

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 25:1-13

One day, a priest and a pastor were standing by the side of the road holding up a sign that read: "The End is Near! Turn around before it's too late!"

One speeding motorist yelled out his window; "Leave us alone, you religious nuts!" as he drove his brand new sports car by at a high rate of speed. A few seconds later, from around the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

"Do you think", said one of the clergy to the other, "That maybe we should have just put up a sign that says: "Bridge Out", instead?"

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ, is the object of derision and ridicule among some people, and yet it is, one of the most important doctrines of the Bible, and therefore something that we should take a closer look at, especially during the up-coming Season of Advent.

Now as you know, the Season of Advent is not that far away, it begins on Sunday December 3rd. It is during this season, that we should consider both the birth of Jesus which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, and the promise that Jesus made in John's Gospel chapter 14, verse 3 where he tells His disciples, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

I will also take it one step further and read this passage from Matthew's Gospel chapter 24, verse 30 through verse 31, Jesus said: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see, 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory, and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

The parable of the 10 bridesmaids in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25, verses 1 through 13, which we heard this morning, is an excellent and illustrative example of Christ's teaching, regarding His return.

As is the case for all the parables, it is written in metaphor, form. Parables use commonly understood circumstances, to point us to an understood truth, so that we might learn something about God, His methods, and His purposes from the parable.

Let's take a few minutes to look into this parable this morning, and see God's message for us, regarding the second coming of our Lord.

As this story opens, we see the similarities of the people involved. Notice that in this case, all were young women (probably about the same age) they were invited to a wedding celebration by the bride, and all had lamps as they were to meet the bride-groom, which was customary in those days.

These 10 young women were "bridesmaids", so to speak. Their job was to attend to the bride and keep her company, until the bridegroom arrived.

One of the most exciting aspects of a wedding in Biblical Times, was the arrival of the bride-groom.

As was the custom of the day, the bride-groom kept the time of his arrival secret. There was a festival like atmosphere at the wedding, because bridegroom tried to arrive at the wedding, at an

unexpected time, while the wedding party of the bride, bridesmaids, and guests tried to be on the lookout for his arrival, and catch him coming to the feast.

So we have ten bridesmaids, each had a lamp, each dressed in the same garment, each claimed to have been invited, and each was there for the same purpose.

None suspected that there was anything wrong with any of the others, but there was a flaw that would soon be revealed.

Now this is a picture of the church in our world today. Think about it. Look at the many different denominations, throughout the world, and the many millions of members of these churches, whose members claim to be Christians.

These folks claim to be going to heaven, claim to be outwardly working for God, but not many of them are really prepared for Christ's return.

And like, the 5 out of the 10 bridesmaids in the parable, they are not prepared for Christ's return to this world in power and in glory, in fact Jesus even makes the comment, that His return will be at an unexpected hour, like a thief in the night.

I am sure that if we could have been around during the time of Noah just before the flood, there would have been a great difficulty in determining who was right with God and who was not.

I am sure that the places of sacrifice were filled, when the religious services were being held, but religion of that time, was imitation religion.

Well, the same can be said of, Christianity today. Christianity, can and is being imitated. The religion practiced by some, can be and is counterfeit. (Think of some the denominations in America, that claim to be Christian, that have gone world-wide) but in fact they are nothing more than cults.

All of these bridesmaids in the parable told by Jesus, looked alike, and dressed alike, but there was a difference.

In the church today, there is a difference between the saved and unsaved. The foolish bridesmaids had no oil for their lamps. The wise bridesmaids brought extra oil for their lamps, hence they were prepared and ready to meet the bride-groom.

Oil in the Bible is a symbol of the Holy Spirit as we see in the Book of 1 John, chapter 2, verse 27. He writes: "As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him."

This word, "anointing", refers back to the Old Testament use of oil for infusing the gifts of God, like that of the laying on of hands and the blessing being passed from one person to another. For example, before the young man, David was anointed as king over Israel, oil was poured out upon his head by the prophet Samuel, and Samuel blessed him.

The five foolish bridesmaids were without oil in their lamps. This symbolizes that they were without the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. And because of this, they would not be allowed to join in the wedding celebration.

Entrance into the wedding celebration, as Jesus tells it in this parable, is symbolizing entrance into the celebration which is to occur at the Second Coming of Christ.

Those who are not prepared, when Christ returns to this world, will not be allowed to join in the celebration. For it is written in scripture, as the Apostle Paul tells us in the Book of Romans chapter 8, verse 9: "But you are not in the flesh: you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to him."

If only 5 out of the 10 bridesmaids in this parable were prepared, and if this parable is a metaphor, for the church, we have to wonder, how many of our number are actually prepared to join in the celebration at Christ's return.

