Chapter 9

Living Ready

The Parable of the Ten Virgins
{Matthew 25:1-13}
Ted Burleson

One Main Thing

We must make preparations for the Lord's return. He could return when we least expect Him to do so. Are you ready?

Introduction

Evidently there are those, even in the church, who are unprepared for the Lord's return. Jesus told the Parable of the Ten Virgins to illustrate how some are prepared while others are not ready for Jesus to return. Many of us struggle with being unprepared for life. However, we must be prepared for eternity if we plan to spend it in heaven. Just as five of the young virgins were unprepared for the bridegroom, the hustle and bustle of life sometimes gets in our way of prioritizing spiritual things. The problem of taking care of the urgent while neglecting the importance of preparation is

as real today as it was in the days of the ten virgins who were waiting for the bridegroom.

Setting

Weddings in the days of Jesus were very different from weddings today. First, the marriages were arranged. Sometimes, the bride and groom had not even met before the wedding. Second, unlike weddings today that last about twelve minutes, weddings in those days lasted a week. Third, invitations were sent out without a specific date for the wedding. A follow-up invitation would be sent when it was time to travel to the wedding. Note also, these were not just wedding guests, these virgins were the bridesmaids; they were in the wedding party. Please do not give the impression that resting was the problem; enough people already struggle with the guilt of not doing enough. Notice, all of the virgins "slumbered and slept" (Matt 5:25 KJV). This lesson is about being ready to meet the bridegroom, which for us is Jesus Christ at His second coming.

Interpretation

The ten virgins shared several things in common. They were all in the wedding party. They all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They all took lamps

with oil in them. They all slumbered and slept. They all heard the midnight cry that it was time to meet the bridegroom.

In contrast, there was one significant difference among the ten virgins. Five of them demonstrated their wisdom by taking extra oil while five foolish virgins carried only their lamps and the oil contained in them with no reservoir of oil. In other words, five were prepared while five were unprepared.

Some readers express disappointment that the five wise virgins did not share. After all, we learned in kindergarten to share. Often Jesus' parables contain details that contribute to the story but are not intended to have a spiritual application. The overarching principle in this parable is readiness.

Others have complained that the Lord did not open the door for the virgins. His answer was that He did not know them. Of course, this illustrates the point that we must all be ready to appear before the judgment seat of the Lord. Since we do not know the day or the hour when the Lord shall come, we must be ready to meet the Lord at any moment in time.

Application

How do we stay ready for the return of the Lord? Real Christianity looks like the following scenarios. First, maintain a relationship with the Lord to assure that He will not have to say to us, "I do not know you." For example, Cameron is tempted to leave the commitment she made to the Lord when she was baptized into Christ. Her boyfriend is pressuring her to do things that she knows the Lord would not approve. Her close relationship with the Lord keeps her from giving in to temptation and remain dedicated to obeying Him. Stay close to the Lord and change the way you live on a daily basis.

Second, worshiping God on a regular basis helps us stay ready for the return of the Lord. Real Christianity can be illustrated by the example of Frank, a faithful Christian who loves to worship. Frank works ninety miles from his parents and his fiancée. When he gets off work on Saturday at noon, he can hardly wait to make that drive to see his loved ones. Never could Frank imagine saying, "You know, that's a long way and I'm really tired. Sunday is my only day off; I'll just stay here and not go see my family." Why? Frank loves his family and wants to spend time with them. If we love the Lord, we will want to stay near those who also love

and want to worship Him. Worship is not just for Sundays; we study and pray on a daily basis, even today.

Third, real Christianity looks like being ready to be with the Lord at any moment. Jim was called to his lawyer's office for a routine meeting, at least he thought. As he walked into the office, a disgruntled former business partner shot Jim in the back five times, killing him instantly. How could Jim know that he was going to be killed? He didn't know, but he did live each day communing with the Lord in prayer and being ready to meet Him. Jim could have been foolish and unprepared if he was living a life of sin, but instead he was ready to meet the Lord. Although we are not his judge, there's little doubt that Jim is being comforted in Abraham's bosom, like Lazarus in the story of the rich man (Luke 16:22). If your life should end in death this night, will you be ready to meet the Lord?

Fourth, real Christianity looks like being willing to wait on someone you love. Have you ever been in a wedding? Let's say that the rehearsal and the dinner are on Friday night and that takes a total of about three hours. You are told by the photographer, "Be here at 10:00 a.m. for pictures." The wedding is not until 2:00 p.m. You have your picture taken countless times and eat a sandwich

and notice that it is 12:15. You have almost two hours to wait, and you're dressed in your wedding garments. Why did you ever agree to be in this wedding? Because it is your best friend that is getting married and that friend asked you to be in the wedding. Likewise, because we do not know when the Lord is coming, some have been waiting on the Lord's return for decades. Just because He has not returned as of yet is not an indication that He is not coming (2 Pet 3:8–10). Waiting is difficult and Satan will use the delay to tempt you to be unprepared to meet the Lord. Do not give in to Satan, not for even an hour.

Finally, real Christianity comes with blessed assurance and confidence that we are ready to meet God. As a young preacher, I wept beside the bed of a godly, Christian woman who was so yellow with disease that she was in her last moments on earth. She gently said to me, "Son, do not cry for me. In a few minutes I'll be with the Lord and you will be left to deal with the problems of this world. I'm going to be with God." Sure enough, within fifteen minutes she was gone. She died with confidence and assurance because she had prepared for that moment for many, many years.

Conclusion

Are you ready to meet the Lord? Have you made the necessary preparation and are you maintaining your readiness? As a child, many of us went through fire drills, Civil Defense drills, and weather preparedness drills. We were practicing being ready. The alarm would sound when we were least expecting it, like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). With racing heart and tired legs, we responded to the drill. However, what if it was not a drill? There is a time coming when each person on earth and those who have passed away (John 5:28-29) will hear the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel, and be called to give an account of our lives. Are you ready?

Discussion

1. What was the real difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins?

2. Why do people often put off being prepared spiritually?

3. What is the connection between being prepared and going to heaven?

4. What is meant by the phrase, "I know you not"?

5. Recall James Henry Stanley's song, "Prepare to Meet Thy God." Note the words, "Careless soul, why will you linger, wand-ring from the fold of God? Hear you not the invitation? O, prepare to meet thy God." Why is this song often used as a song of encouragement/invitation song?

6. What are some concrete examples of being spiritually prepared to meet the Lord?