

Keep Watch for Christ!
Weekend of November 16, 2008
Sermon on Matthew 25:1-13
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther

Introduction: Beware of This World's Lies

Scripture assures us: *The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—awaiting Christ's coming in judgment:

It's a dangerous thing to believe a lie. In fact, it can cost a guy his life.

...The sinful world lies to a person, saying, "Alcohol abuse or the use of drugs can deaden your pain, or it can gain you a whole new set of friends." People have suffered inexpressible sadness by believing those lies; in fact, no few have died from them. ...The sinful world lies to a person, saying, "Guys, sex outside of marriage is exciting; gals, it can be your way to snag a fellow." People have experienced no end of guilt, no end of troubles, and sometimes even deathly disease—by believing those lies.

It's a dangerous thing to believe a lie, sometimes deadly dangerous. So, which lies does the devil want you to believe?—so that he can harm you eternally. Well, I have two nominations for you.

...The devil's first lie? "If God is really a loving God, then pretty much everybody will make it to heaven. As long as you believe a little in some God, or at least if you aren't a really bad person, you've got it made." ...The devil's second lie? (if he can't get away with the first...) "You're a Christian. You've been a Christian for a long time now. You maybe even went to a Christian school. So, you've earned your lifetime achievement award. Nothing further is really necessary for you." My friend, believe those lies from Satan's mouth, and you will certainly be damned.

Theme: Keep Watch for Christ!

God's Word to us today – the Parable of the Ten Virgins – is a great antidote to those diabolical lies. It urges us: (*) KEEP WATCH FOR CHRIST! In a memorable way, Jesus will say, (1) BE WARNED: FAITH IN JESUS IS NECESSARY! and he will add, (2) BE WISE: FAITH IN JESUS COMES THROUGH HIS WORD.

Exposition: Parable of the Ten Virgins

We're approaching the end of the year. Our hearts' attention turns naturally to the end of all things. Jesus was approaching the end of his ministry. His heart's attention turned naturally to the end of all things. And Jesus wanted to get his disciples – including us! – prepared for that.

So, he says—and this is God's Word to us today: "*At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*" Jesus is picturing the glories of heaven to be like a wedding banquet. He's the groom; his bride is his Church. These ten virgins are official attendants and honored guests at the wedding. Their first duty is to go out and wait for the bridegroom.

Now: *Five of them were foolish and five were wise.* How so? *The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.* The virgins are heading out of the house. So, in all likelihood, these "lamps" are torches—substantial sticks, with rags up top, soaked in olive oil, then fired up, and replenished several times an hour.

The five foolish virgins must have thought, “Well, surely the wait won’t be long.” So, they didn’t trouble themselves to bring extra oil. The five wise virgins must have thought, “Who knows? This could be awhile.” So, even though it might have been a bother, they scrambled – and probably even paid – for extra oil. Well, as it turns out: ***The bridegroom was a long time in coming*** – nearly two thousand years and counting! – ***and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.***

Time passed. Life went on. Generations were born, lived long lives, and died. One day passed like the next—more than seven hundred thousand days, and counting! And then, when no one expected it – ***At midnight – the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'*** He flashed across the sky, like lightning from east to west! His voice raised all the dead! Thousands upon thousands of angels accompanied him and subsequently gathered all nations!

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. You would trim the charred ends off the rags, you would soak them in more oil, and you would light them. ***The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'*** Of course! It had been hours! But ***'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you.*** And actually that’s a little stronger in the original: “*No way! There will surely not be enough.*” You and I talk about “sharing our faith”. But really, you see, faith cannot be shared. Each one has to have it for himself or herself.

It’s not as if the wise virgins don’t care. It’s just that they can’t do the impossible. So, they give the best advice they can: ***Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'*** – ***"But of course while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.*** It was only right. You couldn’t keep having the wedding fun interrupted. And besides, everybody had been invited and instructed to be ready.

Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' – even: *Lord, Lord – they said* – in the original. ***'Open the door for us!'***

But he replied, 'I tell you the truth – it’s a very solemn statement – ***I don't know you.'*** And the word used for *know* says, “I don’t know you at all. I don’t even recognize your name.”

