

The Parables About the Importance to be Ready
9NT5

AIMS:

1. To ready ourselves, NOW. To “watch, - and be on our guard”. This in effect, requires that we have to *constantly* prepare ourselves, so that we can accept being called to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. By looking at the parables Jesus told, we can understand the beauty of that which the Lord has prepared for us who are ready. We can also get a feel for what is in store for those who are not ready.

VERSE:

“It is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’”
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

OR

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his works”
(Revelation 22:12)

LESSON OUTLINE

This lesson focuses on 3 main parables which are mentioned in the Gospel of St Matthew, referring to the importance of being ready:

1. A short introductory parable at the conclusion of Chapter 24, regarding the loyal and faithful servant.
2. The parable of the 10 foolish and wise virgins (Chap 25).

It is important to note here that the people or servants about whom Jesus discusses in each of these parables are believers. That is, us as Christians. Jesus mentions two categories of servants in each parable. The loyal servant vs the unfaithful and evil servant. The wise virgin vs the foolish. Which category do we fall in? The importance of the category we fall in is SIGNIFICANT. How do we move into the righteous category of servants, and inherit the amazing reward which He has in store for us.

You may wish to focus on only one parable (the wise and foolish virgins), or structure the lesson to go through both parables.

FOCUS/ACTIVITY:

To get the class thinking, divide the class into 2 groups.

To the first group, ask them to think of what it would feel like if they turned up to school, and realised that they must sit for a very important exam, which they did not know about and for which they are completely unprepared. Or the servant can actually take a make up test with you and ask the class to do it without any warning.

To the second group, ask them to imagine each of them is holding either a lantern, or a battery torch. Ask them to imagine that it is the end of the world, there are no more stars, moon, or sun. It is completely dark. The only way in which you can be identified and rescued is by flashing your lantern or your torch to the rescue team who has to find their way to them. What would you do if you were holding a lantern but the oil ran out, or if the battery for your torch finished.

Ask the class generally:

“What questions will the Lord ask each one of them when He comes, to identify if they can enter the kingdom of Heaven”?

“What will you say to the Lord to convince Him that you are ready and want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven”?

The Parable of the Faithful and Wise Servant
Matthew 24:45-51. (See also Mark 13:33-37)

The essence of this parable as with each of the other parables, is to watch and be ready. (see also Mark 13:35)

What caused the unfaithful servant NOT to be ready?

Firstly, he did not think that the master would come anytime soon (Matthew 24:48). This caused him to be careless with obeying the commands of his master. Unless we are expecting judgement day then we also will become lax in obeying the commandments of the Lord, and careless about falling into sin.

Secondly, the unfaithful servant started eating and drinking with drunkards. That is mixing with the wrong crowds, and indulging with the friends of this world. Remember: James 4:4; *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God!”*

He then beat his fellow servants, rather than looking after them. This refers to the lack of love that we may have towards our fellow Christians. Rather than welcoming newcomers in our Church, or supporting those who are in some kind of need, we rebuke them for being different or helpless.

Jesus places this unfaithful servant in the same category as the hypocrites (whom the Lord hates!), and advises him that his punishment is severe. Jesus describes that person as being cut in two, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (The weeping and gnashing is because the servant will realise that it is too late. Once you have been judged and thrown into the hell, there is no coming back)

The faithful servant on the other hand, is one who obeys his master, and is diligent with the responsibilities he has been given. He does not challenge his master's commands, or argue, or find excuses such as being too tired. It is this type of servant whom the Lord will give much responsibility – He will be ruler and will have authority over the household, and responsibility to feed and to give to his house. This servant will be blessed and given even more responsibility – over all his master's goods.

For us to be ready, we have to be obedient. We must expect to be on our guard always.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

Matthew 25:14-30

This passage is read during Tuesday of the Holy Pascha, as well as the midnight prayer to remind us of the Second Coming of Christ, and to watch and be ready.

The Kingdom – is often portrayed as a marriage between Christ and His Church. The marriage will be consummate at the end of the age, when the Bridegroom returns to escort His Bride (the Church) into the eternal banquet.

The Bridegroom – represents our Lord Jesus Christ

The Lamp (vessel) represents our repentance

The Oil – symbolises the practice of virtues (good works), namely almsgiving and having mercy on others.

The Wise Virgins – are those who practice charity and mercy in this life. They are the 'lit lamp', indicating the pureness of their soul.

The Foolish Virgins – are those who squander God's gifts on themselves.

They all slumbered and slept: Both the wise and the foolish virgins slumbered and slept. The wise virgins were prepared to receive the Bridegroom and were able to rest. Their refusal to give the foolish virgins oil does not show a lack of love. Spiritual preparedness cannot be given or borrowed. If we do not prepare ourselves spiritually for the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be just like the five foolish virgins who were not ready for the Bridegroom's coming and were not allowed into the wedding party.

Give us some of the oil: an indication that good works can save the person who does them. They cannot be lent to others and after death the time for good works has ended. *Therefore repent oh my soul as you dwell on earth for dust does not give praise and among the dead no one remembers and in Hades no one give thanks (agpeya prayer)*

I do not know you: For those who lived with God on earth and had a fellowship with Him, eternity is just a continuation of their life on earth. Whereas for those who did not have fellowship with God, it is not surprising that God tells

them He does not know them

Let us therefore not resemble the foolish virgins in the hardness of our heart, - where we have done nothing good to our brethren (the oil) to light out lanterns. We spend our days loving disgraceful desires without remembering the happiness of Paradise. In so doing we belittle the Heavenly Kingdom.

HOW CAN WE INCREASE OUR OIL ?

The Lord made it clear that His brethren are those who are poor, needy, weak and vulnerable (Matthew 25). On judgement day, Christ will judge us according to the degree of pure love we offered to His brethren who were hungry and thirsty; imprisoned and naked; strangers and sick. Our love for the brethren must be practical and effective. *“My little children,” writes St. John, “let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18).*

St. Bishoy:

The righteous St. Bishoy, whose heart was inflamed with the love of God, was approached by his disciples seeking to meet and see the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Bishoy placed this request before the Lord in his prayers. Several months later the Lord accepted the petition and guided St. Bishoy to a certain mountain in the desert where He would manifest Himself to the monks. St. Bishoy gave instructions to his disciples to meet at the designated place. As the monks passed on their way they saw an old man, feeble and worn out, asking to be taken along by the monks. But the monks, anxious to meet Christ, ignored the pleading of the old man. In the last group of the monks was St. Bishoy. When he saw the old man he was moved with compassion and carried him on his back to the destination. When St. Bishoy met the monks at the place where they were to meet Christ, he straightened his back, and the stranger disappeared. Christ had sat at the roadside, waiting to be helped. In their haste to see Christ the monks had forgotten to be Christians

May the Lord give us the perseverance to be constantly on our guard, and open our hearts to see the beauty of the Gift He has in store for us who love and obey Him. May He guide us to do good to our brethren, and allow us to inherit the eternal Kingdom of Heaven which He has prepared for us.

Glory be to God forever.