



Sermon, Sunday, November 12, 2023

“The Parable of the Ten Virgins”

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:1-13 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other young women came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Introduction: Two attitudes of believers preparing for the kingdom of heaven

Today is the 24th Sunday after Pentecost. Today's text, Matthew 25:1, says that the kingdom of heaven is like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Ancient Jewish wedding customs were very different from ours today. In ancient times the groom had to go to the bride's house to pick her up. However, the groom's return to his home was delayed due to unexpected events. When this happened, the guests at the groom's house had to wait tediously, and it was especially difficult for the bride who had to greet the groom.

According to today's text, when the groom's arrival was delayed, all ten virgins waiting for him became drowsy and fell asleep. Perhaps all ten virgins were tired from the wedding preparations. In the middle of the night, there was a sound that the groom had arrived nearby. All ten of the sleeping virgins had to run out and greet the groom with song and dance. But a problem arose. Five of the foolish virgins had no oil to light their lamps. If they could not light their lamps, they would lose the right to participate in the wedding banquet, so they asked their friends who prepared oil, “Can't you share some oil?”. However, the five wise virgins who prepared the oil for the lamps refused the request of their friends who did not have the oil for two reasons. The first reason given was that if oil was shared, everyone would run out. The second reason given was that one could buy oil at a store in town.

However, while the five foolish virgins went to the village to buy oil, the groom arrived. The five wise virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom entered the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. The five foolish virgins who went to the village to buy oil asked their master to allow them to participate in the wedding banquet, but the master refused, saying, “**Truly I tell you, I do not know you.**”. This is '**the parable of the ten virgins**' in today's text.



But why does the writer of the Gospel of Matthew tell this parable? Today's text talks about our preparation and attitude for the second coming of Jesus, which we often forget or overlook in our religious lives. As Christians, we must examine whether we are well prepared for the second coming of the Lord.

Body: What does it mean to keep awake?

In this parable, the fundamental reason why the ten virgins went out to meet the groom with their lamps was because the bridegroom arrived late. In this parable, the bridegroom is Jesus. The late arrival of Jesus, the bridegroom, means that His second coming has been delayed. In fact, Christians in the early church believed that the second coming of Jesus would occur quickly. However, when the second coming of Jesus was delayed, their faith was greatly shaken.

There were two main reactions of early Christians to the delay in the second coming of Jesus. First, to prepare for the second coming of Jesus, they neglected their daily lives and focused only on church work. Second, there was disbelief in the Second Coming.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray for the kingdom of God to come, and in the Apostles' Creed we confess our faith that "**from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead,**" but there are some who do not take these confessions seriously.

The '**parable of the ten virgins**' in today's text is a warning to these people. People who do not have hope and confidence in the second coming of Jesus in their religious lives are like the five virgins in today's text who did not prepare the oil. The master refused to allow the five foolish virgins to participate in the wedding banquet. Today's text says this at the conclusion of the parable. "**Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**" (v.13).

Today's parable offers us two conclusions. First, today's text exhorts us to "**Keep awake.**" Because we do not know the day and hour of the Lord's return, we must always be alert and prepare for the Lord's return. However, according to the parable in today's text, not only did the five foolish virgins not enter the wedding banquet, but the wise virgins who entered the banquet also fell asleep. The difference between the two groups is whether they prepared the oil in advance or not.

In fact, what '**oil**' means in today's text is not the core of the parable. Many scholars have different opinions on what '**oil**' means. They say it is '**the Holy Spirit, faith, and church service.**'. There is also an allegorical interpretation of today's parable. However, in today's text, '**oil**' is not the core of the parable of the ten virgins. Rather preparing oil means being '**spiritually awake.**' So what does it mean to be '**spiritually awake**'?

The answer relates to the second half of verse 13 in today's text. In other words, '**keep awake**' means that we can be spiritually awake when we are clearly aware that "**we do not know the day and the hour**" of the Lord's return. On the contrary, it also means that only when we are spiritually awake can we accept the fact that we do not know the day and hour of the Lord's return.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

"**The day or the hour**" in verse 13 of today's text refers to the second coming of Jesus. The second coming of Jesus means judgment. Also, the Lord's judgment in the last days distinguishes between truth and lies, between a true life and what is not a true life. Furthermore, the kingdom of heaven will be completed at the time of the second coming of Jesus.

However, according to today's text, we do not know "**the day or the hour.**" Generally, when people don't have something set in stone, they become lax in preparing for it. For example, if there is no confirmed date for an important exam, people are less nervous about preparing for it.



The faith of the early Christians, who had anticipated the imminent return of Jesus, also became loose and disorganized as the Lord's return was postponed. However, the early Christians were people who experienced true life through Jesus. The reason their faith was shaken was because the Lord's second coming was delayed.

In fact, many people have greater faith when they can directly see and hold on to clear reality. If we look at it that way, we might think that if we clearly know the day and hour of the Second Coming, we can have more certain faith, but this is not the case. **This is because, for Christians, the moment we live is experienced as the time of God's presence.**

In Matthew 4:17, Jesus proclaimed the gospel, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Jesus vividly experienced the imminent kingdom of heaven and shared it with the world. **The gospel that Jesus preached is the presence of God and the grace of God in our present lives.**

Early Christians experienced the kingdom of heaven that Jesus proclaimed. **The basis on which early Christians were able to boldly tell the world that Jesus was the visible God was their experience of gaining life through Jesus.** People who have this kind of life experience confess Jesus as God. This is why we can live more dynamically in the present without even knowing the day and hour of the Second Coming.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Life belongs to God. It's not ours. The death of human life is clear evidence of this. God will complete life in the end. When we wait for the second coming of Jesus, we wait for the moment of life's completion. Additionally, the only way we can participate in God's life in our finite lives until the end comes is through liberation from sin and death through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, our hope for the Second Coming does not weaken because we do not know the time of the Lord's return. Rather, we can live a more dynamic life of faith because we do not know how the kingdom of heaven will arise in our lives. **Of course, for this to be possible, we must confess and experience that Jesus gave us our lives.**

Conclusion: Please remember the grace that Jesus gave into our lives.

Now let's summarize today's message. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Please do not feel frustrated or afraid because you do not know the time of the Second Coming. And even though our lives are hard, I hope we can handle them and persevere, because the kingdom of heaven has already come into our lives.

We are people who have experienced the presence of God through Jesus. And we are waiting with hope for the time of its completion. In other words, if our religious life is influenced by environmental factors rather than Jesus Himself, we will be no different from the foolish virgin who prepared a lamp to meet the bridegroom but failed to prepare oil. I hope that we can all experience joy and hope in our present lives because of Jesus. I also hope that we can live with hope for the kingdom of heaven that He will complete at the time of the Second Coming.

