**Finding Christ in the Dark**

Based on [Matthew 25:1-13](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt25.1-13)

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Today begins the Last Days...of the Church Year, that is. And all of the readings from here on out will have a special emphasis on the Last Day, and on being ready for it...or "Prepared" for Christ to come again. And, as usual, Jesus tells a parable.

And as usual, the parable has to do with the Kingdom of God and its attendant judgment. It's about ten virgins with lamps waiting for the bridegroom to arrive so that they can meet him for the wedding feast. Now, it would be nice to have a little background...but, I can't give you much background. We don't know a lot about wedding customs in those days, but that doesn't hinder us from understanding this parable one bit. Just take it for granted that ten virgins had to wait for the bridegroom, who could arrive at anytime. He may arrive right away, or he may tarry, he may be delayed. **In either case, the virgins must be ready when he comes, meaning they must have enough oil for their lamps to go and meet him, even if he comes in the dark of night.** The wise virgins are the ones who are prepared with enough oil for their lamp to go out and meet him, even if he tarries, even if he comes in the dark of midnight. The foolish virgins only have enough oil for if he comes right away.

The ten virgins represent the whole Christian church in its *virginity*, that is, it's *purity* having been washed in the saviors blood, forgiven and made God's holy people. The bridegroom is Jesus, the Son of Man. In Ephesians 5, Jesus is spoken of as being the groom of his bride, the church, "having purified her with the washing of water and the word", baptism of course. And in Matthew 9 and Mark 2, when Jesus is asked why his disciples don't fast, he responds, "**How can the guest's of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast**."

And so, friends, here we are. The bridegroom has been taken away from us, and we fast. We wait for him, Jesus to come again, not in drunkenness and revelry and fornication, but by using the time wisely for the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). **In the church there is nothing but virgins, like virgin olive oil, the pure extract from the one who prayed on the Mount of Olives until he sweat blood, and was poured out on the cross as a drink offering.** Is not the bread we eat a participation in the body of Christ? Is not the cup we drink a participation in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), poured out in agony to make us pure?

The church contains nothing but virgins, people pure because of what Jesus, the bridegroom did to prepare them to be presented before his Father without and wrinkle or blemish or stain...pure. **The whole Christian church on earth is full of pure people...but, some are wise and some are fools.** Some are prepared for the bridegroom to come, some are not. All are pure, but only those who have enough oil in their lamp to meet him when he comes to call, will make it to the wedding banquet. ***Jesus says here that there are those who are baptized, were once declared forgiven, pure, and yet will not be in heaven.***

And so, of the ten virgins who grab their lamps set out to meet a bridegroom, five of them took no oil with them. They were foolish. The other five took flasks of oil. They were wise. They were wise because they anticipated the possibility that the bridegroom might be ***delayed*** in his coming and so *prepared* themselves for that possibility. And he was delayed, and the virgins fell asleep, all ten of them, until it was midnight. And they heard a cry, “**Here the bridegroom is coming!**” But the foolish were low of oil, they went to buy more and while they were away, the bridegroom came, took the wise to the feast, and shut the door. The foolish virgins knocked and said “**Lord, Lord, open to us**.” But he answered, “**I do not know you**.”

The only words the bridegroom speaks in this parable are the most frightening words in the entire bible. God saying, "**I do not know you**." Way back in Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**” Imagine on that day, the day of Judgment opening your eyes and seeing Jesus, and saying “Lord, Lord” and him saying “**I do not know you**.” That will happen to some baptized members of the church. Will it happen to you?

The Wedding Feast is the kingdom of God at the close of the age, and the door is the pearly gates. This sermon is about the lamp and the extra oil. What made all the difference was the extra oil, and the wise virgins having the good sense to go get it ahead of time. What the foolish virgins thought was superfluous, or what they were too foolish to think of in the first place was the extra oil. The wise and prudent virgins got it.

All the virgins have lamps. What it the lamp? The lamp is the Word of God. Psalm 119:105 says, "**Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path**." And in order for the lamp of God's word to be lit, it need's oil, that is sound doctrine, straight teaching. And so a lamp without oil is a bible that isn’t preached, heard, believed, and obeyed. God’s word is sound doctrine, sacraments, solid food…and it gives an oil reserve of spiritual endurance for when the darkness comes. Jesus says about the last days, “**Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved**” (Matt. 24:12-13).

