

Message by David Amber 08/11/20 (adapted from bible.org/series)

Text Matthew 25:1-13 & 1 Thessalonians 5 Vs 8. (Please read first)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ -Amen

THE GOOD OIL

How many of you have ever run out of fuel. It would appear that every year at least several hundred thousand people call for help because they have run out of fuel. Besides flat tyres, dead batteries, misplaced keys, running out of fuel ranks right up there as the reason people call for roadside assistance. One might understand this happening a generation ago when fuel gauges were not entirely accurate, and when all the warning lights of our day were non-existent. But now we have warning messages that our fuel is running low, and then additional progressively urgent warnings indicating just how many estimated miles of driving we have left. One must say that most people who run out of fuel are “without excuse”.

Before we get to the parable, we would do well to remind ourselves of the context. It was in response to the disciples request to know what sign would signal our Lord’s coming at the end of the age. Jesus spoke to them about the last days. He made it clear that the end would not come immediately, but only after considerable time and troubles. Our Lord issued various warnings, because during these troubled times there would be many interlopers, who would seek to turn men’s attention and affections away from Jesus, the true Messiah.

Although we are meant to recognize the “season” of our Lord’s return, we are not meant to know the exact time “not the day nor the hour”. This is consistent with God’s dealings with this world in the past. Noah had spent many years building the ark. He knew the season of divine judgment was near, but he did not know the exact day. Then one day God gave orders to board the ark. It was God who closed the door, and then he sent the flood. The people of Noah’s day had no early warning that the flood was coming. When Judgment came it came quickly, and without warning; there was no opportunity for those under judgement to change their minds and board the ark. Since no one can know the day nor the hour that the Lord will come, we must be constantly in a state of alert, ready at any moment.

I have often seen firemen, policemen and emergency service workers in stores buying goods, but they always have their portable radios in hand ready to rush out if word of an emergency is received. We too, must be ready, Jesus tells us. His coming will be at a time we don’t expect and may appear to be trouble free, much like the day Noah and his family entered the ark, (I’ll bet the sky was blue and clear all day long). When Jesus returns, people will be going about their normal routines because there will be no signs of imminent danger. We therefore must be ready at all times.

Just what does being alert look like? In Matthew 24:45-51 Jesus describes how he desires to find his disciples when he does return, “going about the tasks he has assigned them”. The **faithful and wise** know that their master may not return for some time, but they also know that they have been instructed to feed and care for their fellow man. And so they use the time of the master’s absence to fulfill their mission. And because this is normal routine, their master will find them at their appointed work when he returns, even though the hour is unknown. The **foolish** interpret their masters prolonged delay very differently. They conclude that their master’s return is yet in the distant future. They may also assume that they will be given some forewarning, so that they will have time to “clean up their act” in time to look good for their master. And so they misappropriate their master’s resources and ignore their master’s instructions.

There are several things we need to consider before we attempt to interpret this parable. *First*, we need to recognize that this is a selective account. There are many details omitted. From where is the groom coming?, Where are the virgins waiting?, What will happen there?. What role do the lamps play in this ceremony and celebration?. And, perhaps most notable, where is the bride? She is never mentioned. It is obviously the groom who is central to this story (after all, it is about the coming of the Messiah at the end of the age.) *Second*, we may not be looking at a typical wedding. I doubt that in most wedding celebrations the groom would exclude bridesmaids for forgetting to bring oil for their lamps or arriving late as the five virgins did, would keep them from gaining entrance. *Third*, we must not think of these lamps in terms what we are familiar with. The lamp was more likely to be more of a torch, a larger brighter lamp similar to those used held by those who came in the night to arrest Jesus near the garden of Gethsemane. From what I have learned this lamp was not like any of the oil lamps we are familiar with. There was no glass chimney, no neat wick or adjusting device, and no attached tank in which oil would be stored. It was more like a large flat bowl with a rope like wick that could be attached to a pole and used as an outdoor torch to illuminate ones steps in the darkness. *Fourth*, We need to rid ourselves of the false conception that the five foolish virgins ran out of oil. The text is clear on this point; The five foolish virgins “never brought any oil with them”. I would understand that the lamps were transported without oil in them. If they travelled in the daylight, these lamps would not have been needed on their journey to the wedding place. The reason the wise virgins brought oil was because the oil was carried in flasks and added to the lamps at the time the time need.

Not only is the text clear about the foolish virgins bringing no oil with them, it is difficult to interpret the parable if, indeed, they did run out of oil. “The difference” between the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins is “**Salvation**”. These five foolish virgins were not once saved, but then “ran out” of salvation. They were lost, and never had it. They never had oil. They were just empty lamps, they looked useful, they seemed to give promise of light, but they never produced it. Let us not seek to supply what Matthew has purposefully omitted (any oil) in a way that makes us feel better about the story. We are not supposed to feel good about these five foolish, oil-less virgins.

