

*Introduction*

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. For the remainder of November, our Gospel texts appointed for each Sunday come from the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew - the last part of Jesus' final great discourse in that gospel. Here Jesus is teaching about the end of days. We will cover the parable of the Ten Virgins, the parable of the Talents, and Jesus' comparison of the final judgement to the separation of sheep and goats. These words come to us because we are about to close the church year, with the last Sunday being November 22. What better time to think about the end of the age, judgement, and the advent of the reign of God on the earth?

*Parable Summary and Meaning*

Jesus tells the parable about ten virgins whose job is to wait for a wedding groom and his party to arrive, honor the groom by joining the wedding party and continuing on into the wedding feast. The groom is late in his arrival, and everyone's oil lamp runs out of fuel. When the shout goes out that the groom's party has arrived, the five wise virgins who had brought extra oil quickly refilled their lamps and went out to honor the groom. The other foolish virgins had to run and buy more oil for their lamps, fill them, and catch up with the others. Sadly, when these women arrived at the feast, the groom refused to let them in, saying, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." After telling the parable, Jesus leaves his hearers with the charge, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Point taken!

*Application of Parable*

We cannot make many one-to-one comparisons to real life when studying Jesus' parables. Many times the whole point of his parables revolves around the fact that they do not match up with the usual way of things. In this parable it is especially difficult because little is known of first century Jewish wedding customs. However, I think we can get the main point if we look hard enough. The groom's intention is for the virgins to join his wedding procession and enter with him and partake of the great feast. We can certainly see how the groom may be identified with Jesus, and the virgins as us. Jesus wants us to enter with him into the banquet in his eternal kingdom to come. The virgins needed to be always at the ready for the groom's arrival. If they are found unprepared, they will be shut out. We, too, need to be ready for the return of Jesus on the last day, and no one knows when that will be expect God. Only those who are waiting and watching will enter into pleasures unknown.

Have any of you European travelers ever visited Doggerland? Probably not, since Doggerland, once a large, inhabited land mass connecting England and mainland Europe, no longer exists! Thousands of years before Christ, a huge landslide off the western coast of Norway known as the Storegga Event created a gigantic tsunami that wiped out all life on Doggerland. Glacier melting finally submerged what was left of it. The suddenness of the disaster that deluged the area is evident from the countless mammoth and human bones, tools, weapons, houses, boats, and musical instruments easily recovered today under the waves where Doggerland once stood.

The people and animals of Doggerland had no way to know that a devastating tsunami was coming their way to wipe them out forever. Today, we know the devastating power of tsunamis and there are monitoring stations located throughout the world watching and listening for such threats so people can be warned. There is no such system to warn us of the sudden return of Jesus. No siren will blow. No

message will flash across the TV screen or be sent to our phone warning us that we have fifteen minutes to get our life in order before the arrival of the Lord. Therefore, Jesus teaches we must be ready at all times and in all places!

There are two motivations for being prepared for the return of Jesus. One is fear. This is probably the greater motivator for most of us. Who wants to find out what becomes of those who don't make the final cut? Who wants to be shut out of the eternal banquet and celebration of God and be thrown into outer darkness or the fires of hell? Anyone who believes these things are real does not want to be found unworthy and suffer the consequences. Therefore, we avoid falling away and falling into great sin, so we do not face the wrath of our maker. The second motivation can only flow from a pure heart. This one is expectation. With all that is promised to the redeemed children of God, who would want to miss it? Who in their right mind would ever put themselves in a position where they would lose all the future blessings of God in Christ? Far be it from us, Lord! What is your motivation to be ready for the Lord's return? Fear? Expectation? Both? They are equally valid and serve the intended purpose of being ready.

This is where the parable's lamp oil comes in. What does Jesus want us to compare the lamp oil to in our lives? He says we need to have this oil and have it to spare. It is necessary for us to have it to enter into the feast. Does the oil symbolize faith? Good works? The Holy Spirit? A solid prayer life? It is all these and more. The best way to apply the lamp oil to our lives is to understand it as whatever it takes for us to be ready to honor the Bridegroom when he comes again in glory. We all have to determine what that is for our own lives. I would put on the short list of possibilities that the oil would stand for a clean conscience, one forgiven of all sins both unknown and known. I would also add to that list faith working itself out in love. Works of love provide us with the proof that we are indeed God's people and that faith dwells inside us. This is true because we would not perform many of those good works if we did not have faith in the person and promises of God.

### *Be Prepared*

The famous motto of the Boys Scouts of America also applies here. Jesus gives us the parable of the Ten Virgins and warns us to be always ready. Therefore, now is the time for us to examine our lives and see how much oil we have. If we are out, we must immediately turn to God, repent, ask for the Holy Spirit and live prepared once again. If we are low on oil, again, it's best to turn to God, repent, ask for the Holy Spirit and live more diligently for the Lord. If you are good on oil, heed Jesus' warning to keep watch, and always be on the lookout for thoughts, words, and deeds that will lead you away from a life lived in the Holy Spirit. Temptations abound.

God bless you with insights into the meaning of this parable for your life, that you may know how much oil you have, get more if needed, and always be ready for the day of the Lord. Amen.

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