

Dr. Hugh Hamilton  
Trinity Presbyterian Church – Pensacola, FL  
November 8, 2020 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

## **"THE FATE OF THE UNPREPARED"**

Matthew 25: 1—13 Psalm 39

Matthew 25 tells of a nighttime wedding where everything goes wrong.

Ten young women go out with bright lamps to greet the wedding party. From that point on, it's a comedy of errors. The bridegroom is delayed and after hours of waiting, the women fall asleep on the church steps. When the bridegroom finally arrives, the women awake to discover that half of the lamps are out of oil. Five women panic, begging their friends for a little spare oil. But there isn't enough to go around, so their friends tell the foolish women to head for the nearest 7-11 Store. The wedding party arrives, and the celebration begins; the door is shut, no one may enter, and the poorly prepared women are shut out.

The comedy of errors is no longer funny.

The parable's question is: are you prepared for the return of Christ?

Are you so living your life now as to be prepared?

If you follow the liturgical cycle, then you know we are on the last few Sundays of the Christian year. The New Year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, November 29. The gospel lessons for these last three Sundays focus on the end of time and the Second Coming of Christ.

### **As to being prepared: Are you making most out of the opportunities that God has given you?**

Zig Ziglar once told about a successful jewel thief back in the 1920's named Arthur Berry. Berry hobnobbed with the rich & famous of Boston's elite, only he hobnobbed at night when they weren't home.

He stole only from the elite socialites and conversely, a visit from Arthur became a status symbol among Boston's Upper-Class folks.

But at last the police caught up with him and shot him; he fell through a glass Window and lay on the ground in great pain. Amid the blood and glass and handcuffs he muttered, "Boy, I ain't gonna do this anymore,"

To make a long story short, Arthur Berry got out of prison twenty years later, settled down in a tiny New England town and became a respected citizen & civic leader, But word got out that this notorious jewel thief was holed up in this New England hamlet and the national media arrived in droves.

One reporter asked, 'Mr. Berry, you stole from a lot of wealthy folks in your life as a jewel thief.

From whom did you steal the. Most?"

Without hesitation Berry replied, "The man from whom I stole the most was Arthur Berry!

"I could have been a baron on Wall Street. I could have been a successful businessman had I used my God—given gifts and developed them legitimately. I could have made it big in business, but I spent two-thirds of my adult life behind bars!"

Arthur Berry was a thief who stole from himself. How about you?

If the bridegroom were to come today and ask you to give an account of your life, could you say that you had taken full advantage of the opportunities that God had given you?"

**Focus that question a little narrower: have you been faithful in your service to god and to others?**

In 1780 a solar eclipse brought darkness to New England at mid-day, Birds sang twilight songs and flew to their nests. Cows meandered home from pastures. Chickens came home to roost. Religious men and women fell on their knees to beg a final blessing before judgment day,

In Hartford, Connecticut the State Legislature was in session and someone, thinking Judgment Day had arrived, moved for adjournment.

But then a legislator stood up and replied, "I am against adjournment. The day of Judgment either is approaching, or it is not. If it IS NOT there is no cause for adjournment, if it IS, I choose to be found doing my duty, I wish therefore candles to be brought!"

The legislature approved his request and worked on.

Have you been faithful to God and others?

If the bridegroom were to come would he find you at your post?

Before we feel sorry for the five foolish virgins excluded from the wedding, consider this. They knew the bridegroom was going to be married, they knew he would come to the banquet, and they knew they needed oil for their lamps. It was not for lack of information or having the wrong information that they were locked out. All ten virgins started with the same information. The five foolish virgins had everything they needed to know, and still they were not ready! They put off too late their preparations.

We know Jesus is coming back and that Judgment Day is coming.

We know that all we need do is accept him as Lord and put our faith in him, follow him, and obey his commands.

Good intentions are not enough, once the door is shut, the door is shut and will not be opened again, no matter how long we stand outside and bang on the door or how loud we shout.

