

The Ten Virgins



Matthew 25:1-13

Year A Proper 27

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
●	Jesus	●				
●	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲				
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲				
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲		●
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲		▲		●
▲	Chuza - the open-minded, intellectually curious manager of Herod's household		■			
■	Caiaphas - the high priest, a suave and amoral politician whose primary goal is the survival of the nation		■		▲	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts			■		▲
▲	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past			▲		●
●	Priest - another highly ranked priest of the Temple concerned mostly with his own power				●	
●	Nicodemus - a member of the ruling council who's a secret follower of Jesus				▲	
●	Elder - a member of the ruling council who's honestly undecided about who and what Jesus is				●	

Scene 1

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Peter

{Jesus is just finishing telling a parable to the disciples.}

Jesus Therefore, be watchful! For you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come!

James Amen! Good one, Rabbi.

Jesus I'm glad you liked it.

Peter I liked it, too, but I liked it better when you were blasting those priests!

James *[to John]* I guess you like this one better. You weren't crazy about the sermons against the priests.

John More confused than anything else. *[to Jesus]* I couldn't understand why you were attacking them. But to be honest, I'm not sure I understood this sermon, either.

Peter You've got to be kidding! *I* understood it. Hey! I understood something the rabbi said, and John didn't.

Joanna I have some questions, too.

James Surprise, surprise.

Jesus Questions are good. Ask yours.

John Well, I understood the parable. Ten women are supposed to wait for a bridegroom's arrival so they can all go the wedding, but five of them didn't bring oil for their lamps, and the bridegroom arrives while they're off in town trying to buy more. It's about the need to be watchful, just like in the parable of the house servants that you told us before.

Joanna Hold on. Watchful? I'm not sure that's quite it.

James Of course it is! The rabbi said it himself: Be watchful!

Joanna But that's not why the first five women failed, is it? They were just as watchful as the other five. In fact, none of them were really very watchful at all. They all fell asleep while waiting!

Peter Ha! I didn't notice that!

John Maybe "prepared" would be a better word.

Jesus Maybe.

James *[argumentatively]* It really amounts to the same thing.

Joanna Granted.

John Anyway, whether it's watchfulness or preparedness, what I didn't quite understand was: for what? What exactly is it that we're supposed to be prepared for?

James The coming of the Kingdom, of course!

John But the rabbi said to be watchful for the coming of the Son of Man.

Peter Isn't that him? *[to Jesus]* Isn't that you?

{A pause while Jesus doesn't answer.}

Joanna I think I see where John's going. We're told to wait for the coming of the Son of Man, but isn't he already here?

James He was talking about his coming to Jerusalem, about the Day of the Lord. We've only been talking about it forever.

John But we're here already. The rabbi's already come to the Temple.

{Another pause while they puzzle over this.}

Peter But the fight hasn't started yet. *[to Jesus]* That's what you're talking about, right? We've got to be ready, to have our weapons ready to hand, just like the women who had oil for their lamps.

James Peter, that's brilliant! *[to John and Joanna]* See? Perfectly clear!

Joanna *[to Jesus]* Is that what it is? Is that what we're supposed to be preparing for?

{A pause while Jesus makes no reply, and then the scene ends.}

Scene 2

Caiaphas , Chuza

{Chuza discusses the situation with Caiaphas.}

Chuza *[in a slightly pleading voice]* You must admit, he's settled down. He's barely even shown himself in public the past few days.

Caiaphas True, but I don't trust him to act consistently or rationally. I must

say, I've come to understand why you were first drawn to him, but *you* must admit, any wisdom he might have exhibited in the past has turned out to be the scattershot ravings of a madman.

Chuza I truly believe he's not a danger. Truly! If he's a maniac, then at least he's not a *monomaniac*. I promise you he's already forgotten all about his crusade against the priesthood.

Caiaphas [*genuinely curious*] How can you be so sure? Do you have some inside information? [*suddenly realizing the truth of it*] Oh my God. Joanna is still with him, isn't she?

