



Advent Course Talks 2009

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Session 1 – Thursday 3rd December

Welcome

This course aims to take a look at advent, the time of preparation and waiting for Jesus' birth, and more so, his coming again.

Today's session is entitled "And he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" and will be looking at the parable of the Ten Virgins, found in the gospel of Matthew.

Prayer

Father God, we praise you once more for this season of Advent, for its mood of expectation, its message of hope, its call to prepare ourselves, its spirit of confidence and trust.

We praise you for the way you have spoken, in the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, in promises yet to be realized, and in the living presence of Christ made known through his Holy Spirit.

Lord, touch our lives again at this time, as we remember the coming of Jesus, as we anticipate his coming again, and as we strive to serve him better in the here and now.

Grant that through this season we shall be renewed in hope and strengthened in faith, trusting more completely in the future you hold. May our confidence be deepened in your eternal love and purpose, and may we be ready to welcome Christ, in the assurance that as he came, so he shall come again.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 25, verses 1 to 13

Music - Chorale Prelude: 'Wachet Auf' (JS Bach)

Talk

Are you sitting comfortably?

Today's passage is about being prepared – I just want you to think of a time where you have not been prepared for something. An example of where I have not been prepared is Sunday school – mostly, I prepare in advance and have a good idea of what we are going to do that morning. Other times, I find myself lacking in inspiration, or just motivation. When I am prepared, the sessions run smoothly and we always seem to fill the time. When I have not been prepared fully, however, I find that the sessions can drag, and I find my self checking the door every few seconds, waiting for the knock to say the sermon is finally over!

I hope some of you share that feeling with me.

What we see in the passage is a good example of what it means to prepare properly. The scouts have a motto – 'be prepared'. When I was a beaver and a cub, I never really knew what it meant to 'be prepared' – there seemed little to prepare for. Now, however, I understand the meaning of this motto and clearly see the meaning of being prepared – especially when it comes to the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

When we look around us, we see many things in the world which fit what the Bible says about end times – there is disease, famine, wars, destruction, worship of un-holy things, the destruction of the environment



and so much more that point to the world ending. Seeing these things, it would be fair to ask the question 'are we living in the end times'?

Now hold your thoughts on that one for a moment, instead think of what you have heard about the end times – have you ever seen one of these signs, or someone proclaiming the message from the street corner? Perhaps you have heard the announcements from other religions and groups, claiming the end of the world will be on a certain date? The Jehovah Witnesses have a long history of doing this, although, perhaps because of world opinion, have not made their predictions quite so loudly in recent years.

All of these predictions and words from doom merchants have some element of truth. We know the world will end when Jesus returns – weather it is sooner or later. The fact of the matter is, we need to be prepared – leaving it to the last minute may well be too late – we do not know the hour or day – so we need to be prepared ourselves, and wait for that day to come, safe in the knowledge that we are prepared and ready.

As we heard in the passage, there were ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom to return. Before we go any further, it is important to note how weddings happened at the time. The ceremony is a long process, and near the end it is traditional for the bridegroom, perhaps carrying his wife, to be escorted the last part of their journey by torchlight – hence the ten virgins, or perhaps bridesmaids or personal friends. When the procession reached the house, all would enter and the door would be shut – perhaps a sign of the ceremony being completed.

The parable we have heard uses the imagery of the wedding to show us what the kingdom of God is like. The bridegroom is Jesus himself. He will come again one day at an unspecified time to take his bride (the Church) and celebrate the 'wedding' feast - the heavenly banquet. Note that the bridesmaids are not half Christians and half non-believers. Rather, all of them are meant to be Christians – or at least call themselves such. It's just that half of them are prepared for the coming of the bridegroom - of Christ, while the other half are not.

THEIR CHARACTER DID NOT DIFFERENTIATE THEM: The Lord used the word "virgin" to symbolize the upright character of all ten. If moral up-rightness alone defined one as ready or not ready, all ten would have entered together into the marriage hall. Many church members, or if you wish "professing Christians" are depending on their moral character to get them to heaven. Character is very important but good character alone will not save anyone because our salvation is by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God! (Eph 2 8-10)

When the foolish bridesmaids banged on the door to be let in, the bridegroom states categorically, "I do not know you." It's one thing to call oneself a 'Christian', but the crucial thing is to really live the Christian life - to truly 'walk the talk', as it were - to continue growing in our relationship with the Lord and in Christ-likeness. We need to ensure that we don't allow our lamps to go out.

Additionally, faith and holiness is not something that can be borrowed from others - each one of us needs to possess these for ourselves. The foolish bridesmaids could not borrow oil for their lamps from the wise bridesmaids – they had to purchase it for themselves. And so the Lord is interested in whether we - each one of us individually - is trying to live a holy life. We simply cannot, lean on the faith of others. It's not about whether my great-grandfather was a stalwart of this or that church, or whether I come from a prominent clergy family..... – the point is whether I am sincerely seeking to live a life committed to following Christ and to growing in his holiness.

The other main point I would like to make is one we have already touched on – not leaving it too late. The foolish virgins left it too late to get into the wedding – the door was shut. Because they were not prepared, they had to try and sort things out but it was too late. When the time came, when it really mattered, they were not prepared and there was not time to change their situation. Perhaps we find ourselves in that



position from time to time – but in terms of our faith, we better be ready!

So being prepared - It's about being in a living relationship with a living Lord. It's about living the life that God expects us to live – its about growing and living in grace and holiness. It's about actively witnessing for Christ at work, in our retirement, amongst our friends and neighbors, and so on. And it's about concerning ourselves with the needs of others and attempting to address some of the injustices in the world today - seeking to further God's Kingdom at all times.

In fact, when you think about it, all these things - deepening our spirituality, engaging in evangelism and concerning ourselves with the needs of others - are things which we should be actively pursuing anyway as Christians. But the point is that our expectation of Christ's return at any time actually brings into sharper focus how we live our lives from day to day – in the here and now.

So if we are constantly seeking to live the life that God wants us to, then we will indeed be like the wise bridesmaids who had a sufficient supply of oil for their lamps and so were ready when the bridegroom arrived. The Lord will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, but we know neither the day nor the hour. So - are we prepared for his coming?

Discussion Time

- Do you see the return of Our Lord as something to fear or to look forward to with joyous expectation?
- Do you think we are living in the End Times?
- What does it mean for us to be like the wise bridesmaids?
- How do we guard against being/becoming like the foolish bridesmaids?
- What does it mean for us, individually, to live in the light of the expectation of Christ's return?
- If Christ is coming soon, is there any purpose in us working for the establishment of such things as peace and justice in the 'here & now'?

Music

'awake awake o zion' This is a great song – listen to the words, close your eyes, get comfortable or what ever feels right for you.

Closing Prayer and the Grace

O Lord our God,
make us watchful and keep us faithful
as we await the coming of your Son our Lord;
that, when he shall appear,
he may not find us sleeping in sin
but active in his service
and joyful in his praise;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.