

"Prepared?"

Matthew 25:1-13

November 12, 2023

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise."

I. Ten Virgins

"Oh, come on, you've got to share." That's the pleading voice of five foolish virgins as the Bridegroom draws near. The wedding feast is about to commence, and they've found themselves unprepared. All ten are trimming their lamps, readying for the procession to the feast; five of them are out of oil.

"Come on, you've got to share. We're all in this together. Look at us-we all look the same. We've all been waiting here together. We've all dressed up the same. We've all kept ourselves pure and maidenly. We've all been waiting for the same Bridegroom. We've all got lamps. We chatted and waited, and eventually we all dozed off together. The only difference is that you've got oil, and we've run out. Come on, share."

No.

"No? Why? What is it? All right, we've been foolish, it's true. Somewhere along the way, we ran out of oil. Maybe it's because we just figured that the Bridegroom wouldn't care, that He wouldn't take this oil-thing so seriously. I mean, weddings are fun, and we're fun people, so maybe we just figured the oil wouldn't matter. We know better now. He hasn't even spoken a Word yet, but there's something about His appearing that tells us we've messed up. Come on. Give."

No.

"Still no? Look, we said we were foolish-and maybe a little vain. Maybe we just figured that our looks and smiles and neatness and likeability would carry the day. We figured that we qualified for this procession because of us. We were wrong. Give us some oil. Quickly."

No.

"No?! He's almost here, and He's not going to be pleased. We're groveling here, all right? You want more? Okay, like we said, we're foolish. We're so ditzy that we didn't even realize that we were out of oil. There. Satisfied? You're better and smarter and more prepared than we are. Now give us some oil-He's almost here!"

No.

"No, still? Now?! What kind of wise virgins are you-you call yourselves Christians? We need help, and you won't help us! We're desperate! Why won't you share your oil?"

We can't.

"Can't? We're not good enough, is that what you're saying? What sort of an elitist club is this?"

Please, listen. We're trying to help you. We didn't say we won't share. We said we can't share. We are unable to do so, whether we want to or not.

"What?!"

What we have isn't sufficient for you, because it has to come from those who give out oil. You know this, because once upon a time you received oil from them. We are called to be virginal bridesmaids; to give out oil is the privilege of somebody else. Quickly, go to those who sell the oil, and get some for yourselves. We can tell you about them.

"Oh, we have no time or choice. Quickly, let's go. We've got to find those who sell oil and buy some before the Bridegroom arrives and takes us to the wedding feast. I've heard of this guy across town who stays open all night and sells all sorts of things. I wonder if he has any oil. Let's go."

Wait! No, don't run off into the night! Come back, because the "guy across town" doesn't have the oil you need; only those who have oil can help you, and they will. We can tell you about Them -- One has created you. One delivers the oil to you in abundant quantities. And One has paid the price already so that the oil is free and everlasting. In fact, He's on His way to His wedding feast, and He wants you there. Come back now, before it's too late. When He shuts the door, all whom He knows will be inside!

They didn't hear us. They're gone.

2. Watch Therefore

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. This is the Lord's solemn warning as He concludes the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Therefore watch, and heed the Law which He proclaims to you.

First, be prepared for His coming, for you don't know when it will happen. The Bridegroom delays, but He is still coming. He calls you to His wedding feast, and He gives you the oil that you need: That oil is His merit. You were lost in your trespasses and sins. You were defiled by your unfaithfulness to Him, and thus had no place in His banquet feast of heaven. But your Bridegroom is persistently faithful.

He has laid down His life for you, that He might sanctify and cleanse you by water and the Word that He might present you to Himself as a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that you should be holy and without blemish. He who lived a pure and holy life has suffered for your impurity and unholiness; and He credits you with His purity. Therefore, the Father of the Bridegroom looks down upon you and says, "I will not permit a wandering, unfaithful woman for My Son. But I see nothing impure or unfaithful about you. My Son has poured out His merit and righteousness upon you by His Word and Sacraments. Therefore, come into the feast-you are made pure by the merit of Jesus, which He freely gives to you."

This, oh hearers in Christ, is your hope. Be prepared.

Be prepared. It's a term we must use carefully, because you have been fully prepared already, and there is no preparation left to be done. When you are forgiven for all of your sins, you already have eternal life and salvation. So when we say, "Be prepared," perhaps we should say, "Be on guard, because the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh will keep trying to un-prepare you."

