Hope While We Wait (Matthew 25:1–13) Premkumar I Clement (November 8, 2026)

On the night of January 1, 2023, Varun and I experienced something we will never forget. We were at the railway station in Washington, D.C., on a bitterly cold night. I had made a terrible mistake while booking our tickets from Boston to Washington, D.C., and back. Instead of booking a round-trip ticket, I had booked two one-way tickets in the same direction! Unfortunately, I discovered this only when we arrived at the station to board our return train to Boston.

The conductor looked at our tickets and politely informed us that the train was going to Boston, but our tickets were for a train traveling to Washington, D.C.! We were not permitted to board. We had to purchase new tickets for the following morning. But where would we go? We could not return to the hotel, and we could not go to my cousin's house. After an intense security check, we obtained special permission from the police to remain inside the station overnight. And there we were: two pathetic, helpless passengers, virtually stranded, with nowhere to go and nearly twelve hours to wait! I wondered whether the police had ever encountered two people who were so thoroughly unprepared for a train journey!

That experience came to mind when I read Jesus' parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise, and five were foolish. Perhaps Varun and I belonged to the second category that night!

But what does it mean to be prepared while waiting for God's kingdom?

First, waiting does not mean remaining constantly alert. All ten virgins became drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom was delayed. So, it is not about staying awake every minute. Believe me, after spending several hours in a cold railway station, Varun and I had no difficulty

understanding this! We were ready to sleep anywhere, even on the railway station benches. Christian waiting does not demand that we remain sleepless; it calls us to remain hopeful.

Second, waiting does not mean possessing all the resources necessary for the celebration. All ten virgins brought lamps with oil, but only five carried extra oil. Similarly, Varun and I had our luggage, our tickets, and our travel plans—or so we thought! What we did not have was the correct ticket! We certainly had no extra supply of patience, warm clothing, or a comfortable place to sleep. Yet we survived the night. The parable reminds us that the wedding feast is ultimately the host's gift of grace. We cannot provide everything ourselves.

Third, waiting is not simply about waiting patiently. The text does not prescribe a particular attitude while awaiting God's kingdom. Our experience certainly tested our patience! Every announcement made us hopeful, and every passing hour made us wonder whether morning would ever arrive. We were waiting, but not necessarily waiting peacefully!

Fourth, waiting is not merely about excitement when news of the bridegroom's arrival comes. All ten virgins awakened, trimmed their lamps, and prepared to welcome him. The foolish virgins were just as excited as the wise ones. At the railway station, every announcement of an approaching train made us sit up with excitement. But excitement alone could not get us onto the right train!

Finally, waiting is not about distinguishing those who know the bridegroom from those who do not. Even the foolish virgins cried, "Lord, Lord, open to us." The difference was not their familiarity with the bridegroom but their preparation for his delay.

The wise virgins carried extra oil. While the foolish ones searched for a twenty-four-hour convenience store selling lamp oil, the bridegroom arrived, the wedding began, and the doors were shut!

What, then, does preparing for the wait mean?

Jesus challenges two temptations. One is claiming secret knowledge about God's timetable, identifying who is in and who is out, or interpreting every historical event as a biblical sign. The other is assuming that God's kingdom is already fully realized, that nothing new is coming, and that this world is as good as it gets.

Christian hope rejects both assumptions. The bridegroom's delay does not mean he will never come. The celebration has not yet fully begun! Our knowledge, faith, and love are not tickets to gain entry into eternity; they are gifts for living faithfully in the time before eternity.

So, how do we prepare? We gather with others who wait and remain faithful to one another. We avoid communities obsessed with predicting God's timetable. We fill our lamps with faith, love, compassion, justice, and service, remembering that these gifts illuminate our journey here and now.

Friends, Varun and I eventually boarded our train and reached Boston. That night taught us that waiting can be uncomfortable, unexpected, and sometimes even embarrassing! But we never gave up hope of reaching our destination. As Christians, we do not know when the bridegroom will arrive, but we know that he will come. Until then, let us keep our lamps burning, our faith alive, and our hope shining. For the best is yet to come! Amen.