I want you to listen to these numbers of a recent survey of the Church here in America, this is from a couple of years ago, so really not much has changed.

Only 1 American out of 12, attends church regularly.

7 out of 10 children, will quit going to church by age 15.

20% of those surveyed, never pray.

25% of those surveyed, never read their Bible.

30% of those surveyed, never attend church.

40% of those surveyed, never give to any cause.

50% of those surveyed, never go to Sunday School.

70% of those surveyed, never give to support missionary work.

And 95% of those surveyed, never witness to anyone, to bring others to Christ.

In a way, as I read through these numbers, it doesn't surprise me. There are main-line denominations out there that have gone from being a "church" to being "a social club", with anything that goes.

When there are main-line Christian denominations out there teaching (for instance) that Jesus Christ is just one of the many paths, that lead to the same place (in other words "universal salvation"), how then, can one claim to be a Christian? Remember, Jesus was very clear about this: He is the "Only Way to the Father". No one else is.

If you look at the landscape of the Church in America today, we are in great need of Christian teachers and missionaries who will go out into the domestic fields, now ripe for the harvest and rescue the perishing.

There are millions of people in this country, today, who are like, the foolish bridesmaids in the parable told by Jesus, when He returns for His bride, the church, the foolish will not be ready when He (Christ) returns.

Truly, there is a comparison to be made between the wise bridesmaids who were prepared to join the marriage celebration and the wise church members who are prepared by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the return of the Lord.

And truly, there is a comparison, to be made between the foolish bridesmaids who were barred from joining the wedding feast and those who claim to be Christians today, but at heart, are not.

There is another comparison to be drawn from this parable. All 10 of the bridesmaids fell asleep both the wise and the unwise.

So too, the church as a whole today, has fallen asleep, regarding the Second Advent or the Second coming of Christ.

Many Christians think that the Lord will never return because the delay has been so long. I would say to them, "Wake-Up!". Jesus warns us in another parable of this inappropriate reaction to what seems like a delay, and the consequences of assuming the Lord Jesus Christ is not coming back.

In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24, verse 48, Jesus said: "But if that wicked slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed', and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know."

Christ is coming again, though we do not know not the day or the hour. Notice in the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, that the time of the, "shout", alerting them, to coming of the Bridegroom was at midnight, the hour least expected.

The Bible does not tell us when the return of the Lord will come, other than that the return will happen when is least expected, as was the case with the midnight arrival of the groom in the parable.

The Bible tells us that the Lord's return will be sudden and unexpected. And for the unprepared, the consequences shall be like the intrusion of an unexpected thief in the night.

While the counterfeits of today are passing themselves off as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, now, just as the bridesmaids without the oil for their lamps, are eventually discovered.

Counterfeits can manage for awhile, but in the hour of need, they will lack what they need most. They do not have the oil for their lamp, they do not have the Holy Spirit in their heart. And when that day comes, when Christ returns, they will not be allowed to enter the celebration because of it.

The foolish bridesmaids tried to get into the wedding celebration, but the Lord answered, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you." How is this answer going to make those feel, who say they are Christians, but who are not. They will be greatly shamed.

OK, so what does all of this really mean for us today? Having gone over this parable for today, I think it is safe to say, that all of us want to be numbered among the bridesmaids, who are prepared and ready for the coming of the bridegroom, at an unexpected hour.

As I have said before, I really and honestly believe, that the return of Christ is not that far away. With events that have been taking place in world, I believe that the time for the return of Christ, His

second coming is drawing near. There are some in here who will not see His return, and there are some in here who will see His return.

Ok, Pastor every generation has thought they would be the generation of Christ's return. Yes, I have heard that too.

We don't know that day or hour, but we can be prepared. As Christians, we prepare ourselves by our faith. By God's grace, we are baptized in to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are prepared, we are like the bridesmaids who had the extra flasks of oil for their lamps.

As we await the return of Christ, know that our salvation is secure, therefore, we will go about our day to day lives doing the work that God has called us to do, paying our bills, taking care of our families, and trying to make a better life for ourselves and our families, yet at the same time we are to live, looking toward the future, and the return of Christ.

By faith in Christ, your lamp is filled, trim your lamp-wick, do what God has called you to do, know that you live in God's grace, therefore, let your light so shine, so that others may be brought to the wedding celebration of Lamb, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, We do not the day or the hour, as we await your return to this world in power and in glory, help us to remember, that by God's grace through faith in you, our lamps have been filled to the brim. By faith in you, help us to re-affirm our faith and to be vigilant, awake, alert and ready for your return to this world as we go about our day to day lives. All this we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.