This is the plight of the foolish virgins, who look like part of the wedding party -- and even believe that they are part of the wedding party. They are so foolish that they have even fooled themselves. In fact, the Greek word for them is "Moron" – fools.

They walk the walk and talk the talk, but they do not have the one thing needful. Once they did, but no longer; somewhere along the way, they ran out of oil.

So it will be with all too many churchgoers on the Last Day, astonished to hear the Lord say, "I do not know you."

Perhaps they figure that the Lord doesn't really care about sin. Sure, He speaks rather harshly about it in His Word, but someone has to hold the line so we don't stray too far and do something really sinful.

Perhaps they believe that their Baptism was enough, and have gone on to ignore the Bridegroom ever since. It is true, Baptism is enough: It gives all the grace that is needed to give you life and salvation. To say "I am baptized, and I need not be forgiven again" is as foolish as saying, "I was born, therefore I need not eat again." Baptism imparts faith and Jesus' merit, precious gifts; but if the sinner ignores them, he will replace them with things he finds more important, things that cannot save.

Perhaps those whom the Lord doesn't know figure that they heard enough about forgiveness, and that it was time to move on to something else. Again, a foolish notion: When should you stop hearing that you are forgiven for your sins? Only when you are no longer sinful, because that Word of forgiveness forgives-it gives to you the merit of Jesus, who lived and died for you.

Perhaps, occupied with the cares of life, they simply considered this preparation to be unimportant.

How evident the sinful nature becomes: Diagnosed with an illness, people want it treated right away. Constantly plagued with sin and temptation, they push off absolution until another day.

Whatever the reason, it is no excuse. The Lord is coming; and when He gathers all for judgment, there is no more time. Those prepared by His blood and merit have eternal life, because by His blood and merit they are made pure and holy. Those who are unprepared are still impure; they have unfaithfully ignored their Bridegroom in favor of other gods, and the Bridegroom will not have an unfaithful woman as His bride on the Last Day.

So we pause here and ask, What of you? Are you prepared for His coming? Do you care about righteousness and take sin as seriously as the Lord does? Do you constantly feed the faith given in your baptism with the Word of God-do you always long and rejoice to hear that you are forgiven? Do you always consider this preparation to be more important than all other things? The answer is **NO!** As long as you are plagued by the sinful nature, the answer is no -- by your merit and strength, you are not prepared. That is why you don't just confess your sins; you confess your sinfulness as well.

You confess that, though you often rely on your own reason, strength and merit, they are futile. The Lord forgives your sin, and thus He prepares you once again.

Heed one more warning from the five foolish virgins. Though desperate for oil, they look everywhere for it-except to the One who has oil aplenty. The Bridegroom has the merit; they want it from the wise virgins instead. But the wise virgins are only wise because of the Bridegroom's merit; they cannot give their own merit to share with the foolish virgins, for it will not help them. So they bid the foolish virgins to go to where oil is to be found.

So it is with the sinful nature today. It is still taught by some that saints have lived such good lives that they have merit to share with you; if you don't have enough to please God, then Sts. Peter and Paul have extra to share. But these apostles would be the first to deny that they are saved by anything but the merit of Christ. Don't go to the saints for help-they are no less sinful than you. Go to the One who has saved the saints by His merit.

The foolish virgins then run off into the darkness, away from the Bridegroom who is coming; and the parable gives no hint that they find any oil as they look elsewhere. Many wish to be prepared for heaven, but they shun the Bridegroom who was crucified for them. They seek out religious merchants who teach salvation by other merits-by something else than Christ's death and resurrection. But no matter how attractive the message, it is not the saving oil. This is the way of the sinful nature: Run off into the darkness and look everywhere for help except to Christ. But only Christ has salvation. No one else has died for your sin. No one else shares his merit with you. All other gods demand your works and merit, and none of them can save.

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

So declares the Lord, and you are well aware of sins that would leave you unprepared. Nevertheless, you watch and wait with joy.

You watch because you are alive to watch-alive with the life of Christ. You live and watch for the Bridegroom because He has saved you by His death and resurrection; He has readied you with His blood and merit. It is true as well for those saints who have gone before us; forgiven, they died well-oiled and prepared. They rest from their labors, but they live even now.

Truly this day He prepares you still, with this Word of His that makes you wise unto salvation: You are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.