

“Be Prepared” **St. Matthew 25:1-13**

November 22, 2020

SERMON 1952

by Michael David Henson

Our sermon text is from St. Matthew 25:13, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today’s Epistle from 1 Thessalonians (5:1-2) begins, “Concerning times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” When it says that the Last Day comes like a thief in the night, we understand that a thief does not announce the day or time of his upcoming crime. Similarly, **Christians don’t know the date or the time of our Lord’s return on the Last Day.** As I mentioned in last week’s sermon, the Lord is not slack in keeping His promise. Jesus Christ will surely come again; we just don’t know when.

Now just in case you think that you might cleverly try to figure it out, you need to know that our heavenly Father has kept that information to Himself. Even the human nature of Jesus didn’t know the day or the hour. No one knows. Therefore, we must live with the fact that we will not know, until that day arrives. And then when that day comes, it will be too late to do anything.

Today’s Holy Gospel introduces to us, **not just the suddenness of the return, but the finality of the Last Day.** All of the wedding party was waiting for the Bridegroom. When He comes, they must trim their lamps and go out to meet Him. According to the parable, five of the virgins are not prepared to meet the Bridegroom. When they attempt to secure the oil of which they are lacking, they find that it is too late. The Holy Gospel says, “...and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.” Though they banged on the door and prayed to get in, the time for grace had ended. In today’s Epistle, it says in verse 3, “...then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”

Today’s Scripture readings present us with **an urgency of being prepared before that day comes.** Furthermore, there is no second chance, if you should find that you are not prepared. The deadline is hard and fast. Jesus warns us in advance of the importance of preparedness, when He says, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

So how do you prepare for our Lord’s second coming?

If there is a hurricane coming, then there are certain tasks which you perform and supplies which you acquire. You board up the windows and nail down everything which is loose. You acquire a supply of food and water to last several days. And then with your tasks completed and goods acquired, you wait.

When we compare this **one-time hurricane preparation** to the preparation for

our Lord's return, they aren't really comparable. Let's see, I was baptized. Check. I was confirmed. Check. I am a member of a church. Check. Alright, I did everything I was supposed to do, just wait. Unlike hurricane preparation, spiritual preparation is not a supply checklist of one-time past actions.

-Holy baptism is not a completed work which you do. Holy Baptism is a work of God, performed once, but which is to be trusted in each and every day of your life.

-The instruction which culminates in your confirmation, is designed to teach you about the gifts God gave you in your baptism. And once again, we are to rely upon those baptismal gifts daily.

-Finally church membership is not an association which you keep active by paying your dues of occasional attendance or church offerings. It's not that having an active membership card will admit to the marriage feast.

If there **is an English test** coming up, you get prepared by going over the materials. You consider yourself to be prepared if you know the right answers to the test questions. However, this preparation is not similar either. Admission to the spiritual wedding feast is not achieved through a certain level of competence. It's not that those who get a grade of A or B, are considered prepared. We do WANT to become more familiar with the facts of the Holy Scriptures, but being prepared is not simply knowing the right answers.

In the book of James (chapter 2) there were some who acknowledged the existence of the one true God. James tells them that this knowledge will not save them. He mockingly declares, "Even the demons believe {that there is one god}" and they are not saved. The diploma showing a past competence in religious subject matter will not save. Furthermore, the present execution of true Biblical answers will not save on the Last Day either.

The five foolish virgins had maintained their church membership as they hung around with the five wise virgins, but that didn't help. They knew the correct answer that everyone needed oil to travel with the bridegroom to enter into the wedding feast. They had purchased a lamp and it would seem that they had a supply of oil at one time in the past. Nevertheless, at the end, their lamps were going out. Due to the suddenness of Christ's Second Coming, they were unprepared. Due to the finality of the Last Day, they were not able to rectify their mistake. Though the five foolish virgins thought they were prepared as they waited with the five wise virgins, they were not.

