Forgiving 70 times 7? Love? What do you think?

I think wisdom to bring extra oil is about all those things, and more. I think it is about an attitude that is ready for a long delay. I think it is faithfulness over a life time. I think that it is faithful living so that I would not change how I live if Jesus returned right now, or 100 years from now. I think that wisdom and extra oil is not getting caught up in the Y2K, Left Behind, and Mayan calendar stuff, and being faithful to Jesus 24/7/365.

Living the Christian faith in the light of Jesus return is not just about thrill, excitement and a sprint. Rather it's faithfulness in the same direction over the seasons of our lives; a long, faithful walk. It's a simple life of service, study, prayer, worship and love. Wisdom is about the maturity of patient, hopeful, faithful waiting. It's ready today, ready tomorrow, and ready whenever the day might come.

#### V. Final Reflections

One day in 1789 the skies of Hartford, Connecticut got ominously dark. Lightning flashed and thunder shock the Connecticut House of Representatives. A clamor arose among the representatives as they looked out the windows at the frightening sky. A cry swept across the house for an immediate adjournment as the room grew unnaturally dark, and many feared the end was at hand. Quelling the rising fear the Speaker of the House, Colonel Jacob Davenport arose and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no reason for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, let more candles be brought in so we can be faithful to our call." More candles were brought in. The session of congress was not adjourned. The storm did pass. And the end did not come.....not yet.

Faithful and hopeful through the seasons of life....."doing our duty".....  
"faithful to our call".....through sun and storm, calm and wind.....until our end, or the end of days. This is Jesus' point in the parable.

In time the three boys across the back seat of the car on Thanksgiving Day quit asking "Are we there yet?" I suppose we grew up a little, and matured. We talked, watched the scenery.....and appropriately slept. We also learned about patience and the value of expectation. And when we got to my grandparents the door was always open.....my grandfather there to welcome us. And we never missed the Thanksgiving banquet. So may it be.