

Congratulations to the class of 03!

You've studied enough to pass your tests, done enough homework to fill a few three ring binders, survived the moving of the school, changes in teachers, and numerous trips to the bagel shop – so now are you ready for the real world? What is the real world any way? As you know from Pastor Nickel's class this year, the Christian worldview stands in stark contrast to the other worldviews that seem to be gaining ground. Jesus had a very definite teaching of His worldview concerning the time between His first and second comings. I want to share some of His graduation addresses to His disciples. He gave them more than one graduation speech in that last week before His crucifixion. They were about to graduate from the road school of Jesus. The Teacher was about to leave them, and they were about to go into the world on their own, at least not with His physical presence.

Here are some of the things He conveyed to them in those messages of His last week:

#1 Jesus told several stories about what we need to do while we we're waiting for the return of Christ. One of them, in Matthew 25, is the parable of the virgins that were waiting for the groom to come. Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV) *1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' 13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

We are here between the two comings of Jesus watching and waiting for His return, or as another parable says, "occupying till He comes" (Luke 19:13). Throughout the Scriptures, the oil represents the Spirit of God. Some of those virgins had plenty of oil. They had stored up extra. They had made their lives increasingly available to the Spirit. The other five didn't have any extra. They only had enough, they hoped, to make it until the bridegroom showed up. Isn't that the temptation of the flesh? "I have enough of the Lord in my life. I'll make it. I don't want to get too radical. I go to church on Sunday. I'm cool. I qualify as being in the Christian crowd." But as time drags on the pull of the world drains the oil they have. While they are out trying to get more the bridegroom shows up. When they come later and knock on the door He says to them, "I don't know you." He said that before in Matthew 7. Remember? They refused to serve the ones in need, and so they had not served Christ. He'll tell the story again at the end of this chapter. The presence of the Spirit in our lives draws us into serving the body of Christ. The more we make

ourselves available to Him, the more we are filled. He illustrates that again in the next parable of the talents. Keep opening up your life to an increasing supply of the Holy Spirit. Don't settle for yesterday's anointing. Seek to make your life increasingly available to the Holy Spirit and when Christ returns, you'll be ready. As you head out into a life of your own, choose to be filled with the Spirit to greater extent each day!

Jesus' next parable in Matthew 25 is part 2 of His graduation message. The master is going on a journey. He gives one servant 5 talents, another 2, and to the last a single talent according to their ability. A talent is a measurement equaling more than a thousand dollars. It is not like we use the word, a gift or ability. He gave the men amounts of money according to their ability. We get mixed up and easily interpret this as God giving them abilities. They already had abilities and God gave them amounts of money according to that financial management skills that each possessed. When the master came back, the first two had doubled their money. As a reward, they were praised for their faithfulness, put in charge of much more, and invited to share their masters' happiness. But the last servant was rebuked for being wicked and lazy because he did nothing.

I'm not going to say this isn't about natural or spiritual gifts, but I want to suggest an alternate interpretation. What is of value? What is of real lasting value that Jesus left us? He left us His Spirit. Some are able to receive a greater measure of anointing. They are open to His work in them. They cooperate with the Spirit and bear fruit. That was another of Jesus' graduation sermons, live in me and I in you so that you can be fruitful. God has invested His Spirit in us. The more we yield to the Spirit the more anointing we receive and the more productive we are for the Kingdom of God. But if we don't allow the Spirit to do anything in us, we are like the virgins that had to go buy oil.

It doesn't matter how anointed you are. Jesus is going to anoint you with the Spirit according to your ability. What matters is what you do with what He's invested in you. Are you yielding to the Spirit and bearing fruit? Then you can expect more anointing, the joy of the LORD, and more responsibility. Are you burying it and doing nothing with the moving of the Spirit in your heart? Then expect a rebuke.

I'm not going to tell you to be some great achiever, to be someone who goes down in man's history. I'm challenging you to be someone that doubles their anointing and then doubles it again because you keep yielding to the Spirit of God in your life. I'm at that age where people have mid-life crisis. We see our strongest years are behind us and wonder if we did what we were meant to do. Some of my friends are asking if they've done with their life what they were created to do.

Listen carefully! God made you for one purpose, to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. When you are doing that, you are being what you were made to be. God uniquely designed you to serve Him in some way, but that is to flow out of a love relationship with Him. At the moment you find yourself wondering if you are what God meant you to be, stop and love Him with your all. Be still, or

sing a new song, or get in the Word and let Him speak to you. Then you can say without hesitation, "At this moment, I'm all God planned me to be. I'm successful." As you continue to be faithful to love Him, He will direct you in service. That brings us to another of Jesus' graduation messages:

#3 If you want to be first, be last. If you want to be great, be a servant. John 13 You know the story of the Last Supper. Everyone was waiting to see who would take the servant's role. Maybe Jesus would designate someone as the lowest on the disciple pecking order. Maybe this was going to be the time when Judas caught it for being so tight with the money. But instead of Jesus assigning someone the job, He took it on Himself. Here is God incarnate wiping the dust off the feet of those who were blessed just to hear Him speak. What was the lesson? The accepted worldview of man is to take what you can and claw your way to the top. Jesus was teaching them that serving is greater than being served. Humility draws the presence and power of God. "In fact," Jesus said, "I did not come to be served, but to serve." That is amazing. The Creator of all is serving His creation and telling them that service is the way to greatness. There are many graduation ceremonies and many speakers sharing their wisdom with graduating seniors, but I would guess that very few are encouraging their graduates to be servants. Most are telling the graduate class to become someone great, shoot for the stars. Jesus is saying the way to the stars is via the low road of service. That's the eternal reality of Jesus.

#4 Finally, He gave them the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment! Love one another. If they were going to make it through the persecution that was coming, if they were going to really live His teaching of service, they had to learn to love one another with God's love. How could they risk their lives for each other if they did not love one another? If you are going to make as a good investment of the Spirit within you, and survive the onslaught of the world you will need to cling to this same command. Without love, the church is a mockery of the Gospel. Graduates, no matter what your fellow Christian does, says or acts toward you, love them. It was Jesus' instruction to His graduates. It was what He knew they needed to do to face a world full of self-centered people. Jesus knows love conquers all. Jesus knows that love never fails. Jesus was about to demonstrate that love accomplishes things that people would never imagine. Love one another. This so rang in the Apostle John's ears that it was the last thing he would repeat week after week to his flock at Ephesus.

Let me sum up these graduation messages of Jesus. Never be satisfied with yesterday's anointing! Always seek to be filled to a greater extent. As long as you are living in all out love for the Lord, you are all God made you to be! He will express His life in you through service and love toward the family of God. That is a successful person! That is a great person in the eyes of God regardless of their specific occupation. Go against the flow of our world and be great in the eyes of God. Who cares if you're famous here if you can be famous in the halls of heaven? Live for the One who loves you and gave His life for you! It's radical, it's costly, it's painful, but the retirement benefits are out of this world! Go for the gold, not the earthly gold, but the heavenly. Be all God meant you to be in Jesus. Live to hear His words, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things; I will make you ruler over many. Enter into your Master's joy!"