

STAYING READY FOR HIS RETURN

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

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Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. five of them were foolish, and five were wise. The five who were foolish didn't take enough olive oil for their lamps, but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

At midnight they were roused by the shout, "Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!"

All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. Then the five foolish ones asked the others, "Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out."

But the others replied, "We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves."

But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, "Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!"

But he called back, "Believe me, I don't know you!"

So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, help us to understand these words that You spoke, and through this parable, Holy Spirit, touch our hearts, our minds. Let these words come alive for us that we may be able to know and understand and heed what it is that we need to hear and understand today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

We've been working our way through Matthew. In these last couple of chapters, Jesus has actually been talking about the time when He will return. The question that has been uppermost on the disciples' hearts, and they have voiced it as well, has been, "Lord, when is this time when You will come back? When are you returning?" And Jesus says four times, and this would be the fifth time in these two or three chapters that He says, "You will not know the time." Then He gives some indication of the signs that will be around at that time. But then He says, "But still these are not the time when I will come." And He leaves that open.

But He says that the Kingdom of Heaven for which you are waiting, you must be prepared for that time when it will be ushered in. when I come again, you must be ready. Then He gives us this parable of the ten virgins, as we've come to know of it, or the ten bridesmaids – the five wise and the five foolish. Let's look at this passage and see what it says at a very superficial level.

We have ten bridesmaids, and the bible tells us that five of them are wise and five are foolish. Why are they wise? Because they took extra oil with them; they were prepared just in case they ran out of oil and would need it. The foolish ones didn't prepare; they came just with their lamps. These were the old lamps that you lit with a piece of cloth soaked in oil, and when that oil ran out, it

became dry and fell apart. So they would need that oil. The wise brought extra olive oil with them just in case that happened. They are all waiting together, and we can see that all of them have the same expectation – they are waiting for the bridegroom to come. They are all one group together. There is nothing that separates them right now in their expectation of the bridegroom coming, and for them to join the bridegroom and go with him.

We find that the bridegroom is delayed. They're tired and drowsy, and they fall asleep. While they are sleeping, the call comes, saying, "The bridegroom is coming! The bridegroom is coming!" So they all get up. The ones who are wise, take their lamps because they are still lit, and they are ready to follow the bridegroom. It is 12 o'clock in the night, and this was the way they did it. He would come in the night, and so their lamps would make a wonderful procession all the way down to the bride's home. Then he would pick up the bride and they would go to the point where the marriage would take place, and then consummated and all of that.

At this point though, the foolish ones realized that they don't have oil, that their lamps are going out. So they turned to the wise ones and say, "Please give us some oil." They reply, "We can't do that; we won't have enough. You go and pick up more oil." And so these five go, and while they are gone, the bridegroom comes. He takes these five wise ones, they go in and they enter the place where they are to be, and the door is shut.

Now, the five foolish ones come with the new oil that they have got from somewhere, and they knock on the door and say, "Please, please, let us in. Lord, lord, open the door for us." But look at what the answer is: "Believe me, I don't know you." So Jesus says, "You too must keep watch, for you do not know the day or hour of My return. Keep watch because you don't know when I will come back."

The need is for us to be prepared whenever He comes back. Not that we need to be constantly gazing to see – Oh, when is Jesus coming back? We see from this passage, that when they were tired, they went to sleep. It was not that they were expected to keep their eyes open, to wait and wait. We carry on with what we are doing, but we live in such a way that we are ready when He comes back. And when He comes back, He comes as judge. That is what Jesus was saying: You don't know the time, but you've got to be prepared. You've got to ready yourself for the time when I will come unexpectedly.

The point here is that you don't know when Jesus is coming back, but there is a need for you to be prepared. It looks like half the people were prepared, and half were not. Jesus says, "You make sure that you are prepared when I come again."

Let's try and extrapolate a couple of points that may be worth focusing on.

1. They hadn't prepared themselves for the long haul – the ones who were foolish, who didn't take oil. They came with their torches thinking that this was sufficient. But the delay in the bridegroom's coming brought about their downfall.
2. They looked like they were all part of the same party. They all came together, they must have dressed together, they all had lamps. They all looked like they were where they needed to be, and who they were supposed to be. They spoke the same way; they were accepted by them. And they were all equipped – they all had a torch. It seemed like this entire party was one. But there was one difference and that was that half of them came prepared for a longer wait than the others.

So what can we understand from these extrapolations?

- What the five wise had couldn't be transferred or given to the five foolish. Because they asked. They said, "Can you help us," and they said, "No, we can't." At that point, when the bridegroom comes, if you don't have what you need, it cannot be transferred to you by somebody else.
- Their lack of preparedness kept them out of the kingdom. A sobering thought! If we were to apply this to our lives, saying: How do I live my life in expectation of Jesus' coming back, even when I don't know when? What are the things that I need to be doing? If I'm not prepared for His coming, then it could be that I am shut out of His kingdom. That's what Jesus is saying in this scripture.

