

November 12, 2023

Matt 25:1-13

Title: Sleepy virgins – wise and unwise

Our Gospel lesson for today from Matt 25 tells us about Jesus' second coming. and warns us to be prepared. Since we are celebrating veteran's day I thought it would be appropriate to use an illustration from military service.

Soldiers who have fought in battles say that when bullets start flying the mind goes blank and the body switches to autopilot. This is where proper training is of paramount importance. Soldiers cannot be expected to be effective in battle unless they have been properly trained. They must be drilled in military skills until those skills become second nature. Then when the bullets start flying, trained soldiers will automatically respond with the appropriate action without conscious thought.

There are many battles in the Christian way of life. At any moment we may suddenly find ourselves beset by spiritual bullets, temptations by Satan persecution from the world temptations from our own flesh. And when the spiritual bullets start flying, if we are not prepared we will not be able to defend ourselves. When suddenly put on the spot, it is natural for our mind to go blank. At moments like these we are only as good as our training. If we, as Christian soldiers, are not properly prepared we will be sitting ducks. But if our soul is trained by God's word, we will have ready answers to defend our faith. The warning from the military service as it is in the Boy scouts is always "Be Prepared."

This same warning is also given in the Bible. Our gospel lesson from Matt 25 tells us Jesus is coming. "Be prepared." In Matt 25, Jesus is telling a parable. The parable starts with ten young women, waiting to meet the bride groom at a wedding. They did not know when the bridegroom would arrive. But they were required to be ready. In particular, each was required to bring a lamp to help light the wedding. That was their job. The parable then goes on telling how well the 10 young women did their job. Well, each had brought a lamp, just like they were told. So far, so good. From the outside, they all looked identical. From the outside they all looked like they had all done what they should have. However scripture says five were wise and five were foolish. Why is that? Well, scripture tells us that only five of the 10 young women, had filled their lamps with oil. From the outside they looked identical, but only 5 of the 10 young women, the wise ones, had what

it took to carry out their mission “to light the banquet.” From the outside they looked identical, but on the inside only 5 of the 10 young women had what it took, to do what they were instructed to do. Perhaps the unwise felt they had lots of time to finish the job. They were procrastinators. However, the bridegroom was delayed, and as a result the women became tired. Interestingly enough, both the wise and the UN-wise women fell asleep. While this indiscretion affected the wise women but little, it had a disastrous consequence for the women who were unprepared. When the bridegroom came, only 5 of the 10 were ready for the feast. Only the five wise ones had done what was necessary. Only the 5 wise ones “were prepared” when the groom showed up. Though the other 5 scrambled to get ready, they were too late and were left out of the wedding feast.

When Jesus shared this parable he was instructing the disciples about his second coming. Jesus was the bridegroom. And the return of the bridegroom, was his return to earth, also known as Judgment Day. On this day, the sheep would be separated from the goats. On this day the wheat would be separate from the tares. On this day the worthy would be separated from the unworthy. On this day the people of God would go to Heaven. No one knew the day of his return. but His warning was nevertheless - “Be prepared.” He also warned that until that time, there would be wise and foolish people. Those “prepared for his coming” and those “not prepared.” From the outside, they would be indistinguishable. “They will have their lamps” They will look like they are all prepared. But only the wise ones will have oil in their lamps. Only the wise will be prepared for his coming. And the consequences of NOT “being prepared” where our Lord comes will be terrible!

So, what does it mean to “NOT be prepared?” Jesus has just instructed his disciples what it means to be prepared for His coming, a coming known only to our Father in heaven. What does it mean to be prepared? They were to live in anticipation. They were to live actively watching for His coming. I like to put it this way: “Being prepared” means “living your life like you really expect Jesus to come.” “Those who are sleeping” like the unwise young women in the parable, are those who live their lives not really expecting Jesus to come. “Oh, we got lots of time to get prepared. No hurry. We can mess around for now. We got lots of time.” They continue to live their lives doing things that they know would be displeasing to God. They continue to do things which they would be ashamed of, if they knew Jesus was watching them. Have no doubts about this though. Jesus IS

