

## “Ready of Not!”

(Matthew 25:1-13)

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

**Dear friends in Jesus,**

When we were children we played a game called 'Hide and Seek'. The one who was 'IT' counted to a certain number while the others went to hide. At the end of the counting the person would shout out, 'Coming, read or not!' Those who had made the proper preparations were 'safe', while those who had not planned carefully were 'caught'. A simple game which required good preparation and planning.

Life is filled with emergencies for which we are either 'ready' or in which we get 'caught.' They may be times of extreme happiness or deep sorrow or just the ordinary experiences of life. The way in which we react to them will be determined by the way we get ourselves 'ready' for them. What we do today is dependent on what we did yesterday, and today we are setting the stage for tomorrow.

Jesus tells a very interesting story. His final words of this story, "**Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour**", is not a means of terrorising us but rather a call to 'readiness'. Jesus had used other figures of speech to express and impress this same truth. He pictured God's kingdom as coming like a "**thief in the night.**" And now the 'bridegroom' comes unexpectedly. How events in our lives so often come unexpectedly to us! Temptations come, and we have no chance to change them. Tragedy strikes, and everything turns upside down. Successes and joys come, and we flounder in our new-found happiness and prosperity. "**Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**" We are to be ready not only for the very worst but also and especially for the very best.

The scene before us is a wedding feast. What wonderful preparation Jesus has made. How joyfully he paints the picture of being close to him in friendship with him. "That you may have life abundantly" were his words — "life to the full" which is a constant wedding feast, and finding it centred in Jesus. How easily we become submerged and frustrated in the details of daily living! So often tortured by our mistakes, haunted by our failures, overdriven by our ambitions, and inflated by our pride! How much does Jesus really mean to us? How much of his power and presence are we consciously aware of in our day by day living? How active is his Holy Spirit in directing our decisions and actions?

To "take up the cross and follow him" is the cost for us, but we must never forget the huge price Jesus paid on the cross of Calvary to save us from all our sins, thereby lavishing on us his personal forgiveness, peace and love. Joy and happiness for us comes from sins forgiven and a cleansed conscience, so that we may be his special brothers and sisters invited to his special wedding feast. Each day he loves us and cares for us and now our lives are full and meaningful because of him.

Our Lord not only talks about a wedding feast but also of the lamp bearers for the bridegroom. Pictured as ten lovely maidens he tells of their waiting for the bridegroom. They carried their lamps on large sticks. The lamps had oil for fuel and a rag for a wick. All came and were waiting, and to the observer all appeared quite ready for the coming of the bridegroom.

They all have some similarities. Outwardly they are very much alike. Each is dressed in a manner appropriate for the occasion. As far as we know the wise had no different outward appearance from that of the foolish. Their lamps were probably very similar too.

Each of them knew why she was there. Each had been invited to be a lamp bearer, and that meant having a lamp and a supply of oil. Each knew how much oil she had taken along. None of them knew exactly when the bridegroom was coming. The wise knew no more about this than the foolish. They each knew only that they must wait and be ready.

But here the similarity ends. Now the difference in preparation becomes apparent as it always does in life. Some are ready and some are not; and the great division takes place.

What happens in the moment of crisis? A destiny is decided. It is decided on the basis of the preparation for such a moment. At midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Aroused from their sleep they trimmed their lamps. The lamps of the wise burned brightly for they had made good preparation; but the lamps of the foolish spluttered and went out, and they had nothing with which to refill them.

Now the preparation is put to the test, especially at midnight. We are never more prepared or stronger in our faith than the moment of preparation and faith we can carry in an emergency. A shallow faith is not enough. That's why we need to live in God's life-saving Word often. That's why we need to worship God regularly and receive nourishment and strength for our faith through that Word and the celebration of Holy Communion. That's why we need to have Jesus in the centre of our hearts and lives. That's why we want to share our faith constantly with one another.

If we lack the inward resources of faith and forgiving love no one can transfer them to us. How cruel it seems when the foolish say, "Give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out," to hear the wise reply, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves!" Experience teaches that such an answer is not cruel, but inevitable.

Are character and faith transferable? How often we might wish it so. A faithful mother cannot will it to a wayward and rebellious child. There is a point at which each one of must meet God. Life is not assessed on those around us, but on the fibres of our own souls. If we do not have the oil to replenish our lamps they go out.

"And the door was shut." Opportunity comes to an end. Time just hurries on. Talk and pleas mean little. We would often want to live another hour again, but we cannot. The door is shut!

In his mercy and love and compassion our bridegroom comes to us in his own special way. Perhaps, today, in your life and mine he comes with sudden joy and gladness, and we want to be ready for him. Yes, let us be ready with our hearts and lives warm and receptive. Let's get excited that Jesus lives with us now, and that he will take us to live with him forever in everlasting heaven,' **Amen.**

**The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck 8 November 2020