Now is the opportune time to give Jesu your life, your love, your thanks, your devotion.

**Another question: Is there anything in your life about which you would be embarrassed or ashamed at Jesus coming?**

Jonathon Edwards so believed in the principle Jesus taught in this parable that he wrote his commitment in the form of a resolution, ending with, "Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."<sup>1</sup>

A woman was herding her three children up the stairs for bedtime when her little girl, who was in kindergarten, asked, "Mommy, if it were the end of the world, and everyone was getting ready to die..."

The mother prayed one of those, "Quick, Lord, give me wisdom," prayers... and then asked "Yes"

"If the end of the world came...would you have to take your library books back?"

That child didn't want any unfinished business in her life!

How about you?

Is there unfinished business in your life that you need to take care of?

Is there anything about which you would be embarrassed or ashamed If the bridegroom came today?

If so, repent of it, correct it, be done with it.

**I asked you a related question last Sunday: Do people you love know how much you appreciate them?** We sometimes wait too late to say, 'I love you,' or "Please forgive me," or "Thank you!"

William Stidger suffered an emotional breakdown. He had no energy, no enthusiasm; he was depressed, and counseling brought no progress,

One day a friend asked William, "When was the last time you singled out a person who has been gracious to you and thanked him/her?"

The question annoyed William; but in the isolation of his home that night, William wrote his High School English teacher who, 20 years ago, had taken an interest in him and affirmed his abilities.

Three days later a letter came from her. "I weep as I Write! You are the first student in all my career who has written me a letter to express thanks. I will keep your letter as long as I live."

With her response to his letter in mind, William thought of someone else and wrote another letter, and then another, and another. He didn't even notice when he got well, he later wrote, but he got well as he discovered the joy of expressing his love & gratitude to others. (Dr. Peter Rhea Jones)

If you knew the bridegroom was coming today are there some folks to whom you would want to express appreciation or love or forgiveness or joy while you may?

Who knows what tomorrow may bring? Why not do it now?

**One final question about the coming of the bridegroom: Would he find you a stranger or a lifelong friend?**

What a sad scene at the end of the parable as the five foolish virgins plead at the door: "Let us in, let us in. Lord, open up for us." And he answered, "Truly, I do not know you." (Matthew 25:12)

Those young women thought they were his friends, and thought they were ready to meet him, but they weren't. In the same way, many religious people will be tragically surprised when they present outward righteousness and inward emptiness only to hear the Lord say, "I never knew you." (Pritchard, 7)

Did you notice that the five virgins are never called sinners? They are not accused of immorality or anything ungodly. They were not sinful, they were too casual, too cavalier, too careless, about their faith. They did nothing wrong – they just did nothing – and that was their problem. They did not accept Jesus as their savior and prepare for his arrival. Hence, they were shut out of the banquet.

No one knows when God's call will come, and there are some things which cannot be obtained at the last minute.

An old Scotsman to whom a friend offered comforting sayings and scripture near the end of his life, replied; "Not to worry, Laddie! I thatched me house when the weather was warm."

He was ready. (Barclay, 320)

Some people will miss heaven and it will be no one's fault but their own.

They will find out too late the value of Christ.

They'll suddenly realize how wrong they were, but the door will already be shut.

In that day, the world will declare that the followers of Christ were right, they made a wise decision.

The door of salvation is wide open – someday it will be shut.

Make sure you are on the right side of the door when that day comes. Accept Jesus now.

THE BAD NEWS IS You cannot wait until the last minute to prepare yourself to meet with God,

Neither can you borrow a relationship with God from someone else,

The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil when they discovered they needed it.

You cannot ride another person's coat tails into heaven.

You must possess Christ yourself; you must accept him as your Lord and Savior;

live with him, abide with him, obey him, and be prepared for the day when he returns in glory  
The GOOD NEWS is: If you live all your life with Christ, you are never unprepared to enter his presence.

#### HOW GOES IT WITH YOU?

Since we do not know when the bridegroom will return, live your life now to be prepared.

- Accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.
- Make the most of your opportunities God has given you.
- Faithfully serve God and others
- Rid your life of anything of which you might be embarrassed/ ashamed if Jesus returned today
- Express your love and appreciation to others in your life
- Don't keep Jesus a stranger – get to know him as the best friend you have!

Due to a typographical error, a newspaper weather forecast read,  
"There is a 90% chance of tomorrow."

I hope the chances are better than that!

But who knows what tomorrow may bring?

Don't be foolish. Be prepared!

Accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior!

Amen!

#### Sources

Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977.

Duncan, King. "Ready for the Big Date?" *Dynamic Preaching*, November 12, 2017.

Hamilton, Hugh. "The Fate of the Unprepared." First Presbyterian Church-Covington, TN, Nov 8, 1987.

McLarty, Philip W. "Have You Checked Your Oil Lately?" <https://sermonwriter.com/sermons/matthew-25-1-13-checked-your-oil-lately-mclarty/>

Pritchard, Ray. "Ten Sleepy Virgins: Are You ready for Christ's Return?"

<https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/ten-sleepy-virgins-are-you-ready-for-christs-return/>

*Word & Witness*, November 4, 1984.

\\11-08-20 the Fate of the Unprepared. docx

Gracious Lord God,  
 we praise your name for your presence that never fails  
 even when we have failed you.  
 we thank you that by your love we know love and are able to love.  
~~that by your justice we are able to know what is~~  
 that by your forgiveness we know both how to give & to receive the  
 forgiveness that can bind up our world's ~~division~~ wounds  
 and heal our divisions.

Help us so to discern your presence in our lives that we shall live ~~in the~~  
 confidence of your grace sufficient for us,  
 having the goodness and truth reveal to us in your Bible & your people,  
 loving our neighbors as those for whom ~~x~~ died,

you have given us our dignity by creating us in your image,  
 help us not to tarnish this image, and to see your image in everyone.

we remember before you our friends who are troubled,  
 our friends who are ill  
 our friends who are lonely and sad.  
 Bew, them, bless them, <sup>heal them</sup> comfort them, befriend them.

Establish your reign in the midst of the nations, O God, that your  
 will may be done in all the earth as it is in heaven,  
 your purpose fulfilled in our generation.

Strengthen every effort that makes for peace,  
 and make our nations strong in works of mercy.

Bind our churches together in your truth, your love, your will  
 into that fellowship of ~~chr~~ can never fail and  
 that mission that all the world know Jesus Christ as  
 lord and savior,  
 unite us & lead us forth <sup>in the power of your Holy Spirit</sup> to the glory of Jesus Christ!

Amen.

ADAPTED, from  
 WORD & WITNESS,  
 NOV. 4, 1984

CALL: The theme of today's readings is the future coming of Jesus X.  
- his coming in glory & in judgment.  
The Bible speaks of his coming as the marriage feast of the Lamb.  
- and the church as his Bride made ready.  
"watch," says Jesus, "for you know neither the day nor the hour."  
The Lord says, "Surely, I am coming soon."  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

INVOCATION:

Lord God, we confess that we are not ready for your  
kingdom of love & peace to be established among us.  
we still turn away from others suffering;  
we still postpone obedience to your law,  
we still tolerate war and avoid the burdens of making peace.  
Forgive us, for our unreadiness.  
Awaken us once more to your presence among us and  
to signs of the coming victory of your mercy,  
through Jesus X, who has taught us to pray,  
our Father . . .

DEDICATION

we offer you these tangible gifts that we earn w/ our work.  
we offer also the hymns that we sing  
the music that we make  
the deeds of kindness that we have done for others  
the words of encouragement that we have spoken to others  
the love that we have shared.  
Sanctify our gifts and us that others may glimpse  
your kingdom in our midst  
to the joy of Jesus Christ, your son.  
Amen

Adapted  
word & witness,  
Nov. 4, 1984