

Read: ⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'" ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' ⁹ "No," they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰ "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut."

1. Wedding preparation.

As a pastor you see all kinds of things happening as people prepare for a wedding. *Who usually takes on the responsibility of organizing a wedding? Is it the bride or the groom – or the mother of the bride?*

Ladies...how do you think the father of the groom would go organizing a wedding? Beyond getting a suit and speech ready for the event, how do you think they'd go with all the organizing and preparations? *And how do you think the bride and her mother would cope with that?*

Did you know men have been organizing weddings since biblical times?

In Jewish weddings it was the groom and his dad that got to work on wedding preparation. It started with the groom building a home for him and his bride –on the back or on top of his father's house. When His father was satisfied that their new home was ready (without a bridal inspection of the kitchen and bathroom) the procession to the bride's house for collection would begin. In fact it was all a bit of a surprise for the bride who didn't know when her husband to be would show up.

That's the picture of what's happening in Jesus' parable today – minus one notable exception...

2. Who's missing in this parable? [The bride!]

There are 10 virgins, who we would call bridesmaids, but where is the bride? It was the bride that would go out to meet the groom and his procession when the time came.

But Jesus' parable isn't ultimately about a Jewish wedding.

- It's a picture of the cosmic wedding between the bridegroom and His bride – which is Jesus and His people.
- It's a picture of the return of Jesus in glory on the Day of the Lord - judgement day.
- A day that leads to a wedding feast for some and to divorce and rejection for others.

The question is where are you in this picture of Jesus and His bride? Do you see yourself in those wise and prepared bridesmaids going into the wedding feast? *Why is that?*

Is it because no-one really wants to consider the other option? Being locked out of the banquet is reality for those who Jesus finds un-prepared. Jesus is the loving Lord and

saviour, but He will also judge sin and unrighteousness and bolt the door to the wedding feast closed forever. Let's pray...

Pray: *Holy Father, humble each one of us today in your mighty presence. Shake up our false sense of security. Show us the dread of your judgement upon all our sin and complacency that we might come to fully appreciate the implications of your glorious grace at work in all who turn to you in faith. Lead us to seek the oil of faith, hope and love that we would be prepared and able to stand at your coming. We pray in Jesus' Holy name. Amen.*

All ten bridesmaids in this parable are professing Christians – they all look like Christians and say they are Christians. Here's the difference. Five are wise and prepared for Jesus' coming; five are foolish – stupid and unprepared for the return of Christ.

It all comes down to the oil!

3. For the bridesmaids it was oil that would keep their lamps burning while they waited for the groom.

These lamps were torches with oil drenched rags wrapped around them. The oil didn't keep the lamp burning indefinitely though – they needed extra oil. They needed to have access to more fuel if their lamp was going to stay alight and keep burning as the bridegroom approached. What does this mean for us?

Psalm 70 says ⁴ *But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help always say, "The LORD is great!"* ⁵ *But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; LORD, do not delay.'*

The Psalmist says that the oil of preparation and wisdom for the Lord's return is a lowly and yet joy-filled relationship with the Lord. **It's about FAITH!** Faith that submits and looks to God for everything.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the oil is that sure confidence that the Lord will return – and that he'll return with all those who have died in Christ. This oil of preparation is **the oil of HOPE.**

The prophet Amos says that the oil is **compassionate justice** towards others. And it comes with a heart stopping warning...

Without this oil you are unprepared and in real danger on the *Day of the Lord*. In fact the Lord isn't even interested in your worship, offerings, music or singing if your attitude towards others has no compassion or sense of justice for their welfare. If that's the case the Lord views your worship and singing as nothing more than *noise and a horrid stench that he won't even acknowledge let alone reward at His banquet table*. That's when the holiness of God becomes outright dangerous!

This oil is about your attitude and actions towards other people created and formed in the image of God. **It's the oil of LOVE.**

Faith, hope and love reads like a summary of life as a disciple of Jesus:

- Prizing Jesus and clinging to His word as your first love.
- Cherishing all that it holds out to you as if it's your greatest treasure,
- Living in the will of God and avoiding everything that contradicts His word and will for your life and your treatment of other people.

What's God saying to you today about your life as His disciple? What's the Holy Spirit saying to you about your preparation?

