

Jesus said, “Then 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 of them were wise.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

Especially for us New Testament Christians today, it is necessary to be ever watchful and making preparations to meet our Lord when He comes to receive us into the wedding feast. This is the most essential thing Christ teaches us in the Parable of the 10 Virgins. We know neither the day nor the hour of His appearing, and so between now and then, we must use our days and hours wisely to keep watch and prepare, because the Lord shall soon come to us at a time we don't expect.

I. And when He does—not if, but when He returns for us—the time for us to prepare will be over. There will be no going back, no mulligans or hitting the reset button.

a. For all of you who are husbands here, you know full well that there's much preparing to be done if your wife is expecting to give birth soon. And when she says to you, “My water broke. It's time to go to the hospital,” that's not the time for you to look back at her and say, “Well yesterday I drove the car until there wasn't any gas left.. We'll have to stop and get some before we go.”

b. In the same way, if you ever decide to go skydiving, the time when you're free falling in the air, plummeting to the ground is not the time to say, “Let me check and see if I brought my parachute.”

c. These examples get at the heart of the matter when it comes to the wise and foolish virgins in our text and for all of us in the church as we await the return of our Savior. Because, on that day when He appears, either you'll be ready, or you won't. Either you'll be prepared, or you won't. There won't be any going back or making up for wasted time. and what will be revealed for all to see is whether we've been wise or foolish in what we've been devoted to up till then.

II. Our Lord Himself says that when the wise virgins took their lamps in preparation for the bridegroom's appearance, they took with them flasks of oil. And in view of what little we know about ancient middle eastern wedding customs, this makes good sense. In that culture, when a man and a woman were betrothed and the time of the wedding was close at hand, the bridegroom would depart and take time to prepare everything. I've read that at least sometimes these

wedding feasts in the Middle East would last for a whole week! Clearly there was lots to do and it was the responsibility of the bridegroom to make sure everything was in order, that the best food and the best wine would be prepared in honor of his new bride and for the sake of his family, lest it all be found unsatisfying and bring shame upon his family. People would be invited but unlike weddings in America today, they wouldn't know exactly when they'd happen. there'd be buzz and excitement in the whole community. Everyone would be watching for the bridegroom and talking about it. Only when everything was ready, would the bridegroom announce his arrival and come into the village to bring his bride and everyone else who was invited and ready into the feast.

And with such a great celebration getting ready to start at any moment, day or night, you can sense what would be necessary on the part of the attendees, what course of action and frame of mind would be proper for them to prepare. When our Lord speaks of certain wise virgins who were called to attend the wedding feast, these wise virgins are the prudent virgins, the φρόνιμοι—those who are mindful, giving careful thought and consideration to their steps because of what's coming soon ahead of them. they take the appropriate action at the appropriate time.

And so, In anticipation of meeting the bridegroom at some point very soon, the wise virgins wisely prepare flasks of oil for their lamps ahead of time. They do this because they recognize that whenever He makes his appearance, day or night, the time for preparing and keeping watch will be over, and there's no going back. They had to be ready, and when the time came, they were. In the dead of night when the bridegroom appeared, their wise character was revealed by their luminous faces that shone in the darkness because of the oil in their lamps, just like that of the bridegroom who came to meet them, and what a joyous moment it was. But not so for the foolish virgins.

Despite the imminence of so great and important an event, despite so great a feast being just around the corner for them to enjoy as from heaven itself, the foolish virgins bet against the odds that the bridegroom wouldn't come at night. They neglected to bring any flasks filled with oil, so their lamps were quenched when they needed them. And in this context, dear ones, you have to see all of this for what it is.

You have to see that for an esteemed guest being invited to come to this great wedding feast, for them to be shown such favor and to be given such honor only for them then to neglect to prepare in a faithful manner that honors the bridegroom when he comes, even in the dead of the night—this would be like spitting in his face and saying “I couldn't be bothered to give you the dignity of a proper response to your invitation, to prepare ahead of time as I should and bring with me what's needed so you can even see my face, even after all the hard work you've done, even after you've honored me so highly and desired to enjoy my presence with you at the feast—so little do I care about you and what you're coming to give me!”

How on earth, dear ones, could the foolish virgins be so careless, so negligent! It's as if they were completely out of their minds! What was so important for them that they didn't do what was so obviously necessary given the circumstances?

As our Lord continues the parable, the foolish virgins know they couldn't bear the shame of meeting the bridegroom in the dark like that, so they run and try to make up for lost time by getting more oil, but their fate is sealed. The wedding feast has begun without them and the door is shut. They call out in vain saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But all they hear in return is, "I do not know you"—which is basically him saying, "I don't have anything to do with you, you who couldn't be bothered to prepare for me when I came to bring you into such joy and gladness with me."

Truly, dear ones, whatever else people will suffer in hell, I for one am convinced that nothing will be quite so painful as the suffering of people who knew the promises of God and had received His call and invitation to the feast knowing the Lord Jesus would soon return, knowing what He's coming to give, but who spurned Him and cared so little about how they should prepare to meet Him that they gave themselves over to other things, things they considered more worthy of their time. They have no one to blame but themselves, dear ones.

III. So when you look at how you've lived your life, how you've prepared in anticipation of Christ's return to bring you into the wedding feast in the kingdom of heaven, something to which you've all been invited by virtue of your Baptism, by the way, do you think you've been more at home in the company of the wise virgins or among the foolish? Have you been as prudent as you ought to be in your preparations, being mindful of your ways and deeds, being diligent to keep the vessel of your heart filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit for the day of Christ's appearing?

Let me remind you, dear ones, not just of what our divine Bridegroom has prepared for you, but also how mindful He's been for you and for the joy of the kingdom of heaven He longs to give you.

He's prepared himself as a most holy and fragrant sacrifice to the Father for your sake and for mine.

He's preparing a foretaste of the feast to come for you right here.

Our Savior has also been very mindful and diligent in preparing a place for you to live together with Him with one another in His Father's house. All these things and much much more He's devoted himself to as He makes ready to meet you at the end of the age. So what will you devote yourselves to as you keep watch and make ready to meet Him at the end of the age?

Well, since there won't be time to be filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit then, it's of the utmost importance that we be filled with Him now. And this doesn't mean going off to spend the rest of your days alone in a cave somewhere and spending hours on end in prayer. But what it does mean is being mindful to go where the oil of the Spirit is to be found, namely the Word of God, and the preaching of this Word here in Church and in the Sacraments, and in the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints. Like St Paul says in his letter to the Thessalonians just after our appointed Epistle text for today ends, we mustn't quench the Spirit by neglecting these things, which God gives us for our good.

For all of you fathers and husbands among us especially, you have a key role in leading your household by example, getting to the point where you're leading brief devotions with your family every day, reading the Scriptures, explaining them, praying the Lord's prayer, and showing your families what it is to be wise and faithful as you watch for Christ's appearance. Wives and mothers should support and encourage your husband in these things, and all of you children—make sure you're listening and watching what you see in your parents, so that you can learn what it is to live life in the Spirit of God.

May God grant us all to be devoted to Him in this way, to be found wise and faithful and luminous on the day of visitation. And to Christ our Bridegroom be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.