

Jesus, Good Bridegroom, prepare us for the long night of enduring fill our lamps for active waiting and trusting; ight the fire when the time is right to respond to your call. Amen.

“Ready For Anything”

Weddings are always interesting events. Often a wedding comes at the end of a substantial engagement period in which there is intense planning all leading up to the “main event”. In many weddings, one question is asked by the bride more than any other, “Is the groom here yet?”

In the days of Jesus, the bride was used to waiting. A bride and groom would first become engaged (often after an arrangement by parents and a payment of a dowry). The engagement was a binding contract and usually lasted around a year. During that time a groom would be working on building a home (usually an addition to his parents’ home). When the time for the wedding arrived, the groom would make all the preparations and then come for his bride. The general time of the groom’s arrival would be known but not the exact time.

The bride, groom, and entourage would travel to the groom’s home (almost always at night) where they would have the wedding and a wedding reception, and a celebration that would last sometimes as long as a week. Many of the friends and family would join in this “parade”. Everyone was expected to have his or her own light (torch). Anyone without a light was not welcomed.

This was the common practice and tradition as Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew chapter 25. Many have pointed out that this is one of the most complex and “deep” parables of Jesus.

All ten of the virgins were apparently invited to the wedding. They all had received an invitation. And what’s more, they all responded positively to that invitation. They were all there to welcome the bridal couple. Their intention was good.

The story seems to turn on the unexpected delay of the groom. Some of the women were prepared for a delay and some were not. It got to be late in the evening and the women fell asleep. There was nothing wrong with this. They all woke up immediately when they heard the announcement that the groom was coming. But when they awakened, I imagine all ten of the torches were going out. Five of the women were able to “refuel” and the other five were not able to do so.

The woman without extra oil asked the other virgins to share with them. The other virgins said “No”. When we hear this, we have a tendency to think that this is a rude kind of behavior on the part of these women. It certainly doesn’t seem like a very Christian way to respond. However, we need to keep two things in mind. First, there is the practical fact that if the wise virgins gave oil to the unwise virgins, then they might actually not have enough for their needs.

But second, remember that this was a story designed to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable is introduced with these words, “At that time the Kingdom of Heaven will be like . . . “. The details of the parable are there to make a point. Our job is to see the point that Jesus was trying to make.

The unprepared virgins had to go into the town and try to find oil for their lamps before the groom wedding party arrived. They were unsuccessful.

The unprepared women secured more oil and rushed to the home where the week-long reception was taking place, but the door was already locked. They knocked and pleaded for admission. It is interesting that they are not told, “You’re too late.” They were told, “I don’t know you.”

These words remind us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount: 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons

and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ [Matthew 7:21-23]

The wise and foolish women represent true and false believers; they represent genuine and superficial followers. So, what are we supposed to learn from this interesting story?

First, there are some things you can’t do at the last minute. I’m sure that all these women went out to greet the bridegroom thinking they had plenty of oil for their task. Perhaps the five never even considered that they might run out. By the time they gave the matter a thought it was too late.

There are lots of people who think that they are good enough for Heaven. They believe they are DIE Hard people. They feel that their personal power reserve is enough to help them survive anything. They believe they have whatever is necessary to get to Heaven. They think that they have enough oil.

But the Bible teaches us that we DO not, CAN not and WILL never have enough goodness to get us into Heaven. In fact, our record is sure to keep us OUT of Heaven. We do not have enough oil. We do not have enough power to earn Heaven. We will not be able to stand when the Lord returns. We need something that can do for us what an alternator does for your car. The Bible tells us that our power source is the righteousness of Christ. Jesus is the one who empowers our life and helps us to keep going in life. Jesus is the one who provides our way to Heaven.

When we trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, His death on the cross pays for our wrongdoing and sin and applies the goodness and perfection of Christ to our account. Jesus replaces what was lost and gives us the power we need to get to Heaven and to live victoriously.

It is imperative that you come to this realization now. This is one of those things you can’t put off to the last minute. Those who delay are like a person driving a vehicle with a defective alternator. Sooner or later, they will be stranded on the road to Heaven. Jesus will return and you won’t have the power to join Him. Death will knock at your door, and you will not have what is necessary for eternal life. The trials and tribulations of life will come and you will find that your strength is insufficient. The matter of salvation must not be put off until another day.

Second, we must understand that faith is non-transferable. In other words, we can’t get to Heaven by someone else’s preparation. We won’t get to Heaven through,

- the faith of our parents or grandparents
- our nationality
- the solid teaching of our church or youth group
- the faith of your friends
- the faithfulness of your favorite authors
- the faithful instruction of your Sunday School teachers

Faith must be personal and individual. These virgins had to have their own oil. They couldn’t borrow it from another. In the same way, you and I must have a personal and individual relationship with Jesus Christ.