In other words, He is saying that some who thought they would make it, won't make it. All of them thought that they would go with the bridegroom, but they didn't. And at that point it would be too late. It's possible that there could be some who are not thinking right, who are deluded, who think that they will make it but will not, and when Jesus comes again and makes that delineation, at that point it will be too late to make any change in preparing for that moment.

Jesus Himself alluded to this kind of a scenario many times. Take the parable of the sower. The Word is given to some and it falls upon them and then it falls away. Or it has a very shallow root. They don't take the time to deepen the root, and so it's gone. It is not able to withstand the storms of life, and when troubles and trials and adversity come, they just fall away. Jesus was saying that it's possible that some will not be able to withstand or stay the long haul. For a brief period, they will be connected in, but they will not last, because the Word hasn't gone and done what it needs to do in preparing us for the time when Jesus will come.

The parable of the wheat and the tares talks about this as well. they grow together and then finally they will be separated. The sheep and the goats as well. The sheep: "Well done! For when I was hungry you fed me; when I was naked, you clothed me. Come to one side, and the goats to the other side." In each of these places, we see Jesus is delineating between people who just receive the Word and fall away, and the ones who stay, who are prepared and waiting for Jesus to come back. They are doing whatever they need to work out their salvation in the interim, from being saved to being raised up with Jesus in glorification.

In Matthew 22:11, you remember the wedding feast. The king calls people for the wedding of his son, sees his guests, finds a man without the wedding garment – unprepared. Thrown out!

In 2 Timothy 3:5, God talks about a form of godliness but without power.

Luke 6:46 The Lord says: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord!' and do not do the things which I say. Whosoever comes to Me and hears My word and does them, I will show you to whom he is like. He's like a man who built a house and dug deep and laid the foundation."

Matthew 7:22-23 Lord, Lord! Have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out demons, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? Then I will profess unto them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, ye workers of Iniquity."

Luke 13:24-28 "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. When once the master of the house is risen up and has shut the door. And you stand outside and begin to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord! Open unto us.' And he shall answer and say unto you, 'I know you not from where you are' Then you shall begin to say, 'We've eaten and drunk in your presence, and you have taught in our streets.' But

He shall say, 'I tell you, I know not from where you are. Depart from me all you workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Jesus is saying that it is so important that, while we wait for Him to come back, that we prepare ourselves for His return, that there's a way that we need to live our lives in this interim time.

TAKEAWAYS:

1. MAKE SURE THAT WE DON'T FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF THE FOOLISH FIVE.

How do we do that? Let me give you some points that I think might be important for us.

Being prepared is equal to keeping the light of the presence of God burning brightly within us. That's what it means to be prepared – that constantly the light of God within each of us burns brightly, that it never goes out. The light that we have is the light of God's presence; we must not allow it to go out. Without that light, we are not seen as His, and that light is not transferable to anybody else.

So, how do we keep that light burning? Let me give you four areas that I think are important for us to be aware and focused and working on so that our light shines brightly.

i. Are we growing in holiness?

We have just finished our weekly Bible study on Colossians, and what a wonderful time we've had as we've mined it. In the third chapter I told you that what we need to understand are two crucial things that Paul is talking about. The first is that we "Put off" and the second is that we "Put on". And the path of holiness is that constant putting off and putting on. We put off those things that we used to be entangled with, those things that He talks about in that list. Then we begin to put on those things that come from Jesus in our lives. We let those things begin to shine forth in us.

The first question that we need to ask ourselves is: Am I growing in holiness? Each and every day, am I putting off and putting on? Putting off unrighteousness and putting on righteous behavior.

ii. Are we growing in love toward God and neighbor?

Remember the rich ruler who came to Him and said, "What must I do to attain eternal life?" And Jesus said, "You're a ruler in Israel. What do you think the Word says?" And he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus told him to go and do likewise. The man said, "Teacher, I've done all of these things from my youth." Then Jesus looked at him and said, "Go and sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me." And he turned around and walked away because he had many possessions that he was not willing to give up.

Beloved, to love God with your heart, soul, strength, and mind is to love Him in entirety, that you love Him above everything. The rich young ruler thought he did, but he loved his money more. The question for you and me today is: What is it that we love more than we love the Lord? Is there an area that we invest in more than we invest in our relationship with God or with our neighbor?

iii. Are we serving God?

