

One of the joys of ministry is being able to be part of and participate in weddings. It’s a joy to work with a couple months before the big day, helping them prepare not only for that one day but for the days that will follow. It’s also a joy to sit back sometimes and watch the energy, anxiousness and comedic planning that can go into these grand events. You never know where the comedy will from, sometimes it will be a nervous groom who doesn’t want to see anything go wrong. (I remember one such groom that asked me a couple of years ago, “You have done this before haven’t you?”). And other times it comes from the MOTB.

You don’t know about the MOTB? It’s from one of my favorite wedding stories by Robert Fulgum and it’s found in his book, “It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It.”

In this story Fulgum says that the “Central figure in this drama was the Mother of Bride (MOTB_, not the bride and groom or minister. Mother. Usually a polite, reasonable, intelligent and sane human being. Mother was mentally unhinged by the announcement of her daughter’s betrothal. I don’t mean she was unhappy, as is often the case. To the contrary, she was overcome with joy, and just about succeeded in overcoming everybody else with her joy before the dust settled.

Nobody knew it, but this lady had been waiting with a script for a production that would have met with Cecil B. Demille’s approval. A royal wedding fit for a princess bride. And since it was her money, it was hard to say no. The Father of the Bride began to pray for an elopement, his prayers were not answered.

She had seven months to work, and no detail was left to chance or human error. Everything that could be engraved was engraved. There were teas and showers and dinners. The bride and groom I met with only three times. The MOTD called me weekly and was in my office as often as the cleaning lady.

An eighteen-piece brass and wind ensemble were engaged, (the church organ simply would not do – too churchy) The Bride’s desires for home furnishing were registered in stores as far as east as New York and as far south as Atlanta. Not only were the bridesmaid’s’ outfits made to order, the tuxedos for the groom and his men were bought – not rented, mind you, bought.

If all that wasn’t enough, the engagement ring was returned to the jeweler for a larger stone, quietly subsidized by the MOTB. When I say the lady came unhinged, I mean unhinged.”

Now if you want to learn what happened to the MOTB and this wedding you’ll have to read the story, but it makes this point, weddings are a big deal. And we go to a lot of trouble in preparing for them.

And that attention to detail and the need to prepare has not changed in 2000 years. That is why Jesus used the celebration and preparation details of a wedding in one of his great parables.

In this parable of the 10 Bridesmaids Jesus tells us that the coming of the kingdom will be like 10 Bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to greet the Bridegroom. In Palestine of Jesus' day, and even today, the marriage custom was for the Bridegroom to come to the Bride's home with his friends, receive his bride and take her home to his parents home where they would be married and then spend the next week in celebration. The catch was that the Bridegroom would often play a little game. See if you can catch the bridal party by surprise. That is why the Bridegroom never let it be known when he would exactly come.

Just before his arrival one member of his party would run ahead announcing his coming and see if the members of the bride's party were ready.

In the parable the bridesmaids fall asleep waiting for the groom, until the word goes out. The groom is coming! At that moment, five of the bridesmaids discover they have made a big mistake, they have forgotten to bring extra oil for their lamps and now they don't have enough left to light the way for the groom's party. In panic these "foolish" bridesmaids ask the other "wise" five to lend them some oil. But to do so would deny the bridegroom anyone to light his way, so the foolish five are encouraged to run out and buy their needed oil. The five run out and find some oil, but when they return, they find that the bridal party has already gone into the party. The door is locked, and when they knock and ask to come in the bridegroom informs them that the invitation to the party has expired.

Now we listen to this parable of Jesus' there are two things I want you to notice. The first is that all the bridesmaids are identical in appearance. They've all been invited. They all have shown up and are waiting for the bridegroom. They're all dressed in their finest wedding clothing. They all carry lamps. There is nothing in their outward appearance to tell one apart from the other. What does that mean for us as we look at this parable and try to understand it?

Outward appearances are not enough. It's not enough to just say you're a Christian. The Kingdom lifestyle of Discipleship that Jesus is calling for is more than just going through the motions of going to church every Sunday, serving on a board and dropping something in the plate. It's more than saying you're a Christian because you prayed a prayer at Church Camp or at an altar some 30 or 40 years ago when the Spirit moved you. Discipleship is more than just looking like a Christian. All the bridesmaids outwardly looked the same, but the real difference was inside.

The other thing I want you to notice about these 10 bridesmaids is that they all behaved the same way. They all fall asleep while they are waiting for the bridegroom to come. The Disciples life is a journey that takes energy. Every disciple grows weary and tired, our walk is never as

close as it should be. The issue in this parable is not the fact that the bridesmaids took a nap, the difference between the two groups was readiness.

In this parable Jesus is warning us to be ready when he comes. The five foolish bridesmaids woke from their naps unprepared for the coming of the Bridegroom. The important thing to realize is that they knew he was coming, it was their responsibility to be ready when ever he came.

Every Sunday we say these words” He will come to judge the quick and the dead.” This is our profession that Jesus will come again, there is no doubt about His return, the only question is when, and will be we ready.

So how does one get ready for the coming of the bridegroom? What does it mean to be prepared.?

