

## Sermon Transcript for the Last Sunday of the Church Year, November 21, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, we have a wonderful parable of Jesus again, and it starts out like it often does, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." Now, remember, when we talk about the kingdom of heaven, more often than not, we're not talking about a place, we're talking about a person. And in this case, it is a parable for the church, the kingdom of heaven. And this is a parable that talks about us and who we are. There are 10 virgins, five wise and five foolish. Now this is not, as is understood by often, it's not, okay, the five wise are the church and the five foolish are the people outside of the church. No, what this is really saying is all of these five, these 10, are within the church, that some who are part of the physical body of Christ will not actually enter into the kingdom of God.

Now, that should not lead you to be afraid and wonder if you are part of the kingdom, but it should cause you to think, how does one become a foolish virgin or a foolish member of the church? And that is by coming and looking to your own efforts and your own glory and your own righteousness, rather than looking to what God has done for you. Now, you notice in this parable, it all hinges upon the coming of the bridegroom. That's where the celebration really lies. Now in today's culture, in American culture, when we have a wedding, the big event is when the bride comes down the aisle, right? That's when everybody stands and everybody's excited they get to see her dress and how beautiful she looks. And everybody's anticipating the bride coming down. But here, the important one is the bridegroom.

The bride is foolish or wise. All of them fall asleep. But the real important part is the coming of the bridegroom, which is Christ himself. And the bride, the bride is all of us. We are the church. The church is the bride of Christ, and he brings all who are part of the church into the kingdom of heaven. And yet, let us look at those virgins who are waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. Some of them do not even bother to bring oil with their lamps. Now, how foolish is that? You're preparing for this marvelous event to take place. You're excited for the coming of the bridegroom. And yet you don't know when he is going to come, but you don't bother to have any oil in your lamp. And so what is this oil? The oil is the righteousness of God.

We talk in 1 Thessalonians about the breastplate of faith and love, that breastplate of righteousness, which God gives us, the righteousness of Christ, which claims us and brings us into the family. And so, our lamps, our lives, are filled with the righteousness of God. So what this is saying is there are some who are filled with God's righteousness and they are ready in joyful anticipation for the coming of the bridegroom. But there are others who have no righteousness, who claim to believe in Jesus, but they don't actually believe that He's going to come back. They don't actually believe whether or not He forgave sins. They don't necessarily even believe in sin. And you might think, "That's crazy. We're members of the church. Why would we think anything different?" And yet I can guarantee you, there are bodies of Christian believers out there who don't really care whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. As odd as that seems, that's not the important point.

The important point is whether it just tells us a story that God is love. Some sort of generic love that has no definition, and is whatever you want to put into it. Now, I know that sounds crazy, but there are people that claim to be Christian, there are denominations that claim to be Christian, that teach that. Not only that, we all need to be careful not to look to our own efforts for our hope of salvation. Because when we look at the virgins, think about this, the wise and the foolish virgins all fell asleep. In other words, we, even though we are part of the church, and even though we believe, we get lazy, we get worried, we get fatigued and we maybe think, "Well, I don't need to really worry about my righteousness right now. I got plenty of time before God comes again."

And so there is a danger. Nobody and nothing can snatch you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. However, you can choose to walk away from it if you want to. And the way you do that is by ignoring His gifts and not looking to Him for your comfort and your grace and your hope. And so we should all be hungering and thirsting for the Word of God, which sustains us and fills our lamps with the oils of righteousness, with the oil of faith and love.

And so this is a call for the church to be awake, to be ready. See, the end of time is near. Now, Christ could come back tomorrow, or it could be a hundred years from now, or even a thousand years from now, I don't know. But I guarantee you this, we should live each day as if He is coming back tomorrow, because we don't know how long our lives will last. As it says, that our lives are but a breath. We're here today and we're gone tomorrow. So who knows what may happen? Who knows what you may face tomorrow? Are you ready, is the question, and what makes you ready?