Chuza [*in a weak voice*] Yes.

Caiaphas Didn't you warn her to stay clear of him?

Chuza We discussed it. She was on the verge of coming home, and then she changed her mind at the last moment.

Caiaphas Did she give you a reason?

Chuza She said she didn't want to leave Mary on her own.

Caiaphas [*genuinely puzzled*] The whore?

Chuza [*a little stiffly*] Yes.

Caiaphas [*in genuine admiration*] Your wife is an amazing individual.

Chuza [*tensely*] So you can see why I'm worried about any action you might take.

Caiaphas [*compassionately*] Chuza. Old friend. You can set your mind at ease. We have no interest in harming any of his followers. In fact, that's the last thing we want to do. The last thing we want is a fight. That would defeat the whole purpose of arresting him!

Chuza I know. But I also know that not all the priests feel that way. Some of them would like to execute the whole group as a show of power.

Caiaphas True. But I am still the *high* priest, and promise you no harm will come to Joanna.

Chuza Thank you. It's an enormous load off my mind.

Caiaphas Now that you're reassured, tell me: do you really believe the man is no longer a threat?

Chuza I'm...I'm not sure.

Caiaphas What's he been doing since he disappeared from public sight?

Chuza Nothing threatening. Nothing military at all. No organizing of any kind.

Caiaphas Really? Then what?

Chuza Just teaching.

Caiaphas Teaching can be the most dangerous activity of all. What's he been teaching?

Chuza *[awkwardly evading the question]* I'm not sure. Joanna missed most of it.

Caiaphas Then how do you know he spent the whole time teaching?

Chuza Oh, well, I did get a report from Judas, the operative I introduced you to when they entered Jerusalem.

Caiaphas Yes, I remember him. A very clear-sighted man. What does he report about the content of the teaching?

Chuza Um, that there's actually a lot of debate within the group about what it means. According to Joanna's past accounts, this is pretty common.

Caiaphas What are the conflicting positions?

Chuza *[reluctantly]* I don't know if it would be fair to say. After all, none of them are sure, and -

Caiaphas *[interrupting]* Chuza! Listen to me and believe me: Joanna is not in danger, unless it's from some scheme this rabbi of hers is hatching. It would be catastrophic blindness for us to harm a hair on the head of the wife of Herod's steward when our desperate need is to end this threat with as little public attention as possible. Joanna is safe. But the nation is not. The nation - my nation, your nation - hangs by a thread. And any information we can gain about this man's intentions could be the difference between survival and destruction. So I ask you again: what has he been teaching?

Chuza *[with a sigh]* Some think he's talking about the Kingdom again, about the revolt. Others think he's begun to talk about...

Caiaphas About...?

Chuza *[bleakly]* The End of the World.

Scene 3

Joanna , John , Mary , Thomas

{John and Joanna discuss Jesus's™ parable with Thomas and Mary.}

John The end of the world?

Thomas Yeah, weren't you here yesterday?

Joanna I spent the day with Chuza.

John James and I visited our parents.

Thomas Wow, so you missed it. He spent the whole day talking about the end of the world.

Mary Not everybody thought so.

Thomas No, but you did. And so did Matthew.

Mary But Judas disagreed.

Thomas *[to John and Joanna]* He is *not* happy about the rabbi's recent sermons, by the way! You guys should maybe have a talk with him.

John I'm not sure what to make of it myself.

Joanna I'm sure Judas will be okay. He's been as critical as any of us of some of the things the rabbi has said, but I don't think there's anybody more dedicated to the cause.

Mary *[blurting it out]* No! *[a pause while they stare at her in surprise, and then in a small but urgent voice]* We're losing him. I can feel it. He's not...he's not really with us any more.

John Okay, Mary. I'll check in with him the next chance I get.

Joanna So what happened yesterday?

