

Today, St. Matthew takes us back to the parables of God's Kingdom. In our gospel reading, we learn of ten bridesmaids waiting in the dark for the bridegroom to make his appearance. Clearly, they weren't the liberated women of today; different times, different traditions. Half of the women were ready; at least they had extra oil for their lamps. The other half were foolish. They were not prepared for any delayed arrival by the groom, and while they were out trying to get some extra oil, the groom came. Woe to them who were not prepared. Woe to us if we are not prepared, because Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is just like this parable. Some of us are prepared and ready to meet our maker face to face. Some of us are not. Woe to those who are not!

What is this all about? It's simple. If we want salvation, if we want eternal life in the Kingdom of God, we have to live our lives in such a way that we are ready to meet our maker. As Jesus told this parable, the foolish bridesmaids wanted others to salvage things for them. "Give us some of your oil," they said. But life is not like that. We can not turn to others to make things right with God for us. We are responsible for our own lives and we are accountable to God for the way we live our lives. We cannot delegate this responsibility nor can we transfer the blame for our own sins and shortcomings. "The devil made me do it" doesn't work, nor does an excuse like "it was my upbringing," or social status or any other excuse. We, alone, are responsible for our lives and we are accountable to God for those things done and left undone.

To use the language of today's parable, if our lamps go out before our lives go out, we will spend eternity in the darkness. Christianity requires us to think about final things. Nothing removes us from the reality that the day comes when we die. Plans and intentions incomplete on the day of death are forever incomplete. We are either ready to meet Jesus or not. Now is the time to decide.

This is probably enough said, except that I cannot leave you with the possible thought that our merit or good works get us to heaven. The grace of salvation comes from Christ alone, it is not something that we earn, nor should we think of the Savior as "keeping book" about our lives.

I am not talking about cheap grace here. I am not talking about universal salvation. I'm not talking about an abdication of Christian responsibility. What I am saying to you is that leading a virtuous and Christian life is pleasing to God and expected by God, but a virtuous and Godly life should be our response to God's love and God's grace. If we do not respond to God's love with a godly and virtuous life, have we really let ourselves experience God's love and acknowledge Christ Jesus as our savior?

Salvation is God's free gift to those who love him and it is given to us through the merit of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus earned, if you must have earnings, our salvation. Jesus atoned for our failures and took the ramification of our sin to the Cross. He offered it to God and through his sacrifice we are the recipients of God's grace.

There is nothing for us to earn, and there is nothing for us to buy. The cost of salvation was paid long ago on a cross outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem. But we must understand that even though grace is given, through sin we squander it away. We are accountable to God for how we live the new life Christ gives us from the Cross. *Amen.*