So how do you prepare for the return of Christ?

When Jesus says, "Watch, therefore..." He uses a present tense verb! **He is teaching us that we need to be presently engaged in the task of watching.** The one who is stationed at the wall and told to watch for the approaching enemy, does not complete his job. He is to continue to watch. Yesterday's watching does not prepare for today's attack. You must continue to watch today. Similarly, there are no completed spiritual supplies of faith which you can store up, like water or bank account.

The oil in the parable of the ten virgins is faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Jesus Christ there is no admittance to heavenly glories. Faith is a gift of God that comes through the preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments. Those foolish virgins do not have faith. They have been hanging around with other church members. The others can't tell that they aren't really one of the marriage party. By their lamp which they hold, these foolish virgins have the outward words of prayer.

Another word for faith or belief is trust. Trust is not a work that can be accomplished or awarded like a certificate. Trust is not a good or supply that can be stored and used later. Trust is always in the present. **If you formerly trusted in Jesus, then you are not presently a believer. If you know that Jesus is the world only Savior, but you don't presently trust in Him for salvation, then you are not prepared for Christ's return.**

What a shame it would be to know the truth, but not trust in it. There are many who don't know the truth. Many false religions teach salvation through the fables of false prophets. They tell you to be a member of the Mormon church or the Roman church. Many cults and denominations teach their people to trust in their good works or their love. They say things like, "Do the best you can" or "Try to be a better person."

You, however, sit in the pew and hear the proper distinction of law and gospel. You know that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone who suffered and died for your salvation. You know that those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. **It would be a shame if you had the outward lamp, but really had no faith in Christ.**

Jesus said, "Watch." You are not prepared for the thief, if you watched for him yesterday. And you are not prepared for Christ's return if you formerly believed, but now you live in your sin or trust in your "churchly" actions. The lamp of sitting in a pew does not admit to the heavenly banquet. Only a present faith in Christ saves.

What a shame it would be if you knew that the believer repents of his sins, but then you were no longer repentant. Suppose you knew that the absolution spoken by the pastor was "just as valid and certain even in heaven as if God, our dear Lord spoke it Himself," but you didn't trust in that forgiveness. No, it wouldn't save. The man drowning in the lake but holding to the life preserver is saved. But if someone convinces him to let go of the ring, or he trusts in his own swimming ability to do the best that he can, he will drown. Today's Epistle says, "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them... And they shall not escape.

St. Paul knew that there is a danger for believers to fall asleep at the wheel. The believer who quits watching, thinks "peace and safety" and faith falls away. St. Paul knows that the Scriptures say that **he that is faith-filled unto death, I will give the crown of life**. Christians need to be vigilant. St. Paul exhorts us, "Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8).

-You have been made a son of God through your baptism into Christ. Don't forget that you were washed and made holy. Daily trust in Christ by living as a baptized child of God. You are a son of Light, do not engage in the sinful works of darkness.

-When you have allowed yourself to sin, confess it and return to Christ's forgiveness. Trust in God's promise made to you in your baptism to forgive you all your sins.

-You have been taught the Lord's Supper gives you Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins, don't just walk through the actions. Trust in Christ's words and ask the Lord to strengthen you in faith toward God and love toward your neighbor.

-Don't just hold onto the lamp of prayer, believe that God answers your prayer. Don't just know the right answers, trust in the one true Savior from sin. Take comfort in the words of God by hearing them daily.

In the first of the ninety-five theses, Dr. Martin Luther wrote, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ``Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." So here in St. Matthew 25, when our Lord said, "Watch, therefore..." our Lord and Savior willed that the entire life of believers to be one of watching. When the Scriptures say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31, 1 Jn 3:23), our Lord and Savior willed that the entire life of the believe to be one of faith-filled believing, so that when our Lord returns you will be prepared.

We live in the time of grace. Our Lord is giving out the oil of faith in the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper. Through a living faith in Christ we are prepared for our Lord's return.