

Weekender Slide

College Ministry Slide

“Trevor Atwood Slide”

About a year ago, I wrote a letter that all of our elders signed that we snail-mailed out to all of our covenant members.

That letter was a pastoral call to spiritually prepare for the next year of our church.

Then I pointed you to a story that Jesus told,.

Now- Im going to quote that letter.

“In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a story about ten bridesmaids. They are preparing for a wedding processional, an important custom in first century Palestine. Bridesmaids would hold lamps (or torches) that burned oil to light the way for the groom to come and meet the bride- and start the days long party that would ensue.

“Half of the bridesmaids carry flasks of oil with them for their lamps. Though costly and burdensome, they recognized how important it was to be ready to light their lamps when they spotted the groom. The other five decided to not weigh themselves down with oil. After all, The groom could be a while. They’d get around to getting the oil soon enough. But now was not a good time.

“All the bridesmaids got tired of waiting...literally...and nodded off asleep. They were startled awake by a voice at midnight “The groom is here!!!! He’s coming! I see him on the horizon.” The ladies all scrambled for the lamps, got the wicks ready...but that’s when a noticeable divide happened. The bridesmaids that brought their oil immediately lit their lamps...while the other 5 ladies begged them to give them some of their oil.

The wise women (as Jesus called them in his story) told the foolish women, “There won’t be enough oil for all of us- go into town and buy some from the oil store.”

While the foolish bridesmaids are looking for oil,- the groom arrives, and they completely miss him. They are shut out of the celebration.

Jesus ends the parable with his point- “Be alert, because you don’t know the day or the hour.” Said another way, “Be prepared for God to bring his Kingdom at all times- or you will miss it entirely.”

I believe there is something on our horizon- that we need to prepare for. A move of God that he’s inviting us into- and we need to get the oil ready. We need to be prepared- you need to be prepared- or we’ll miss it entirely.”

Toward the end of that letter- I wrote this. I’ll put it on the screen.

“Here’s what that means for you, a covenant member of City Church.

You MUST be prepared.

When the Spirit moves in power through our church- if you aren't prepared- if you haven't gathered the oil for the lamp- the Spirit's fire will pass you by, and revival will happen right under your nose.

We are the church together. We are the body of Christ. We depend on each other.

That said, no one else can spiritually prepare for you.

Get Your Oil Ready

This will be up to you. And it won't be easy.

It will require a disruption of the status quo. God may pry something you cherish from your hands. He will shake up your routine. Spiritual renewal begins with a holy discontentment. A restlessness of the day-to-day. A distaste for continuing spiritually as you have been. Preparing for this renewal will be costly.

Additionally, the spiritual powers of evil will resist this. Likely, you will not be drawn away to obvious evil- but apathy & disunity. You will be tempted to lethargically disengage. As Jesus put it in the parable of the sower (Mark 4), distress or persecution, the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things- will come up and choke out the word you originally received with joy.

The elders of City Church are asking you- pastorally leading you- to start preparing now for the wind of the Spirit to blow. For the bridegroom to ride over the horizon."

I'm here today to tell you- I've seen both of those paragraphs come to fruition. Many of you have had your routines shaken. You've been brought into a restlessness...where you can't go back- but you are nervous about going forward.

I've also seen a spiritual resistance to this brewing renewal. Sometimes coming from inside our church, sometimes from outside of our church. I've seen the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things come and choke the word out of people that originally received it with joy. I've seen this over the year... and I've seen it in the last week.

And, by God's grace, I've also seen some of you take it very seriously. Through prayer and preparation and attentiveness to the Scripture and the voice of the Holy Spirit- We've already seen the beginning stages of this renewal. We baptized 22 people over the last year. That's the most we've had since 2015. By far, over the last 3 weekenders, we've had more people commit to this church family than ever in that same time span in the history of our church.

I know that for many of you that have started coming to our church in the last year- a significant number of you had been out of church for a long time, or questioning the existence of God or the significance of the gospel, or whether or not church was a people you needed at all in your life. But you're here...and for the stories that I've been honored to have a front row seat to- I can see God changing your life.

