

READY FOR AN EMERGENCY

Matthew 25:1-13

Having concluded His ministry in the Temple, Christ withdrew with His disciples to the Mount of Olives, where He delivered a marvelous discourse on "Last Things." This parable of the ten virgins makes an indelible impression on the Christian imagination. The parable has many sides and aspects. It is prophetic; it is also practical. It suits all ages, but especially the last days. It is a graphic illustration teaching the fact of Christ's return and emphasizing the importance of being ready for it. The purpose of the parable was to alert the disciples, and all the followers of Christ down through the centuries, to the return of the Saviour to the earth.

Christ sought to impress His hearers with at least five facts in connection with His second coming:--the certainty of it, the uncertainty as to the time of it, the necessity of preparation for it, the blessedness of the prepared, and the wretchedness of the unprepared. The parable recognizes the fact of His return, and in connection therewith it accentuates and emphasizes the uncertainty as to the time of this great event. The time of His coming again cannot be known. How utterly foolish are those who try to fix a date for it! With reference to this great event Jesus enjoined watchfulness.

This parable is a continuation of what the Lord Jesus has been teaching throughout His great Olivet discourse. It is evidently drawn from the prevailing Jewish customs at that time. Christ was drawing a picture of a well-known Eastern marriage festival. He portrayed ten lovely, joyous, and charming girls who were expecting to participate in the festivities.

Oriental weddings usually take place in the evening. The great event in the celebration is the arrival of the bridegroom at the house of the bride's father to receive the bride, and to take her with him to his own home for the wedding feast. The ten virgins with lamps went out to meet the bridal party, and were to pass in with them to the marriage supper.

A great and fundamental contrast is indicated between the two classes of virgins. Five were wise and five were foolish. The word "wise" denotes being sensible, thoughtful, and prudent. The word "foolish" denotes being thoughtless and reckless. The foolish ones are characterized as being easy-going, trifling, and lacking in forethought. The wise virgins acted with forethought and laid in a supply of oil, so as not to run short if the marriage procession should be delayed until late in the night.

This parable is a gripping story, told only as Jesus could tell it. It is full of lights and shadows, triumph and tragedy, laughter and tears. Jesus shows us ten lovely girls, who are expecting to take part in a marriage ceremony. What a fascinating picture they present! They all seem equally joyous and equally charming. These ten girls were to all outward appearances as much alike as ten grains of corn shelled from the same ear. They were all virgins. They were all invited to the wedding. They were all dressed for the occasion. They all had some knowledge of, and regard for, the bridegroom and desired to honor him by going forth to meet him. They all had lamps which at the moment were burning. They all knew they had to have oil in their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, and there was nothing for them to do but wait for his coming, they all slumbered and slept. They were alike in their ignorance of the exact hour of the bridegroom's coming. They were alike in their intentions, that is they were all in the group for the same purpose. But here their likeness ends.

It is the ready and the unready that we meet in this story. While they were alike in these things, when the call came at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" and they awoke to the emergency, they immediately fell into two groups. Five of them had wisely made careful preparation and had brought sufficient oil in reserve. The other five had foolishly started out with insufficient oil, probably none at all except

what was in their lamps, and they did not realize their lack of oil until their lamps were now going out at midnight when the bridegroom and his party were arriving and when stores were closed and there was no opportunity to buy any oil. And the sputtering, flickering, smoking wicks were a sad revelation. The midnight cry of warning was followed with the cry of alarm, "Give us of your oil." This anxious request was denied because the other five virgins were afraid that there was no possibility of there being enough oil for both groups. While their request was earnest, it was also heart-rending and fruitless. The procession could not wait. The bride was escorted to the banquet house, and those who were ready entered also. Then the doors were shut and when the foolish virgins came with an earnest appeal that they be permitted to enter, their request was denied and they were fearfully disappointed.

From this parable we shall endeavor to draw some broad lessons which anyone may grasp. The lessons taught herein are somewhat as follows:

I. The Necessity of Preparedness.

The application of this beautiful parable is obvious, but is surpassingly tender and pathetic. It teaches that the only way to be ready when Jesus comes is to be ready always. The hurried and fruitless attempts, when the moment arrives, to make the preparation which ought to have been made in advance is deeply pathetic. It touches a certain common fault in regard to readiness for meeting Christ at His coming, or for meeting the messenger whom He sends to bear us away, even death. It is impossible for us to be always looking out for the coming of Christ, but it is quite possible for us always to be prepared for His coming.

