

WATCH! ... for you know neither the day nor the hour

Matthew 25:1-13

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There's always been a certain fascination with knowing how and when the world is going to end. Those who hold to a *naturalistic* view of things that the world *happened by chance*, usually think it's going to *end* by chance as well. The sun is going to blow up and incinerate the earth. Or it's going to go out and freeze the earth. Or a meteor is going to smash into the earth. Or some *other* cosmic event is going to wipe out life on earth! Some think *man* is going to be responsible, either killing ourselves with global warming or killing ourselves through a nuclear holocaust or because of some genetically engineered disease that we've produced but can't control. All, pretty scary stuff! And so, most people don't even want to think about it at all.

But how should *we*, the Church, Christians, think of the end of the world? Well, Scripturally, of course. And the end of the church's calendar year gives us a chance to do that. The *first* half of the church's year focuses on the life of *Jesus*. The *second* half on the life of the *church*. And at the end we focus on *THE END*, the end of the world. And God, who began this world purposefully, will end it the same way, purposefully.

But it's an end, that's really *not* an end at all, but a new beginning. New heavens - a new sky, new planets, new galaxies, a new universe, with a new earth. A new creation ... for a new you! And it's going to happen, how? Not by chance. Not by accident. But purposefully, when Jesus comes again. *God* in control. Not chance. Not nature. Not human activity. But God.

But still, what should be our *attitude* toward THE END? Should we just not think about it? Should we be afraid of it? The Bible speaks of the final *judgment*, so should we fear that? (*Douthwaite*) In our text today, Jesus speaks of the end in terms of **JOY!** When's the last time you heard of the end of the world described as a time of joy? Jesus speaks of the end in terms of one of the most joyous events in all of life. The joy of a wedding, the ceremony, the dinner, the dance. The day awaited so long, *finally* come!

Jesus' illustration is about an ancient Jewish wedding, where the groom has the starter home all ready and waiting for his new bride. And he's going to the home of his new bride's family to get her, and bring her home with him. The END. The happiest of times! And the bridegroom isn't coming alone. All his friends, all his extended family, all his community take part in this wondrous celebration. But it's not really about an *earthly* wedding, is it? That's just an illustration of the kingdom of God and what it'll be like when Jesus returns to earth, returning for His bride, the church!

"*The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*" Little clay pots with a wick and a few ounces of oil that you carried like a candle (or larger, more like a torch). That was the job of the bridesmaids. To show up at the wedding with oil lamps. To bring light! To bring joy! To bring a spirit of celebration to the festivities!

Five bridesmaids brought oil. Five didn't. Five wouldn't let *anything* get in the way from celebrating this amazing event! Honored; overjoyed, to take part in it! They wouldn't have missed it for the world! The other five? Well, quite honestly, they'd rather be somewhere else, doing something else. They had *better* things to do than attend the wedding feast. What *no one* figured, was that the groom would be *late*. What *no one* figured, was that everyone would fall asleep. What *no one* figured, was the groom was a little on the *crazy* side, and decided to start his wedding at *midnight*. (*Cwirla*)

Suddenly, at midnight, when everyone's fast asleep, someone cries out, "He's here! The bridegroom's here!" And everyone's instantly awoken! And since it's pitch dark out, they start preparing their lamps for the wedding celebration. Two types of bridesmaids. The wise are always ready. Ready and waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. The foolish, not so much so.

Two types of people. The wise, who in faith, are always *ready* for Jesus to arrive. Thankful daily! Thankful for the cross. Thankful for God's love for sinners like themselves. Always looking forward to meeting Jesus face-to-face one day! *God's word of grace to them in Christ is the oil* that keeps their flame of faith alive and well.

The foolish, on the other hand, aren't thinking all that much about Jesus. They've got *other* things on their minds. And without the oil of the Good News of Christ, their flame of faith slowly does what? It slowly dies out. And when Jesus returns, what happens? He doesn't recognize them. He doesn't know them. They're strangers, not family. Strangers, not His beloved. And so, those without the oil of faith are left out in the cold. Left out of the kingdom of God. Left out of the eternal celebration. And THE END, that should be a time of joy, ends up being a time of dreadful fear.

The five foolish virgins Jesus speaks of in His parable don't *want* to be excluded. They don't *want* to be left out in the cold. And yet, they are. Foolishness *happens*. It *happens* when our hearts and minds become captivated by the things of this world. Foolishness *happens* when we put our trust in what can't save us; when we put our trust in things that won't last. Foolishness happens when we're not watchful, when we're not ready, when we allow our light of faith to grow cold and go out.

Foolishness happens when we stop having regular quiet times with the Lord, when we stop opening our Bibles, when we stop gathering with the family of God. Foolishness happens when we see less and less our daily need of a Savior, when we see less and less our need for fellowship with other believers, when we see less and less our need to nourish our faith with the Word of God. And slowly, but surely, what happens? The light of Christ within us begins to die out. And in the end, foolishness leaves us out in the dark, afraid, and all alone, where there'll be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 13:42). THE END. Something to fear? Or something to rejoice in? Depends. Depends on whether Jesus knows you or not. It depends on whether you're ready to meet Him or not.

"But as for that day and hour no one knows it", not even the angels in heaven, except the Father alone. For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. (What's the comparison with the days of Noah?) For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing - until the flood came and took them all away. (Mt 24) It will be the same, at the coming of the Son of Man. (By then, it will be too late! Therefore, what?) "Therefore, stay alert [spiritually] ..." (Mt 24:35-44)

Everything seems fine and dandy for the wedding party, until what? Until the bridegroom shows up unexpectedly and they find themselves unprepared to meet him. And the door is slammed shut and bolted tight! And no amount of pounding, and no amount of pleading, is going to open it again. And the *really* sad thing is that they *had* a place at the wedding party. Christ died for *all*, without exception. They *had* a seat at the table, with their name on it. But when the time came, when the Bridegroom showed up, they hear, through an eternally shut door, "I don't know you." (Cwirila) "He's here! The Bridegroom's here!" The day awaited so long, *finally* come. The *JOY* of the eternal wedding celebration ... unless you've disinvited yourself, and find yourself left out.

A bridesmaid. All dressed up. Hair and make-up done perfectly. Nails carefully manicured. With flowers in one hand and a dirty, smelly can of gas in the other? That's how Christians look to the unbelieving world? To a world that thinks: *we don't need all that religion stuff*. How foolish we look lugging around the baggage of God's Word. How foolish we look coming to church every Sunday. How foolish to waste our time in prayer and bible study. How foolish to worry about our sins and a God we can't even see. "Relax", the world says. "Don't worry about all that baggage. It's not that important. *You'll be fine*." But in the end, who will look like the fool? (Douthwaite)

The end of the world. How will it all end? Not by chance. Not by accident. But purposefully. As planned. A party. A wedding celebration! The only question is, will you be surprised, and caught unprepared? Or will you be looking forward to it? *Ready*, when He comes?

"Watch ... for you know neither the day nor the hour." How do you do that? How do you watch for Jesus' second coming? By fixing your eyes on His first coming. Seeing in His death and His resurrection, your own death, your own resurrection. Keeping your flame of faith burning bright, with the fuel of God's Word. A word about the joy of the Bridegroom coming to take you home. The beginning of a whole new world!