The key issue for each of us is whether we will put our trust in Christ. It is one thing to believe in Jesus, it is another to trust Him. Christians believe Jesus is God, that He is the Savior, that Jesus was a sufficient payment for our sins. We can look and act like we’ve responded to the invitation of salvation. But until we trust Christ personally, until we place my confidence for salvation in Christ; we are not prepared.

At the beginning of the parable, it would have been impossible to know which of the virgins were wise and which were foolish. They looked pretty much the same. It was only when they were awakened to the cry “The Bridegroom is coming” that we see a difference in the Virgins.

There is certainly a parallel here for those who profess faith in Christ. It is difficult to distinguish those who have put their faith in Christ from those who just talk about putting their faith in Christ. These things will be revealed suddenly.

There are all kinds of theories and suggestions about The Second Coming of Jesus. What we do know is when Jesus comes, He will come in power, not in meekness as He did the first time. We also know that Jesus will come suddenly.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:10)

We also know that when Jesus comes there will be no time for preparation. It will be too late to get ready. The door of opportunity will have been shut.

At the time of Jesus, a crisis was created when there was a delay in the return of the Lord. Every one of the early disciples believed that Jesus would return during their lifetime. As their brothers and sisters in Christ began to die it was easy to drift from the faith. It was easy to conclude that there was no urgency in the message of the gospel. Jesus warned the people not to lose their hope and expectation.

We see two extremes in the Christian world today. On the one hand are those who proclaim that Jesus will certainly return during the next couple of decades. However, if the Savior delays what happens to the faith of these folks?

On the other hand, there are those who believe Jesus will not come during our lifetime. They believe there is no urgency. What happens if Jesus does come during our lifetime? Jesus will come in someone's lifetime. Maybe it will be ours.

We should live our lives prepared for the Lord to come at any moment but ready to continue to be fruitful and faithful if Jesus does not. The true believer is prepared to follow Christ regardless of God's timetable.

The second crisis time is at the time of death. Death sneaks up on most people. We go to bed planning the next day, and we wake up among the dead. We never know when life will come screeching to a halt. At that moment when we cross over into eternity the wise and the foolish will be revealed. But once again, the foolish will have no more opportunity. Time will have passed. The door will be shut.

There are some folks who will tell you that they will repent on their deathbed. They tell us that they want to enjoy life as much as possible before they make a commitment to Christ. But these people make three mistakes:

- They assume they will have time to make that decision.
- They assume that they will not become indifferent to spiritual things
- They assume that the pleasures of the sinful life are greater than the life of Christian discipleship.

Now is the time to deal with eternal matters!

Every time we face a critical trial in life, the readiness of our faith is tested:

- when someone we love dies
- when you are told you have cancer
- when your child is sick or dies
- when your spouse walks out
- when your children reject you
- when you face severe financial reversal
- when you are falsely accused

- when your body refuses to cooperate with your mind

These are times that come upon us suddenly and reveal whether we are really ready. These are the times that cause some to turn away from the faith. These are the times that separate the genuine from the spurious.

So how do we prepare? Jesus concludes the parable by telling us to “keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (25:13) O.K., how do we do this practically?

First, we must settle the matter of our own salvation. We must examine ourselves to see if we have personally and totally trusted Christ’s work on the cross as payment for our sin. If you are not sure . . . BECOME SURE. If you have not acted on what you say you believe . . . if you have never really rested in the arms of the Savior; if you have not placed ALL your confidence in Him, please do so now.

Second, we must combat laziness in our life. We must be vigilant soldiers aware that Satan is looking for ways to attack us and drag us away from the Lord. We must not let down our guard. We must continue to talk to God in prayer, listen to God from daily exposure to God’s Word, Honor God through our worship, and seek to serve God in everything we do. We must periodically examine our habits, our priorities, our amusements, and our friendships to see if we are beginning to let down our guard.

Finally, we must seek to be prepared for everything by working to develop a deep faith. We must work to understand the ways of God. We must make sure that we continue growing in our Christian faith.

Think about what it must have been like for the foolish virgins. They could hear the festivity and delight on the inside. They could hear the music. They could sense the joy and the celebration of those in attendance. How crushed they must have been to be on the outside. How they must have regretted their foolishness. Jesus tells us this parable so that on that day when we arrive at the door of Heaven, we will enter into the celebration of Heaven rather than be forced to remain on the sidewalk of regret. To the glory of God. Amen.