

## ***“Prepared to Celebrate the Marriage”***

The point of the parable that Jesus speaks to us is preparation. Simply put, there were five virgins who were prepared to meet the bridegroom and celebrate his marriage – and there were five virgins who were not prepared, and, therefore, excluded from the nuptial festivities.

Both preparation – and the lack of preparation – carry consequences in every area of life. The student who refuses to prepare for a difficult exam will likely fail the test. The football team that doesn't adequately prepare will probably come out on the short end of things.

But the consequences of the lack of preparation when it comes to our spiritual life – far outweigh a failed test or a lost game. As our parable shows us, the consequences are eternal.

Jesus calls the five virgins who were prepared “wise.” Now, in the Scriptures, wisdom is not equated with a high IQ or great learning. One may be wise without being very smart. In the Bible, wisdom is seeing things – seeing all of life – from God's perspective.

For example, our Lord tells the story of the wise man who built his house on the rock. Jesus says, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (St. Matthew 7:24-25 NKJ).

In other words, the wise man knows that only a life built on the words of Jesus will endure – for even though the heavens and the earth pass away, His words will never pass away.

It's no wonder then, that Moses prays in Psalm 90, saying, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (v. 12). Moses' prayer is not simply that we might be smart – but that we might see our fleeting days from God's perspective.

The five virgins were wise. They did not live for the moment. They lived as those who had been invited to a wedding. They didn't know when the bridegroom would come – they didn't know when the party would begin – but they knew that He was coming and THEY were His invited guests.

So, their lives were oriented around that wedding – nothing else was as important. They were prepared to wait. They checked their lamps – they bought extra oil – their flasks were full.

No doubt others thought they were foolish – uptight because they were so concerned about having enough oil – told to loosen up and have a good time. Nevertheless, these wise women paid attention to the oil – and when the bridegroom finally arrived – they were prepared, ready for the marriage feast.

When the bridegroom arrives, there's no opportunity to purchase oil – it's too late for the five foolish virgins. They are unprepared and unable to enter into the joy of the celebration. The door is shut, and they are excluded.

What does this mean for us? Jesus tells us. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” We DON'T KNOW when the Lord will return – but when He does, it will be sudden – like a flash of lightning, like the days of Noah, like the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. So Jesus tells us to “watch.”

Watching doesn't mean trying to figure out the day and hour. The history of Christianity is full of people who have tried – and failed. Instead of speculation, Jesus calls for watching – for faith. For as surely as our Lord came in flesh and blood to suffer and die for the sins of the world – so He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

“Watch” – be vigilant. A church that ceases to watch will lose the Gospel. A church that becomes lazy or complacent regarding God's doctrine is in danger of losing the faith. So, the Apostle Paul warns all pastors – “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Our watching is not gazing up into the heavens, but attentiveness to the voice of our Good Shepherd as He speaks to us in His Word.

We are living in that evil age of which Paul speaks – “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (2 Tim. 4:3). We are to watch by holding fast to God’s Word, hearing it, learning it, and taking it to heart. [P]

We, like the virgins in today’s parable, are living in the evening of the wedding feast – when the oil is still available. In fact, there is more than enough – for the oil of the forgiveness of sins purchased and won by our Savior Jesus Christ – is for the whole world. There is no shortage of supply in His grace and mercy.

This oil is distributed now in the washing of Holy Baptism, the preaching of the Gospel, and the giving out of Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Holy Supper. The wise cannot get enough of these, for they always give us more Jesus – and the more we get of Him, the more ready and eager we are to receive Him when He comes again in glory. [P]

The wise know for whom they are waiting – the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He is the Lord who loves His Bride, the Church – that’s you, and all believers! He “gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

This is our life as Christians – with everything oriented around our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He who loved us, who gave Himself up for us, and who will come again to take us into the marriage feast of heaven – continues to love you in these days – giving you the oil of His forgiveness, grace and mercy – so that you, His beloved, are prepared – today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.