Every day, am I serving God? Am I using my spiritual gifts within the context of the church? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, “Regarding spiritual gifts, I don’t want you to be ignorant.” Spiritual gifts are given to edify, exhort and comfort the church. 1 Corinthians 14:12 – to build up, to encourage and comfort. Are we, you and I, in the process of building up people, encouraging people, comforting people? Are we using all the gifts that God has given us in service to the church?

iv. **Is our life a visible manifestation of the presence of God?**

Is your life and mine a visible manifestation of the presence of God? Jesus says in Mathew 5:14, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. You need to be visible. Neither, do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Your light cannot be hidden; it must be visible. Instead they set it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Each and every day, beloved, wherever you are, is the manifestation of God’s presence visible through you?

These four areas, and there could be many more. But it would be a good spiritual reality check for us to say: I don’t want to fall into the category of the five foolish bridesmaids. I want to be prepared. I don’t know when Jesus will come back, but I’m going to do everything that I can to be prepared. I’m going to walk in holiness. I’m going to serve Him. I’m going to grow in love toward God and neighbor and I’m going to let the manifest presence of God in my life be seen by everybody who is around me.

Well, you may have been listening to all of this and saying; I’m not doing anything actively toward any of the things that you spoke about. Maybe today is the day for you to say, “Lord, I’m sorry. I accepted Your salvation but I didn’t allow You to bring change in my life. I didn’t give reign and access to Your Holy Spirit to lead me in paths of righteousness and service in all those things that I need to do to be prepared for Your second coming. Lord, today I come to You and I ask if you would help me. I release the Holy Spirit within me to do what I need to do. Unstop my ears so I can hear what You are speaking to me. Lord, here is my will. Make me, mold me, shape me in the way that I need to be so that I will be ready when You come.” I pray that you would pray that prayer if you fall into that first category.

2. WEARY? DON’T GIVE UP.

Maybe you’ve been doing this for a long time and you’re growing weary. You’ve grown tired, maybe disillusioned. Maybe now you’re just saying: Lord, how long are you going to wait? I’m ready for You to take me. How long Lord? and you’re just sitting by the side of the road saying, “I’m just going to wait for You.”

Beloved, I want to give you two encouraging scriptures. Right off the bat, I’ll tell you that that place is not the place you need to be. it isn’t! God wants you on the road following Him, and He will empower you. He will give you the strength, the energy, the wisdom, the stamina, the vision, everything that you need. You know why I know this? Because God is not in the habit of snuffing out dimly burning wicks.

Long before Jesus came as Messiah, Isaiah prophesied about Him and this is what he said: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.” Maybe you are a bruised reed today. Maybe you’re just a dimly burning wick, and maybe you need to go to Him and say, “Lord, I need You to fan me back into flame. On my own, I don’t have it. Lord, would You do it?” And beloved, He will!

Paul tells us in Galatians 6:9 “Let us not become very weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up.” Don’t give up, beloved. Just turn to the Lord and say exactly what’s going on and how you’re feeling, and say, “Lord, would You help?” And beloved, He will!

Shall we pray together?

I’d like to pray for both situations: if you are responding to the first scenario where you’re saying, “I haven’t done anything, but Lord, would You help me do that?”, I want to pray for you. And if you are responding to the second, that you’re tired, fatigued, worn out, I’m going to pray for you too.

But I’m going to pause now, and allow you in this time, in these quiet moments, to just respond to God. You speak to Him. You tell Him exactly what’s going on and what the decision of your heart is. At the end of it, I’m going to pray for you.

Heavenly Father, on those who have decided to get up and begin to allow You to work in them to bring change and transform something they’ve never done before, Lord, I pray that there would be just a resurgence of Your Holy Spirit within them, that as You take charge Lord, that You would inspire, that You would give Zeal and enthusiasm to hold on to You, and allow You to do all that they need to do to make them prepared for the time when You will return. O Master, anoint them afresh. Give to them fresh vision as well. undergird them with Your Holy Spirit. Give to them strength and energy Lord, to pursue hard after those things that You have placed upon their hearts, or even putting on their hearts right now.

Then Lord, I pray for those who are turning to You and saying: Lord, we re done! We’re tired, worn, fatigued. We’ve been serving You for so long. We are ready, just like Paul, to be with You. It will be wonderful. Lord, how long should we tarry? Lord, would You come alongside each of them. Hold them Master; let the beautiful presence of Your Spirit envelop them. Let strength and energy pour into them. Lord, gently lift their heads so that they can see ahead. Lord, hold their hand that they can feel the strength of Your hand. Lord, lift them up and point them in the direction that they need to go. And let them know, Master, that You will not leave them. You will not forsake them. Lord, let bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks be fanned into flame, Master. Lord, if there are those who are hurting, wounded, Lord, would You bring healing upon them? Those who are just dimly burning, fan into flame. Restore, renew, invigorate. I pray in the powerful majestic beautiful incomparable name of Jesus. Amen.
