Matthew 25:1-13; Matthew 7:21-23; Parable of the Virgins I. The Joyous Occasion II. The Wise Virgins III. The Foolish Virgins

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever gone on a trip only to forget the one item that was really necessary? In your excitement to leave, for example, you neglected to put your suitcase in the trunk of your car. So you arrive at your destination only to find out that you have forgotten something that is critical! In a similar way, today we find 10 virgins who are invited to a wedding, but only half are prepared. The other half have forgotten something that is critical- vital to their calling. As we return to our parables this morning, we come to one of the more sobering matters. This parable is going to be directed at the church once again- reminding us that we need to be ready for the groom to return at any time. In other words, this is an inner church warning! The application will be straightforward- are you prepared for Jesus to come back? The context of Matthew 25 is one that focusses on the return of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus has made it clear that no one knows the day or the hour. His return will be sudden, without warning and unexpected for many. This theme of the sudden and unexpected return of Jesus is carried over into our parable this morning. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ warns the church to be ready for His return at any moment with the parable of the virgins.

**I. The Joyous Occasion**

In our first point, we consider the joyous occasion that sets the stage for our parable. Once again, Jesus grounds his parable in a cultural setting of a grand wedding. As we saw a few weeks ago in Matthew 22, the wedding feast is a long event that covers multiple invites as well as multiple locations over many days. So in our parable, we start in v. 1 with 10 virgins who have been invited to go out and meet the bridegroom. These 10 virgins were likely from the family or friends of the bride- so we can call them bride’s maids. These bride’s maids would accompany the bride from her parent’s house to the house where the wedding would take place- which was normally the house of the groom’s parents. So we have a festive party that travels with the bride from the bride’s parent’s home to the home of the groom’s parents. These bride’s maids were not only to attend to the needs of the bride- to accompany the bride on her journey, they had a very specific and important task at the wedding and following reception. These virgins were the light bearers. They had one main job- one particular task- and that was to provide the necessary light for the bridal party. Remember that there were no streetlamps during this time- no electricity in each home- so those tasked with bringing the light were not only important because of the festive gathering- but by shear necessity! It is wise to see clearly during your wedding ceremony as Jacob would tell you! So these 10 virgins were invited and given a specific task- provide the light! Now the lamps were large cup shaped torches made out of clay- with a wick or piece of cloth that sat in the oil on one side and burned on the other. The wick had to be trimmed so that light output and oil consumption were optimized. So these 10 virgins go from one house and travel to the next- the final destination is at hand and the wedding is soon to take place. Waiting at the door- only to be let in when the rest of the party arrives. They are ready to meet the groom- or so it would seem. Remember, these virgins have one main job! They are the light bringers! It would be like the key holder to lose the key! Or like an ink pen that does not write! So let those who are called to be salt- be salt! Those called to be light- shine like the light! Otherwise they are useless and do no good!

**II. The Wise Virgins**

So after introducing us to 10 virgins, Jesus immediately makes a distinction. A division between the wise and the foolish. 5 were wise and 5 were foolish. The wise virgins are known for the fact that they have oil- they are prepared for their task of bringing light. Instead of going directly into the house where the wedding was going to be held, they had to wait outside for a time. There was a delay between the invite and the actual arrival of the groom. As you know in middle eastern culture, time is more fluid. But suddenly in verse 6 the cry goes out. At midnight- the darkest part of the night- the groom is finally on his way! So the wise virgin trim their lamps, add extra oil to their lamps, and get ready. They do their job well and thus they are ready when the groom arrives. They are welcomed into the feast- and I would add that they were found faithful! Well done, good and faithful servants! Enter into the wedding feast prepared for you! So in v. 10 we find that these 5 faithful virgins who were ready enter into the wedding feast and the door was shut! The application is pretty straight forward- we are to be like these wise virgins! How? By being ready- as v. 13 puts it- to watch! The application is simply this- watch and be prepared for the groom to come! But who is the groom and when is He coming? Well, remember that Jesus has been talking about His own return. When Jesus the King returns, He will be taking His Kingdom with Him. Those who are ready will be welcomed into the wedding feast. How are we to be ready? Well, by having a true and living faith! Not just by giving a public profession of faith- but by having true faith! Remember that true faith is living, active and enduring! So the wise virgin is someone who is ready for Jesus to come back- and when He does appear this person will stand by faith! They will be ready- as they watch and pray! They will be praying- come Lord Jesus! They will be looking for His arrival with expectation! We can also learn about the manner of Jesus return from this parable as well. His coming will be sudden and without warning- as v. 6 puts it. At midnight, the cry will go out. For the virgins, the time of the groom’s arrival was unknown. But when He does come, there will be a cry and a shout! The arc angel will sound the trumpet and the whole world will hear the summons! Next, we find that the arrival of the groom follows a time of delay. So in v. 5, the virgins were forced to wait. There was a significant delay between the announcement and the arrival! So it is, that the church has been waiting for over 2000 years. We have received the summons- the wedding is at hand- and yet here we are waiting! But the delay between the invite and the actual arrival must not lead to doubt! For the groom will certainly come! Jesus is on the way and He will appear and we need to be ready! But the question remains, when Jesus comes back, will He find faith on the earth as Luke 18 asks?