Being prepared for the Bridegrooms return means live life as a disciple daily. The difference between the prepared and the unprepared Bridesmaids was internal, it was a case of character. Outwardly they looked the same, they behaved the same, but it was inward character, living as disciples of Jesus Christ that made the difference.

We need to change our labels in the 21st Century world of today. Today anyone can call themselves a Christian. People who sing God’s praises on Sunday can cheat the government on Monday and call themselves Christians. Men and women can say “I’m a Christian” but live their lives as if they are no different from one who says in their heart there is no God. Remember in the “God-Father” movies even Michael Corelone calls himself a Christian.

Jesus never said, “Go and make Christians.” He said, “Go and make disciples.” The only people in the New Testament who used the term Christian were outsiders trying to put a label on the disciples of Jesus Christ. It’s too easy to simply take the label of Christ in this 21st century world, but Jesus said that the life of the disciple is a life of daily dying to self and living for others. “Take up your cross daily and follow me.”

Disciples are called to pay attention to substance. To ask the hard questions of ourselves. “Am I going through the motions in my life as a disciple, or have I really examined my inner self and turned it over to Christ?’ “Am I unconsciously equating a Christian lifestyle with a relationship with Jesus Christ?’ A Christian lifestyle will not get you into the party, only the disciple who is following the master daily is ready for his coming, whenever he comes.

I believe it is time for the 21st century Church to do away with calling ourselves Christians. If we are serious about being ready to meet our master when He comes let’s be serious about who we are. We are first and foremost Disciples. Followers of Jesus Christ who have dedicated themselves to a life of patient listening to the Word and being shaped by the Word. We live to obey the one who loved us with the perfect love that was demonstrated on the cross, not because we have to, but because we are responding to the love we have experienced: “This is

how God showed His love among us; He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.”

What does it mean to be ready? It means you can't borrow a living relationship with Jesus Christ. When it came time to meet the Bridegroom the five who were not ready tried to borrow oil from the others, but the oil of Discipleship cannot be borrowed. A relationship with Jesus Christ is a transaction between you and God. It cannot be transferred from one person to another. It doesn't come through nationality or denominational membership. It doesn't come from regular worship or regular giving. It doesn't come from growing up in a Christian home or learning all the stories in Sunday school. You cannot ride into the party on the coattails of your parents, or grandparents or your own works. It only comes by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and committing yourself to living each day as his faithful disciples.

We have been warned about not being ready for the Bridegrooms coming. We have known from the first day that we entered the Church what God expects of us. God want us to live holy lives. Remember, you were created by God to glorify Him and enjoy living in relationship with Him.

We sing the old hymn: “Oh Jesus Lord and Master, I give myself for Thee, for Thou in Thy atonement didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master, my life shall be Thy throne, my life I give hence forth to life, O Christ for Thee alone.”

Jesus told us, “Let your light so shine before the world that they see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Rick Warren says: “Jesus honored God by fulfilling His purpose on earth. We honor God the same way, when anything in creation fulfills its purpose, it brings glory to God.”

John Piper writes, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied with Him.

Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”

We have known what is required to be ready. But if Jesus came back right now, would He find us ready. Or would He find some of us the same as we were on the first day, we said we were entering into His service. How many of us still hold on to lying, cheating, stealing, backbiting, gossip, hate, anger and disobedient to the Word of God. How many of us still put the things of this world ahead of the Kingdom of God by hoarding our money, we want the best for ourselves, but we throw God just the scrapes of our riches.

That's not what Jesus wants for us. In this parable He is saying to us “Don't waste your life.” Jesus wants each of us to come to the party, to enjoy the life God has given us, the greatest tragedy of life would be to waste this one life God has given us.

John Piper in his book "Don't Waste Your Life" makes this statement: "You may not be sure that you want your life to make a difference, maybe you don't care very much if you make a lasting difference for the sake of something great. You just want people to like you. If people just like being around you, you would be satisfied, or if you could just have a good job, with a good wife or husband, and a couple of good kids and a nice car, and long weekends and a few good friends. A fun retirement and a quick and easy death, and no Hell! If you could have all that even without God, you would be satisfied," Piper says, "That is a tragedy in the making! A wasted life."

Compare these two lives and decide which was wasted: In April 2002 Ruby Eliza and Laura Edwards were killed in a car accident in Cameroon. Ruby was over 80, single all her life she had lived her whole life as a medical missionary. Laura was also over 80, a widow, she now assisted Ruby as a medical missionary. The car they were driving in brakes failed and went over a cliff. Both were killed instantly.

Here were two women, well past the age when many of us would be looking to live off our Social Security and pensions, living in West Africa, for the cause of Christ, to honor and glorify His name.

Now compare this couple to a couple Readers Digest wrote about, a couple who took early retirement from their jobs, he was 59 and she was 51. They were now living in Punta Gorda Florida, where they cruised on their 30-foot trawler, played soft ball, and collected shells on the beach.

Now I ask you which lives were wasted? When the bride groom comes what do you want to have to show him, a life lived for His glory, or your shell collection? Friends don't waste your life. A wasted life is any life that is not lived fully and completely for the honor and glory of God through Jesus Christ. Anything less is libel of hearing these terrible words, "I never knew you."

Behold the Brideroom is coming – are you ready?

He will come, He will come, He will come. Are you ready for the party?

Amen