I'm so stoked about this. It feels like Christmas Eve. Even with all the all the resistance...with all the frustration...I still with a deep God-sized, confident, and joyful expectation of resurrection... I feel like that last line of Chance the Rappers' Heart and Tongue-

"I'm sitting court-side with the nurses during visitation, Watching the vitals with some popcorn and anticipation."- Chance the Rapper, *Heart and Tongue*

That line means that I'm looking at a body that was flat-lined....but that first beep from the heart monitor hits...and then another beep...and then another...and i'm just watching God do something special.

I feel like Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem"

"What happens to a dream deferred?

**Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?**

**Or fester like a sore-
And then run?**

**Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-
like a syrupy sweet?**

**Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.**

**Or does it explode?"
- Langston Hughes, *Harlem***

Oddly, as this last week has had a good bit of bad things in it for me. But The Spirit of God has not let me be discouraged... Its like the waters of the ocean are receding....but only because there is a tsunami of God's mercy and grace and love and power that is about to hit us in the very best way. I'm telling you, grab a surfboard.

What we have prayed for is happening...and there is much much more to come.

So from that...let me tell you where we are today...and where we're headed.

We are nearing the end of a couple of major undertakings for our church...and I think there is another one that is overlapping these that we are going to start next week. We just finished and moved into this building- and we're nearing the end of the Sex, Gender & Spiritual Renewal series of messages.

So starting- kind of- today...and then full on next week- we're going spend probably close to another year in the book of Romans. Here's why thats significant.

Romans Slide

Some form of reading or studying or preaching of the book of Romans has preceded every major modern revival. From the reformation forward.

I didn't know that when our elders decided to preach this at this back in November of last year.

But here we are. And here comes the bridegroom.

So today-

Romans 1:1-17

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God —

2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures — 3 concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh 4 and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. 5 Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles, 6 including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.

7 To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because the news of your faith is being reported in all the world. 9 God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in telling the good news about his Son — that I constantly mention you, 10 always asking in my prayers that if it is somehow in God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I want very much to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, 12 that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 Now I don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as I have had among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.

The first 17 verses of chapter 1 have a decidedly different tone than the last 15 verses.

You might say, the first half of chapter 1 is written about the Bridesmaids who had their oil ready...but the last 15 verses are about the bridesmaids who ignored the approach of the groom...and got busy thinking and worrying about other things.

v 18

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth

v 21-22

For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools

v 28

For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

See that last statement- claiming to be wise, they became fools. That is the exact category that Jesus divides the 5 bridesmaids who prepare for him...and the 5 who don't.

Here take a look at the start of that parable.

Matthew 25:1-5

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom.

2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they didn't take oil with them; 4 but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps. 5 When the groom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

Now- let me show you one more thing from Romans 1.

I want to give you 2 points of division...or separation between the wise and the foolish.

Sticking with Jesus' parable- you might say- this is a part of what it means to get your oil ready for the groom.

1) The wise let good news shape their desire to overflow. The foolish let their desires tell them its good news to consume.

This passage started with the gospel- that through Jesus perfect righteous fulfillment of God's law...and his death in our place to receive the just punishment for our rebellion against God... we will be like him in resurrection...death no longer can stop us...sin doesn't have to be our defining nature...and he God now welcomes anyone in who will trust in his Son for their righteousness.

That grace...that forgiveness...that good news...now shapes our desires. Paul writes about his eagerness to preach the gospel. How much he wants to be with this church in Rome.

He said he's not ashamed to proclaim the good new of Jesus resurrection and promised return.

In fact, the way he frames in v 16-17 the opposite of being ashamed is not being proud- rather is being eager to share the good news.

The foolish on the other hand, in the second half of Romans 1 listen to all their base desires. They become less human, and more animal in nature- which turns them into selfish creatures that don't long for connection and self- sacrifice- two major components of love- rather they long to scratch itches, feed their own hungers. They tell themselves- If I want it, I should take it.

2) The wise give thanks to God. The foolish ignore God.

v 8 & v 21

So- we're just going to follow what Scripture says right now, together, in a worship gathering. I'm gonna stop preaching...and we're going to listen the Holy Spirit and together give thanks and encouragement to the Saints who are in Murfreesboro.

Gratitude acknowledging God or a person through whom God is working.

I have recently believed the gospel...or Im choosing to do that right now...and I want to be baptized because I am eager to proclaim that gospel