The bridegroom Jesus Christ delays? The church finds herself there right now. The bridegroom is delayed, lawlessness has increased, and the love of many has grown cold. During the reformation there was revival of sound doctrine, an a passion for God’s word that prepared Martin Luther to say against the lukewarm church of his day “here I stand”, and others took their stand also and the Gospel, rediscovered brought the world out of the dark ages into the marvelous light of Christ. The church was ready 1500 years ago; is it ready now? Or are we again lukewarm and lost?

When the bridegroom delays you feel lost. Think about when a child is lost…what’s his natural inclination? **To move to search, to wander around the mall in a panic looking for mom or dad.** Fear and terror set in, but it’s irrational…as if Mom and Dad are going to give up looking and go home for the night. Of course not. They’ll find you; they love you. **But the fear and the terror make the child impatient and he wanders and searches in tears.** So what’s the sound advice every parent is supposed to give their child if they’re lost? Stay put. Sit down and wait for us to find you…we will eventually. But if you keep moving around, you’re liable to be lost a lot longer, or worse, you’ll stumble into a danger that you’re not prepared to face! A danger that could cost you your life, for there are evil men in the world.

So it is, God’s Word teaches that we are to stick to the straight and sound teachings of the true faith until Christ comes again to call us. Stay put! He is coming. It’s not like he’s forgotten about you. Just sit tight so that, when he comes to where you are, you’ll be there for him to carry you home.

And another reason not to wander is because night is coming, and then it will be even harder to find your way. The bridegroom comes at night--midnight even--when ***both*** the wise ***and*** the foolish virgins were sleeping. This is the world we are in today…darkness. The light of God’s teaching is not shining in every corner of society today like it was even 50 years ago. Once upon a time, our society and culture was Christian and proud of it. Once upon a time, to be the mayor of a town, you pretty much had to be an Elder in a church to be given any respect. Now if you are an Elder, you’re suspect.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not popular anymore to be affiliated with Christ or his church. God’s Word is not lit from every home and hearth as it was a 50 years ago. When I grew up, the *only* time God was mentioned in the home was mealtime prayer…now I find more and more homes that don’t even pray together for mealtime. And here’s what it all means: **God’s word is not lit because there is no oil in the world’s lamp. It ran out because it got tired of waiting for Jesus’ return.** And yours is running low also and guess what, Christ will come in the night, when your lamp needs to burning brightest. When society has systematically been snuffing out its lamp for years now…in that case a wise virgin would bring an extra flask of oil. Night is coming (John 9:4) and the world has no light and you need to be able to see when the call to the bridegroom is sounded.

Night is coming. Or it’s already here? God’s clear word is out of season and out of fashion. **Christians cannot walk by the light of the lamp of others anymore because society has rejected God’s Word as a superstitious relic of primitive days we have now “risen above.”** And here’s where many older Christians find themselves today, and it’s very sad. Struggling with their faith. Because when ***they*** were younger the path was still lit, because God’s Word still had some authority in society. Now it has none. And if the only thing that kept your faith alive back then was the faith of your family and friends and society, what happens when they put their lamps away so they can hide their deeds in the darkness? That’s when you have to crank up the oil in your lamp to see even dimly. And the parable is clear, you can’t borrow oil from the wise virgins, you need your own reserve in the darkness of night.

You need more than to own a bible and have church membership, you need to know God’s word and have it in your heart. You need to know truth from error, right from wrong, heavenly treasure from worldly chaff and the Holy Spirit teaches those who would hear. But can’t depend on the world around you to teach you, it is lawless and has been subtly leading unsuspecting Christians away from Christ for years, until now people are so biblically and doctrinally illiterate, that you ask them to explain their Christian faith and they speak unintelligible nonsense. My baby daughter coos more clearly than most people speak when asked to give an account of their faith.