**III. The Foolish Virgins**

For not all have faith! Not all of the virgins were wise! Not everyone will be prepared when Jesus returns! This applies to those who are externally members of the church as well! This parable is about those who have been invited- those who have heard the gospel call- who are visibly present with the elect! But in our parable, half of those virgins were foolish and in v. 3 we find that they took no oil for their lamps. Because they were not prepared for the arrival of the groom, they ended up missing out. In v. 10 we find that these 5 virgins were busy with other things- busy trying to buy oil for their lamps- so that when the groom came, they were nowhere to be found! Ultimately- as v. 10 makes clear- they were shut out of the kingdom and missed out on the feast! Now to be clear- these virgins did not bring oil- or in other words- they did not have true and living faith. What was necessary to enter into the kingdom was missing- they did not have the mark of those who would be welcomed to the wedding. When the groom came, they were busy doing other things. They were occupied with the cares of this world if you will. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, they were running around preoccupied with other things when the moment arrived! So in this parable, lack of oil corresponds to lack of faith. These virgins are like the seed sown on rocky soil- or the seed among the weeds. There is no depth and no fruit because the word is choked out by the cares of the world. It may appear for a while that they were wise virgins- they had light for a little while- but time has a way of proving the heart. Their light was extinguished because they had no faith- no oil. So what was the result? Well, these foolish ones were locked out of the kingdom. The door was shut in v. 10- and the door would not be opened again. When Jesus returns on the last day, He will not give any extensions or second chances! Those who are not ready for His return will be cast out! As the man who was not properly dressed for the wedding back in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22. These will be locked out of the kingdom- kept outside and forced to remain in the darkness! Not only will they miss out on the great wedding feast, but they will also receive the sharp rebuke! As v. 12 says- the master will tell them, I never knew you. Let’s read from Matthew 7:21-23 again. Notice the same words- I never knew you. The finality of it all is clear. Once the door is shut- it will remain shut! Once Jesus Christ comes back, no more people will be let into His kingdom! The division is also clear. Half of the virgins were wise, the other half were not! You cannot live off the fruit of others- you cannot steal the oil of others on the last day! You must have your own true faith! No one will be able to deceive Jesus- God is not mocked! He knows His own and His own know Him! But praise God- the door is still open! There is still time! The groom has not yet arrived! So sinner- wake up now! Get your oil before the groom returns! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! Today is the day of salvation- do not wait for tomorrow- for tomorrow may be too late! Once Jesus appears in glory- once the groom arrived- the eternality of all men will be sealed! The time to enter into the feast is limited- the window is closing! Flee the coming wrath! Repent and believe, and the door will be open for you!

To conclude, the coming of Jesus is certain and it is near. It may be soon- so be ready and watch! Have your lamps lit! Or it may be yet some time before Jesus comes back, so bring extra oil and do not grow weary in doing good! This parable can strike your heart in two ways. It is a warning- be wise and be ready so that when Jesus comes you may stand by faith! But also, be of good cheer, Jesus is coming, and He will gather all His chosen on into His kingdom! As we now come to the Lord’s Supper, the same promise and warning applies! The Lord’s Supper is for all those faithful ones whose lamps of faith are burning! Come for the feast is spread! But for those who do not believe- those who continue to be foolish and refuse to take the necessary oil- let these be warned! When Jesus comes back, He will comfort His people but rebuke the hypocrites- even in the midst of the church. Jesus Christ warns the church to be ready for His return at any moment with the parable of the virgins. So may our lamps be lit- may we be found standing in faith on that day! Shining like a lamp- for all to see.