

Matthew 25:1-13

Aim of Lesson

To show that we should be always ready and watching for the return of Jesus, and that we should put his work before anything else.

Background study

Familiarize yourself with marriage customs in Bible times. The wedding ceremony comprised various steps, not all of which were taken at every wedding. These included the garments of the bride and groom; bridesmaids and friends waiting for, and accompanying the bridegroom to the bride's home, and the wedding supper - sometimes held in the bride's home though more usually held in the groom's home to which the bride was subsequently escorted, often accompanied by singing, music and dancing. A model or picture of a lamp would be a useful visual aid.

Matthew 24:29-51. Warnings against unpreparedness and exhortations to watchfulness lead into this parable.

Suggested outline of lesson

Find out how many children have been to a wedding or perhaps been bridesmaids. Talk about the importance of the occasion, the preparations and the excitement, and refer briefly to the duties of a bridesmaid today. Describe as clearly as possible, an Eastern wedding, with the lengthy preparations, lively music, rich food and beautiful dresses. Because of the hot climate weddings took place in the evening, necessitating the use of lamps for the procession. Describe the type of lamp used and, if you have a model, trim the lamp as the bridesmaids would have done. All the bridesmaids had lighted lamps with them, but the bridegroom was delayed. Throughout their long wait the bridesmaids' lamps burned as they slept. But not until they were awakened by shouts heralding the approach of the bridegroom and they rose to trim their lamps, did five of them realize that they were running out of oil. In vain they tried to borrow from their companions, and their attempt to buy oil also failed. By the time they returned from their search the procession had moved on to the marriage feast and the door was closed to them.

When relating this part of the story, help the children to imagine the panic, the pleading, the desire to rectify matters, the disappointment, and then the remorse. How the bridesmaids would have wished that they had prepared themselves properly. Draw on the experience of the children who will have known the regret of leaving something undone until it is too late.

Not only had the bridesmaids let the bridegroom down by failing in their duty; they had also arrived too late to be welcomed at the feast.

Remind the children that Jesus told this story to teach a lesson. He wanted to make his hearers think about preparing themselves for his own arrival on that day when he would return again to the earth. He hoped to find people watching and waiting for him, well-prepared and ready to greet him. He was warning the people that he would come suddenly, and unexpectedly, and that those waiting for him must be prepared and ready at all times.

Relevance to the children's lives

It is easy to be like the foolish bridesmaids and leave undone important matters until it is too late. Can you think of an example of this? Some of us leave our Sunday School homework until the very last minute, and do it just before we leave for Sunday School. Would it be a good idea to get into the habit of preparing carefully by thinking ahead?

How can we be ready for Jesus so that when he comes we shall be happy to see him, and he to see us? (Try to show how precious the Bible is and that we should never take it for granted. Each of us must learn to know and love Jesus personally, by reading our Bibles and putting into practice what we learn, before it is too late.)

Worksheets

The messages are 'Lamps but no oil' and 'Oil in jars'.

The code reads 'Watch for you do not know the day your Lord is coming'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you that we can pray to you, and read the Bible which is a personal message to each of us. Help us to treasure your teaching and to prepare ourselves for Jesus by reading it and by praying every day. Amen.

Memory verse

"Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).