And what’s the message of this story, this parable, this extended illustration? Jesus himself provides it! ***"Therefore keep watch*** – for Christ – ***because you do not know the day or the hour"*** of his return. In fact, you can’t even narrow it down to a year, or a lifetime. So, you always have to be ready.

Part One—Be Warned: Faith in Christ Is Necessary!

That’s it. That’s God’s Word to us today. And the message is obvious – isn’t it? – and striking. Message number one? “Be warned: Faith in Christ is necessary!”

Yeah, Satan wants us to believe, “If God is really a loving God, pretty much everybody will make it to heaven. As long as you believe a little in some God, or at least if you aren’t a really bad person, you’ve got it made.”

Well: off to hell with that lie! There’s only one way to heaven: faith in Jesus Christ. With him, you’ve got eternal life! Without him, you’ve got eternal death! Today’s parable taught that: You need the olive oil of faith in Jesus Christ! And how could it be any other way?

How could faith in any other god: whether a vague someone-up-there, or a distinct false god—how could faith in any other god get you to glory? Was allah born as your substitute?! Did buddha live a perfect life for you?! Did any of the three hundred thirty million gods of the hindus die as the penalty for your transgressions?! Did some vague

guy-upstairs rise to declare your eternal triumph over hell?! – No!!! Faith in Jesus Christ is necessary! Only he could possibly have saved you!

And how could the almighty, eternal God be satisfied with anything we have done – or kept ourselves from doing – to get us to heaven? “I’ve kept myself from serving any long prison terms, Lord, and I guess that’s good enough for you”?! “I’m a decent enough person, Lord – some people even like me – and I guess that’s good enough for you”?! Oh, come on!!! We need Jesus! None other will do!

So, the next time somebody says to you, “I guess it doesn’t matter which god you believe, as long as you really believe one” – and you know they do say that! – you can’t let it stand. You have to say, “No, I can’t agree with you there. Only Jesus died for sin. Only Jesus rose to give us life. People need him, not anyone else.”

Part Two—Be Wise: Faith in Christ Comes through His Word!

That’s message one: “Be warned: Faith in Christ is necessary!”. Message two? “Be wise: Faith in Jesus comes through his Word.”

Yeah, Satan wants us to believe, “You’re a Christian. You’ve been a Christian for a long time now. You maybe even went to a Christian school. You’ve earned your lifetime achievement award. Nothing further is really necessary for you.”

Well, off to hell with that lie, too! How many Lutherans-by-name – not to mention how many Christians-in-name – have died and gone to damnation believing the devil’s lie?! Remember: today’s parable taught that some stale oil of faith lying on a dusty shelf back home is not going to help you when the bridegroom arrives. You need the fresh oil of faith in Jesus Christ right with you, and then you’re ready.

So, if I think to myself, “I was raised right; my soul is okay,” I’m going to hell. If I think to myself, “I had years of education in church schools; my soul is okay,” I’m going to hell. If I think to myself, “I’ve been a pastor; I’ve done a lot for the church; my soul is okay,” I’m going to hell. I need a fresh supply of faith in Jesus Christ by way of his Word. Then, I’m ready; then, you’re ready.

And the application? Well, if you yourself have gotten lax about hearing God’s Word every week in church – and reading it daily at home – now is the time to get back to business on all of that. And if you have a loved one who has grown lax – and which one of us doesn’t? I myself have hundreds! – now is the time to show them some loving concern, and speak to them, and to support your pastors, when they do the same.

Conclusion: Anticipate That World’s Wedding Banquet

And what are the stakes? – Well, heaven and hell. But the parable put it more picturesquely....

“There’s a wedding this weekend. What a gloriously happy occasion! You have been cordially invited. No, better: you’ve been invited to serve as one of the attendants—in all of your finest, looking very good, as a center of attention. The ceremony? – It will be like nothing you’ve ever seen. The banquet – which one of us doesn’t like good food? – well, it’ll be the best feast you’ve ever eaten. The party – with beloved friends, beloved relatives, and a really warm glow of love – incredible! And get this: all of it will never end!”

...Just make sure: you have, from God’s Word, enough oil of faith to meet the Bridegroom! ...Amen.

Scripture assures us: *That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.* Amen.