4. The foolish and unprepared Christians pictured in the parable had no reserve of oil with them.

They weren't prepared. Their kind of Christianity was half hearted. The kind that takes the word of the Lord absolutely seriously...***sort of, when it suits, if it's what you want to hear.***

The kind of faith interested in all the benefits of membership, having all its needs met, but not interested in bearing the fruit of faith, not interested in bearing the fruit of compassionate love, not interested in hope unless it's about personal hopes and dreams. That's the kind of Christianity that ends up locked out of the Kingdom with loud weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

When crunch time hits for these people they beg the wise and prepared Christians for oil. But it's too late. Their lamps are out, the oil has run dry.

You can't borrow someone else's faith at crunch time. It's not theirs to distribute – oil only flows into your life through being in the holy presence of God. Oil flows into the humble who receive it with thankful and obedient hearts – because they understand its infinite value for their life now and eternally.

I know a family who lost their child under tragic circumstances. There are no words to say when this happens. They used to go to church, but the oil had run dry over decades and the lamp had gone out.

Yet in their grief God called and invited them back into his presence. They would make their way from the back row of the church to the altar, shaking with tears as they held their hand out for God's precious oil of Communion in the presence of angels, archangels and all the company of heaven (including their child). Week by week this happened and yet they kept coming regardless.

By the grace of God their lamp of faith and hope and love was re-lit. Week by week it burned brighter and brighter to the point where they could say confidently, **"We have hope again."**

Who is God asking you to invite back into his presence that their oil might be replenished again? Is it you? A loved one? A friend or neighbour? The oil is available and free to all if they will only come and receive it. The Apostle Paul says, *"My God will supply all your needs."* (Phil 4)

Picture your life:

- Being fuelled by the living Word of God;
- Strengthened and nourished through the presence of Christ in Holy Communion;
- Filled to overflowing by the Holy Spirit.
- Walking obediently & joyfully in the will of God...

Then picture your life without these things. Without these grace-filled treasures the oil fuelling your lamp gradually reduces from a roaring flame to the flickering light of a small candle. And if it's still neglected then the flame dims and extinguishes all together.

This isn't a popular message, but it's the truth of God's word.

You may like to imagine that Jesus will forever be standing at the door knocking and that you'll always have the opportunity to invite him in or take him seriously.

Jesus invites you to imagine a different reality today. He invites you to consider that one day that opportunity will be gone. That one day the foolish and unprepared will cry out at the door only to be held accountable to their own choices and decisions and hear Jesus the righteous judge say, *'I don't know you.'*

5. So is there any comfort from Jesus today?

Absolutely!

- The good news is that the door hasn't been bolted shut for eternity.
- The good news is that Jesus tells you this with a great sense of urgency that you might know afresh the wonder and glory of His grace at work in your life. We won't understand or crave for the treasures of Christ and His cross if we don't grasp the consequences, the finality and the complete isolation that ***is coming*** on account of sin.
- The good news is that you've had a peak into the future today. Jesus started this parable with the words, *'At that time the kingdom of heaven **will be like** ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom...'*
- Jesus is saying *'This is how it will end. These are the issues. I'm telling you ahead of time so that you can be prepared now for when I do come for you – and I am coming for you!'*

- *Be discerning and wise so that by my power at work in your life, by my grace which will keep you from falling, by the oil that I will fill your life with – you will avoid stupidity and foolishness and instead live and walk in my grace. That you would know for certain that my grace is sufficient even in your weaknesses and inadequacies.'*

The best news you could hear today, is that there is an opportunity for God to turn things around for you. There is an opportunity to refuel your lamp and keep the tank full. There is opportunity to turn around from a **'sort of...when it suits me or meets my needs'** kind of Christianity and instead live each day fuelled and ignited by the gifts of God at work in you.

God has filled you with the oil of his love at your baptism; he has ignited that flame of faith by His Holy Spirit. Now he wants you to keep that lamp burning and to keep drawing on His unending supply of oil. He wants you to be prepared for the wedding banquet that will have no end.

People hostile to God are looking for a divorce; **your heavenly Father is planning a wedding.**

He offers you today everything you need to keep your lamp burning with the roaring fire of faith, hope and love until the bridegroom arrives.

Will you cherish this time of preparation and be ready for the Day of the Lord? Amen.