As we consider the interpretation and application of this parable, we should begin by observing that it is but one of several parables in this discourse. All of the parables have to do with what we do and don't know about the coming of Christ at the end of the age. Jesus assures us that we should be able to discern the season(the general time frame) of his return, but we will not know the day nor the hour, therefore we must be constantly in a state of alertness.

What then is the unique contribution of the parable of the ten virgins? Several clues to the unique message of this parable should be noted. *First*, we see that this parable describes what the “Kingdom of Heaven” will be like at the time of the second coming. Some would say that this parable describes the condition of the Church at the second coming, for Jesus is speaking here (as in this entire discourse) to his disciples; He is not speaking to his adversaries, the Jewish religious leaders, nor to the crowds, thus, this parable, like the others in this section, should serve as a warning to The Church. *Second*, we should observe that for some period of time the five foolish virgins were almost indistinguishable from the five wise virgins. The foolish virgins looked just like the wise virgins. They all were invited to the wedding celebration, and they all came expecting to participate in the wedding. The five virgins were no different from the five wise virgins, except for one thing, “ the foolish virgins brought their lamps but no oil”. *Third*, none of the ten virgins knew when the groom would arrive, and all ten slept when he took longer than expected to arrive. We do not find the five foolish virgins asleep, while the five wise virgins are busily at work. All slept, and all were awakened by the news of the groom's approach. The emphasis here is not really on working, as it is in the

earlier and later parables. This is because our salvation is not the result of “our” works but “his” work on calvary. *Fourth*, we are initially surprised (and even disappointed) that the five wise virgins will not share their oil with the foolish virgins. This is not because the five wise virgins were selfish. In the context of the story, sharing their oil may have meant that all ten would run short of oil. But when we come to the interpretation of this parable, we can see that the saved cannot share what they have in Christ with the lost. The lost will not enter Heaven based on “the salvation” others have received. Each person is accountable for their own choices. *Fifth*, we find it emphasized here that once our lord returns, there is neither the time nor the opportunity for the five foolish virgins to change their course of unbelief. There is a “Point of no return”, after which one’s rejection of Christ cannot be reversed. In our text, the five foolish virgins are not given time to reverse their folly, once the groom has arrived. They had their opportunity, and they lost it. Now it is too late. *Sixth*, The outcome is either Heaven or Hell, and thus the key element is **Salvation**.

Taking Matthew’s words literally, the difference between the foolish virgins is this. The wise virgins had oil for their lamps, while the foolish virgins did not. The wise virgins had the opportunity to obtain oil, and did so. The foolish virgins had plenty of opportunity to procure oil, but did not.

Jesus is also warning in this parable that there will be a number of people who look like Christians, who associate with Christians, and who even think they are Christians, who will be shocked to learn that they are not saved at the return of our Lord. Indeed, we should remember that when Jesus spoke these words of warning in the parable of the ten virgins, Judas was among the disciples, and Judas was not a believer. Surely his true spiritual condition came as a great shock to the eleven.

I believe that the five foolish virgins had no oil for the very same reasons people continue to run out of fuel, even when the flashing message on their instrument panel tells them they are. *We don’t believe the warning signs*, We don’t think things are as bad as they are reported to be. “I must have more fuel than that!”, or, “ I’ve gotten this message before, and I’ve always made it to the fuel station before running out”.

Those who run out of fuel are lulled into a false confidence by the fact that everything appears to be fine at the moment. The engine is running smoothly; there are no preliminary chugs or sputtering and we feel confident in our choice not to purchase fuel. Don’t be lulled into a false sense of security. He will come at a time when it seems we are just doing fine.

Those who run out of fuel are those who wrongly suppose that they will still have plenty of time to get it later. We know when our fuel gauge is low. Good Grief!!, we can see the flashing lights on the dash, but we lull ourselves into thinking that there is still plenty of time to deal with the problem. Those who think they will have other chances to come to faith in Jesus are making a very dangerous assumption. The coming of our Lord will be sudden and unexpected, and when he comes, all chances of changing our course have been forfeited and ends our opportunity to turn to him in faith.

We must therefore be prepared now (and from now on) by acknowledging our sins, our helplessness, our need for **salvation**, by trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our place. Being ready means, among other things (and especially in this parable), trusting in Jesus, and having our sins forgiven.

Must we wait until the coming of our Lord to learn, much to our dismay, that we were not really saved? God wants to know for certain that we are saved. He wants us to be fully assured that our sins are forgiven and that **salvation** is certain. He wants us to be confident, because we are saved and we know it.

Those who are Christians have a hunger for God's word

Those who are Christians now see spiritual truths, to which they were blind as unbelievers

Those who are Christians have the internal witness of the Spirit

Those who are Christians desire to know Christ more intimately

Friends, do these things which characterize Christians characterize you? Do you have these "vital signs" of spiritual life? If not, then confess your sin and trust in what Jesus did for you on the cross of calvary. He bore your punishment, and he offers you his righteousness and eternal life. Don't wait until it is too late to acknowledge that you have "no oil". Trust Him now. "For **salvation** awaits".

Amen

The peace of God that transcends all human understanding keep our hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. - Amen