coming. Jesus is coming and the alarm has gone off. The “sleeping ones?” The unwise? They are the ones who have pressed the snooze button of life. They are like the man who doesn’t want to be a Christian because he knows that God would call him to change his life, his lifestyle. So he thinks... I can always change later. I’ll just need to change sometime “just before I die.” Besides God will forgive me anyways. Such a person doesn’t realize what is at stake. Such a person doesn’t realize what God is calling us to. Such a person is spiritually asleep. Such a person needs to be awakened! You see, God’s grace may be unlimited in coverage, but it is limited in time. God’s offer is to everyone. But there will be a time when it is too late. Every sin that we have ever committed, are committing or will commit has been paid for by the death of Christ. But there will come a time when “it will be too late.” Too late to come to faith. Too late to receive forgiveness. God’s grace is unlimited in coverage, but limited in time. It is for this reason, Scripture warns us “Be prepared.”

There used to be a TV show called MASH, about a military hospital during the Vietnam war. Hawkeye, one of the doctors was called out to the front lines due to a shortage of doctor. When he arrives, bombs and bullets are flying all around. He suddenly realizes that his life is in danger. So, in a few spare moments he takes time to write out his Last Will and Testament. Eventually, he is relieved by another doctor and is able to return to the safety of his MASH unit. He arrives late in the evening, enters his office, sits down at a desk, and the continues to finish his will. Corporal Klinger comes in and sees him working and asks “what ya is doing?” Hawkeye tells him he is writing his Will. Klinger responds “no paperwork is so important that it can’t wait until tomorrow.” Hawkeye looks at him thoughtfully and says, “I used to think that way too, but not anymore” In the face of death Hawkeye had come to grips with the importance of being prepared.

It is only when people realize that their time on Earth is limited that they struggle with questions like, “What should I do to be prepared?” As Christians we know the answer! Going back to the parable of the bridesmaids, remember that for all intents and purposes, from the outside the wise and the foolish maids looked the same. What was the only thing that differentiated them? The wise ones brought lamps which were filled with oil. What does that mean!? What does the oil stand for? The oil stands for faith. On this earth... when it comes to earthly things, sometimes it is hard to differentiate, the saved from the unsaved. They suffer the same things. They benefit from the same things. Sometimes from the outside they look

the same. But what is different is on the inside. The oil stands for faith. For the saved our lamps are not empty. For the wise, our lamps are filled with oil. We have faith. The first thing, in fact the only thing required to “Be Prepared,” is “Faith in Christ.” It is through “faith in Christ” alone that we will be allowed in Heaven. Those who carry lamps filled with faith in Christ. They are the wise ones. For now, from the outside, we may look like everyone else. But in the end times, those carrying filled lamps, those who have faith in Christ, they will be separated from those with the empty lamps. For everyone with faith in Christ, the door to Heaven will never be shut. They will come before Christ with joy and hear the words, “good and faithful servant” Through faith, they will be counted not as those who are asleep, but will be counted as those who “are prepared.” God’s give of life is unlimited in scope, but limited in time. So be prepared. You are the wise-ones, You have your lamps filled with oil. You have faith in Christ. Hallelujah! Amen.

But what about the others? What about the people of this world, the unwise ones? There is still hope for them. Until the day that the Lord comes, there is still time. For those we meet who are spiritually asleep, for those whose lamps are empty, they need to be wakened! They need their lamps filled. They need to come to faith in Christ! For this reason, Christ calls us to be prepared in another way, not to just be prepared for our own salvation, but to be prepared for the salvation of others. From 1Pet 3:15

Always **be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Be prepared to share the story of Christ. Be prepared to share the story of Christ, with those who do not know him. So, they can become wise. So, they can have their lamps filled. So, they can be ready on Judgment day. Do not be afraid to do this. Don’t be afraid because you think you are not prepared. Remember our job is just to be declarers of the Gospel. It is not our responsibility to make sure they understand how it works. It is only our responsibility to declare, to declare “Your sins are forgiven.” “God loves you.” Be prepared to share the story of Christ, especially during this coming advent season. You will meet someone who only knows the baby lying in the manger. They need to know, the savior dying on the cross. Be prepared to tell them.

Brothers and sisters Jesus is coming! Good news to the saved! Bad news to the unbeliever! Help them be ready. Tell them about Jesus. Amen