All these exhortations, to watch and be ready for the Lord's coming, will apply without material alteration to the duty of preparation for death, which will in an important sense summon us to meet Christ, and will leave fixed and permanent the relation in which we shall rise to meet Him when He does come.

II. Lack of Forethought is Foolish and Inexcusable.

The foolish virgins had their lamps and the lamps were burning. But they forgot to reckon with a tardy bridegroom and it was just that want of forethought that spoiled all. Each of us have a life to live, a death to die, and a God to meet, so it is high time that we make provision for all that.

III. Not All Persons Are Saved Who May Think They Are.

The foolish virgins thought they were ready to enter with bridal party when it arrived. There is much deception in the world, but no deception is so dangerous as that which concerns salvation. Satan gets people to follow some man-made plan in order to lure them from God's plan of salvation. Oh, the tragedy of being deceived by Satan! "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." Many who think they are saved will find they are not ready. How terrible to trust this or that false hope and come at last to find himself irreparably lost!

IV. Not All Persons Are Saved Who May Want To Be.

Every indication shows that the foolish virgins wanted to enter with the bride and groom. For that purpose they left their homes, came to certain point and waited, slumbered, and slept until the bridal party arrived. When they awoke it was to the fact they were not ready. Frantically they ran to others, and tried to borrow oil. They wanted to enter, but they were not able.

All are invited to be saved. The Lord urges everyone to come to Him. But all do not come. Being invited and coming are two different things. Desiring to be saved and being saved are poles apart in meaning and actuality. All want to go to heaven when die. Yet, all will not be saved. Many do not want to be bad enough to break with Satan, forsake sin, and trust the Saviour. To hold on to the world and to God too is their desire. To be saved is more than a desire to be saved. Being saved means an acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour.

V. Men Are Not Saved By Good Intentions.

These foolish virgins who neglected to prepare for the occasion had no thought of being left out. They knew the preparation was necessary, and they fully intended to make it. It was purely a matter of carelessness, it was a postponed duty, merely a thoughtless neglect. How truly does this apply to people concerning their salvation! Many fully intend being saved and becoming friends of Christ, but neglect that matter too long. Many are not in danger of plunging into perdition, but are in a very serious danger of thoughtlessly drifting there. I do not question their good intentions but I wish I could alarm them about the danger of not speedily fulfilling those good intentions.

VI. Many Valuable Things Cannot Be Passed From One To Another.

The distressed virgins who found themselves without preparation cried pitifully to their sisters for help, but it was emphatically told them that they could not supply their want. They would have to go and provide for themselves. This certainly is not without its lesson to us. A father can leave many things to his child, but there are some things he cannot leave. Many things may be included in one's will and handed down to others, but there are some things that can not be put in a will. Many a mother has stood beside the dying baby and wept out her soul, and was willing to give her life for the child, but she could not. Many a parent has wished they could pass through some ordeal in the place of the child, but it was not possible. Character cannot be given from one to another. Virtue cannot be exchanged. Salvation can not be provided one for the other. A father may give his bank account to his child, but not his faith in God. He may pass on his title to real estate, but not his title to Heaven. Each will have to make preparation for himself.

Trying to borrow religion is a common resort of many. You can not have religion in the other person's name. No doubt the ten virgins were all good friends. But in the hour of crisis that friendship was of no avail; there was no oil to borrow or to spare. The others needed every drop of oil they had. In any hour of judgment there is no shining with a borrowed light. The help of others is priceless in many things, but in the hours of spiritual crisis it is vain.

VII. Lost Opportunities Can Never Be Recalled.

When the door was shut, the foolish virgins could find no entrance into the feast though they sought it with the most agonizing earnestness. Every day is bringing opportunities which, if we miss them, can never return. Others may come but these will never return. We may have an opportunity today, but, if we let it slip, the door that opens to it will be shut and it will never be open again. Other doors may open, but that one never will.

VIII. The Separation of The Prepared And The Unprepared.

The best of friends were they, but five went in and the others were shut out. Five rejoiced, while the others were filled with disappointment. All had the same invitation,

the same understanding of what was necessary, and the same opportunity to be prepared. Half of them acted, and the rest of them delayed. Five did not take a chance, whereas the other five thought they had time enough yet. Again this parable presses upon us the importance of preparation without any delay.

Those who are not ready when Jesus comes will be shut out. If you have not made preparation before then, it will be too late. Those who are saved will enter with Him when He comes. It is the greatest demonstration of wisdom to get ready for life, for death, and for eternity.