The blessed thing is that God, the bridegroom, could come without any warning, and the wise and the foolish virgins would be without hope, because they were asleep and they'd miss it. But God sends His messenger out ahead of time to wake everybody up. "Look, I'm coming soon. Be ready." So in His grace, He sends His Word on a regular basis. He gives us His Word so that we might listen and we might wake up and be ready for His coming, that we might know our hope and where it is, where it comes from, because the Lord can come, like it does come, like a thief in the night. Very few of us are going to be ready for the day that we die. It could come today, and we are to live as if it were our last day. Not in fear, but in rejoicing. Because think about this. The end of the world is something to rejoice in for us as Christians. It's not something to be afraid of, it's not something to cower in fear about, it's something to anticipate with joy. If God comes today, what a blessing. All my aches and pains will be gone. All my fears and frustrations are over. All my hurt and anxiety is finished. There's finally going to be peace in this world. I don't need to worry about the political nonsense that is going on, I can be at peace. And I get to see my Lord and all of those who call upon His name, and we get to celebrate this marriage feast forever. Why would I not want that day to come? So when we talk about the end of the world, or the end of our lives, it's not with doom or gloom or fear, it's with joy and rejoicing.

And if you cannot look to the end of your life with joy, then it's time for you to wake up and hear what the Word of God has to say to you, that we are not destined for wrath, but rather we obtained a salvation through Jesus Christ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with Him.

And then what are we called to do? Encourage one another and build one another up. See, the days are evil. We've been reading that for a while now, we've been looking and seeing. The days are evil and there is a lot of chaos in this world, and we could look at it and be depressed. I know sometimes I look at it, I go, "Man, what is going on? And why do I have to live in this foolish world? Why do I have to deal with all this chaos?"

And sometimes that can lead me to really be discouraged. But God says, "No, no. We are"... In this Isaiah passage, God talks about this new Jerusalem that He is building. And it has two fulfillments. One, yes, there is a heavenly home that God is preparing for us. It is the new Jerusalem where there is Christ Jesus, and we are dwelling in His mansions that He has prepared for us, and we will celebrate the feast of the lamb forevermore, of which we get a foretaste right now. But that heavenly kingdom that He gives to us, that is the new Jerusalem. It is a joyous, wonderful, marvelous place to be. But until that time, until He comes, we here in this church are the new Jerusalem.

This is His kingdom that He has created. This is where we receive the blessings of God, where we are encouraged by His Word, where we receive His body and blood, where we remember our baptism, we hear the confession of our... We confess our sins, and we hear that absolution, that we are forgiven for the sake of Christ. This here right now is a foretaste of the kingdom of God. We are now members of God's kingdom, and this is His dwelling place. And so we get a taste of the new Jerusalem, a taste of everlasting life, a taste of the hope and joy of salvation, here, when we receive His gifts. But what we receive here is just a small bit of what is waiting for us in paradise.

And so yes, the end of the world is near, but it's not to be afraid, not something that we should fear. But we should be awake and we should be aware. In other words, we are called to live sober, mindful lives. We are called to dwell on the Word of God, to allow that Word to transform us, to allow the Word to give us hope in the midst of chaos, and to be ready to share that hope with all that we come in contact with, so that we might encourage one another and build each other up. Because there's a world out there that is in darkness and we have the light of Christ. So let us wake up. Let us be ready. Let us be vigilant. Vigilant in our practice of faith, in prayer and supplication and reading the Word, vigilant in our joy of our salvation, vigilant in our witness of the confidence that we have in Christ Jesus, and vigilant in the reception of His gifts.

Not because that's how we earn His favor, but because we already have His favor and we are so excited and look forward with anticipation to the coming of the bridegroom. See, the problem with the foolish ones was not that they fell asleep. We all do that. We all fall short of the glory of God. The problem of the foolish was they didn't look to the right source for their hope. They asked the other virgins, "Give us some of your oil." Well, I can't give you my righteousness. God must give it to you. They didn't go to the right source. If they had gone to the bridegroom and said, "We forgot to bring oil. I know that was dumb, that was foolish, and we ought not to have done it. We should have been prepared, but we weren't. Will you please, in your grace, let us back, let us into the kingdom?"

And I'm sure the bridegroom would've said yes, because they went to the source for their hope. So let us always go back to the source, the Word of God, the promises of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, which He said, we are not destined for wrath. Christ was destined for wrath on the cross, we are not. We are destined for joy, for hope, and for peace. May that joy and that hope and that peace be and abide with you always, now and at the end, forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.