Thomas It all started when he mentioned the Temple being destroyed again. Do you remember when he told the crowd that if they destroyed the Temple, he would raise it again in three days? Yesterday, he said it *would* be destroyed, that not one stone of it would remain sitting on top of another.

John Was he talking about fighting the Romans again? About the collateral damage that would occur?

Thomas That's what some of us thought, so we asked him.

{A pause while they wait for him to continue.}

Joanna And?

Thomas Instead of answering directly, he started giving us all this additional teaching.

John About?

Mary *[solemnly]* The end of the world.

Thomas It certainly sounded like that. He talked about wars and rumors of wars, about false messiahs appearing, about the stars falling from heaven and the sky becoming dark. He talked about the angels coming to harvest the righteous, and how two people might be working in field and one of them would be taken and the other one left.

Joanna Some of that sounds familiar.

John I remember! He talked about a lot of this when we were still on our way to Jerusalem. We debated at that time whether he was talking about the Day we entered the city or the end of the world.

Thomas Except that we've already entered Jerusalem, which is what made most of the group think he was talking about the end of the world.

John We've entered, but nothing's really happened yet. He could have been announcing that we're finally going to do what we came here to do.

Joanna Whatever *that* is.

John I imagine that's the position Judas took.

Thomas Yeah, his big argument was another thing the rabbi said, that all the things he talked about would be experienced by this generation.

Joanna *[to Mary]* What's your rebuttal to that?

Mary I don't have one.

John But you still believe the rabbi was talking about the end of the world?

Mary Yes. Because I saw it in his face, and heard it in his voice. *[suddenly almost pleadingly]* An end is coming! He's saying his goodbyes! He's giving us his last words! Can't anyone else hear it?

Scene 4

Caiaphas , Elder , Nicodemus , Priest

{The priests and elders discuss Caiaphas' latest intelligence.}

Priest *[in outrage]* He's trying to foment an uprising against Rome? Sedition on top of blasphemy!

Nicodemus The high priest's source didn't say that! He said that was just one interpretation, while most of his followers believe he was talking about the end of the world.

Elder Still, we can't ignore the possibility that he's planning some kind of military action.

Priest This proves conclusively that he's a more pressing danger to the nation than we ever imagined. We have to move against him now!

Nicodemus What this proves is that he's just a religious teacher lecturing about very far off and theoretical events. Don't forget: his own followers see it this way. *[to Caiaphas]* Didn't you mention that your contact was actually *disappointed* that his leader *wasn't* talking about a revolt?

Caiaphas True. And I'm inclined to believe his interpretation. However, this makes his leader *more* dangerous! A man lecturing to his followers about fighting against Rome might not actually do it. He might simply be rallying them for purposes of his own. To give him more money, for example. But a man lecturing his followers about the end of the world may well be a lunatic who

fully plans to attack the Romans, *but knows it can't succeed*, and so is preparing his people for that end. To my mind, what this new information means is that we have to strive harder than ever to neutralize him quickly and quietly.

Scene 5

Joanna , John , Mary , Thomas

{John and Joanna have a final chat with Mary and Thomas.}

Joanna Mary? John and I had a thought about the end of world.

Thomas Does that mean you've come to agree with that interpretation?

John We're still not sure, but we just wanted to tell Mary that even if it is true, it might not happen all that soon. We might have a long time still to spend with the rabbi.

Mary How could that be?

Joanna Remember the parable of the ten women? Remember why it was that they even needed oil?

Thomas It was because the bridegroom arrived at night.

John And why was it at night?

Mary Because he was late!

Joanna Exactly. He took way longer to make his appearance than they thought. So maybe we'll wait long for the end to come.

Thomas But it'll still happen within one generation, which is pretty quick for the end of the world. On the other hand, what if he was really talking about freeing ourselves from the Romans? We thought we'd be instigating the revolt the moment we entered the city, but we're clearly not ready for that, and now it seems the rabbi may have been aware of that the whole time.

John One generation away from freedom. I can see that.

Mary I'll wait a thousand generations if I have to - for *him*.

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