

Check Your Faith

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November 12, 2023

INI - SDG

Matthew 25:1-13 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² "Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. ³ "Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ "but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ "But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶ "And at midnight a cry was *heard*: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming¹; go out to meet him!' ⁷ "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ "And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ "But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹ "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' ¹² "But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour¹ in which the Son of Man is coming.

Some of you know we've been having problems with our van. Joe Brown helped us take it down to the Kia dealership. While I was talking to the guy at the service desk, I admitted that we sometimes go a couple hundred miles over before getting our oil changed. The man replied saying that was nothing. He said that they often get people coming in five or ten thousand miles past the oil change.

That of course is a foolish thing to do. You spend tens of thousands of dollars on a car. You should want to take care of it. You should watch that mileage, and keep your logbook, make sure you do the regular maintenance. You especially ought to watch the oil. Change it when it needs to be changed.

This is what Jesus is speaking about in our text. The Lord has given us salvation, forgiveness of sins, the word of life, baptism, the Lord Supper and so much more. These things are precious. These things need to be taken care of, not ignored, and forgotten about.

When Jesus tells us to "watch," he is using the word the way your mechanic would you tell you to watch your oil. Keep on eye on it. Check the levels. Make sure you are ready and prepared.

The key word in our text today is "watch." With this word Jesus doesn't mean that you should stand around staring at the sky. Rather he means that we should always be prepared. The difference between the wise and the foolish is not that the wise were awake and watching but that they were prepared. Before they went to sleep, they made sure they had enough oil. The oil that Jesus speaks of here is faith.

1 Peter 5:8-9 **8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.**

We are vigilant (watchful) when we stand firm in the faith, not when we stand staring at the sky.

When the disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven, they stood there watching the sky. The Angel came down to tell them there was no need to watch the sky. Jesus will come again, and you will not miss him when he comes again. The important thing is to go get those things done which need to be done.

If you are having company over to your house, you don't need to stand at the door watching for them. You know that when they arrive, they will ring the doorbell. Rather than standing at the door, you can prepare. Clean the house. Cook supper. Hide the dirty laundry in a closet.

This is what the angel is saying to the apostles. Don't stand staring at the sky. Go get the things done you need to do to be prepared. Even though Jesus tells us to "watch" what he really means is that we should always be prepared.

When I was in Germany at the German Free Conference. Some of the pastors at that conference were obsessed with the book of Revelation. They wanted to find out what each word meant. They wanted to know exactly what all these things mean, so that would know we he is coming.

“We have to be ready.”

But that isn't at all what Jesus tells us in our text. He tells us too always be ready. Watching for Jesus isn't a matter of knowing all the signs. Rather it is a matter of making sure you are always ready.

The women, wise and foolish, are peacefully sleeping. No one misses it when the groom arrives. All are awakened and told that he is here. We don't need to set our alarms to make sure we know when he is coming. We simply need to make sure we are prepared before going to bed.

Watch therefore in this context means, not to stand guard, but to be prepared.

1 Peter 4:7 7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

The essence of being prepared is faith.

Paul reminds us in:

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, (be on the alert) stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

Those who stand firm in faith are ready for Christ's coming. The oil Jesus speaks about is faith. The thing we are to check on is our faith. We heard in our Old Testament reading how the Jews thought they were ready for Jesus coming but their faith was empty and vain. Their rituals were outward shells. Their oil was empty.

Revelation 16:15 15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.

Every time I read this verse, I'm expecting an adjective. Keeps his garments clean or white. I have to reread it to realize there is no adjective. We are simply to keep the garments. We need to hold on to them.

Revelation is referring to the robes of righteousness that Jesus gives us through his death. It is not up to us to make them or to keep them clean, only to hold on to them. We remember the parable of the king's wedding feast. In that parable the man who lost his robe was cast out into outer darkness.

When Jesus tells us to watch, be prepared, he is telling us to simply check that we still have our white robes. Check that we are covered in the righteousness which he has given to us. Without this we will not enter the marriage feast. That righteousness that he has given us is pictured as oil in our text and robes in revelation, but oil or robe the point is make sure you have it.

The best way to prepare is to practice.

On August 17th 1943, the USAAF 3rd and 1st Air Division were supposed to work together to bomb Schweinfurt. Colonel Curtis LeMay commander of the 3rd division was worried about the possibility of fog. He relentlessly forced his men to practice taking off in low visibility situations. General Robert Williams, commander of the 1st division, did not. The 3rd division was ready and took off without a problem regardless of the dense fog. The 1st division was not ready. They were stuck on the ground for three hours while they waited for the fog to lift.

The best way to be prepared is to practice.

Our Lord Jesus has given us a means to practice. Where are the young women going in the parable? They are going to the marriage feast of the Lamb. We have a foretaste of this marriage feast in the Lord's supper.

We prepare for the marriage feast of the lamb every time we come to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's supper is many things. One of those things is practice for the day of judgement.

Just as Jesus tells us to be prepared for his coming in our text, so also the apostle Paul reminds us that we should be prepared before coming to the Lord's supper.

Luther reminds us what it means to be prepared in his catechism.

"He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these simple words, 'given and shed for you for the remission of sins.' Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say."

In the same way we are truly prepared for Jesus coming on the last day. This is how we check the oil of our faith. We examine ourselves.

What are some of the indications that our faith oil might be low?

If anyone comes to the Lord's Supper thinking, "I've done this or that sin, but it's okay I can keep doing that sin tomorrow," let him be aware. That person is not prepared for the Lord's Supper and is not prepared for the final day of judgement. Such an attitude is not repentance. Where there is no

repentance there is no faith. John the Baptist reminded people to repent and bear fruits worthy of repentance. True repentance will be followed by a desire to change.

If anyone comes to the Lord's supper thinking, I want the Lord to forgive me, but I will not forgive this person or that person, let him beware. That person is not prepared for the Lord's Supper or for the final day of Judgement. Jesus warns us that those who will not forgive will not be forgiven. We cannot ask for the Lord's mercy will refusing to show mercy to others.

My confirmation kids know exactly which day they have to say their memory work. Consequently, there are always a few who think they can wait and "prepare" Thursday morning. They would probably be better off if I did not tell them when I was coming to hear their memory work. Then they would have to prepare every day.

We do not know when Jesus is coming. We need to practice every day to be prepared. Practice true repentance. Practice true forgiveness for others. Practice true trust in Jesus.

The most important thing you can do for your car is to watch your oil. Check it regularly. Make sure you change it when it needs changing. The wise will similarly regularly check their faith.

Am I a sinner? Did Jesus die for my sins? Do I believe his promise, even the promise that his very body and blood are present here? The one who answers yes to these questions is ready. He is ready for the Lord Supper. He is ready for Jesus to come again.

These Sundays in November are dedicated to look forward to the coming of Jesus. As we look towards the last day, we began with hymn 200 "I Know that My Redeemer Lives." We need to begin and end with that confession of faith. Because Jesus lives, we don't have to fear his coming. Because he lives, we will live also. Because he lives, we are justified, that is forgiven. He lives and because he lives, I shall conquer death.

Amen