And on the last day, God will ask you to give an account of the faith he gave to you, and goo goo gaa gaa isn’t going to cut it. God is going to ask people to give an account as to why they lived your life as though his scriptures taught nothing (Matthew 12:36). And they don’t get to say, “**Well God, you’re Word wasn’t clear enough, there seven ways to Sunday how to interpret your word, so I just followed my heart**.” Are you going to accuse God of not being clear, that the lamp he gave you gave no light? God not only speaks clearly, he sees clear through every excuse and defense and knows the truth, and He will say, “**Pardon me, you say my word is unclear, that’s a lie**. It’s a lie you tell yourselves and other to cover up and to darken the truth. **The truth is that you didn’t bother to grapple with my Word on the subject in order to find My will there**. You didn’t search the scriptures for the answer when you were confused, nor were you willing to be taught. Instead you thought that you’d spend your time doing things that don’t matter and give no oil for your lamp, and call your own vain and selfish pursuits “faith”.

“My Word,” God says, “Is the ***only*** lamp on the way, and so I have made sure, as the age grows longer, that it is accessible in thousands of languages, various translations free on the internet. Are you confused about baptism? You can do a word search for “baptism” or “salvation” or “heaven” or “hell” and in second find all the references to it in my word. But more important than that, I have given Pastors to my church, who are not infallible, nor sinless, but who you can test by making them prove what they teach is from the bible. They ought to know it, they are professionals and that’s their job.

**You complain that studying my word is too hard and confusing, and yet, you somehow found the time in your life to learn an array of useless hobbies…all the while complaining that you were “too busy” to figure out what my Word says, in preaching or bible study.** And now, the final trumpet has sounded, you come before me, unprepared, having taught and believed the wrong thing in your long misspent life, misrepresenting Me to others. And what’s worse you have the nerve to blame the very *lamp* I gave you “my Word” for your ignorance. I gave you the words of eternal life and you ignored them, and then to add insult to injury you blame Me for your unpreparedness.” And now you say “Lord” “Lord?” No…depart from me, I DO NOT KNOW YOU.

Jesus says in Matthew 12 verses 36 and 37, “**I tell you on the Day of Judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned**.” ///

So the first and final question of all of this is this: “**The wise virgins who were saved were prepared with an extra flask of oil. Where do we get such oil for our lamp?**”

You get the oil from the pure preaching of sound doctrine and the receiving of the sacraments. These are the means of grace Jesus gives his church and promises his Holy Spirit to work in you to create and sustain faith, and to fill up your reserve. You have the Word, the bible, which is a lamp, but the lamp needs oil or else it has no function. It needs to be interpreted by sound doctrine. You need to hear the full gospel over and over and over again, and so your reserve is filled and so that you are prepared for the last day. **Christ died on the cross for your sins, paid your debt and took your punishment**. He sacrificed himself in order that his sacrifice would be preached into hearts through the ears of those who hear, and that it be given into the mouths of those who eat his body and drink his blood for forgiveness. Those who believe have a flask filled with the pure oil of sound doctrine.

Do you have a reserve flask of oil? Yes you do. You who stick to the simple faith and teachings of the apostolic church, you who treasure God’s word as the only lamp in a world of darkness, you need not worry or be afraid. These are not words of regret, but words of comfort and joy that can carry you to the end. In this lawless world, you may feel sometimes like a child lost in the mall without his parents. **Sit tight, stand firm in the faith handed down to you from your forbearers in the faith. Do not swerve to the right or to the left.**

Christ says, “Many will come with new ideas to get you off your duff and searching for me in all the wrong places and making you frantic. They will come with flashy signs and wonders and promises I did not make, and as a result you may not be at the rendezvous point when I call. Do not listen to them, avoid them, for they are calling you off the path setting aside your lamp. Be prepared: Sit tight and have peace, peace in the faith as it was taught to you, and do not be afraid…I will come and save you.”

Fellow believers in Christ…Waiting for him is not long or boring. Waiting for the Lord is a virtue and it is *yours* as his church fills your flask with oil again and again as he delays to come. He will come again, he does not leave you as orphans. May his name be praised from our hearts to our lips, and from our lips to the ears of those who have yet to hear. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.