

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We’ve all been to weddings and seen the wedding parties come out, and then the music gets loud, and the wedding march starts playing to announce the coming of the bride. The groom has slipped to the front of the church with the pastor and best man, not drawing too much attention. The bride is the one who makes the grand entrance, while the groom waits to receive his bride.

To fully appreciate this parable, we must understand its meaning. The church or Christians are the bride, and Christ is the Groom. So instead of singing, “Here comes the Bride”, we should be looking for the coming of the Groom. He is the one who will be making the grand appearance.

But to fully understand this parable, you must first look back to the tradition of how a Jewish wedding was performed. First, the parents played a significant part in choosing the bride. Now, like Samson did, the son could tell his parents who he wanted to marry, but it was the parents who would go with the son to ask for permission to marry their daughter. The parents would negotiate the payment for the daughter, and when an agreement was reached, they were recognized as married under Jewish law. There was then a period of about a year during which the husband would go and prepare the home. This would be the engagement time. The bride, though considered married, still lived at home with her parents, and there was no physical contact between them. This was the stage that Mary and Joseph were in when the Holy Ghost conceived Mary with Jesus. Now you know why Joseph was going to, as he put it, “Put her away secretly”. Then, after everything was ready, the word went to the bride’s family that the groom was finished with his preparations and was coming to claim his bride.

On that night, the bride would have her bridesmaids go out into the streets and wait for her husband. There were no street lights, and they would have these torches that lit the way for the groom to come and receive his wife and take her back to the place he had prepared for her. When there, a big party would start, and sometimes last as long as seven days. This is where we get the tradition that the groom's family pays for the reception. Can you imagine the bill for this seven-day party? Not to mention the honeymoon, or lack of a honeymoon, with all the people over at the house.

The groom had made the payment for the bride, just as Christ had made the payment with His own life for His bride, the church. He had left to prepare the place for him and his wife, as Jesus states that He is preparing a place for His bride in John 14:2-3: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you." I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And just as the groom comes to receive his bride, Christ is coming again to receive His bride, the church.

Now with all of this in mind, let's get back to our parable.

As we read in our parable, there were 10 virgins with some similarities and some differences. Let's talk about them.

They all had the same job and fell asleep while waiting for the groom, who was delayed.

That reminds me of a story I heard about a young couple.

A young couple had met and set their first date for Friday at 8:00 pm. The girl didn't know the guy well enough to realize he was constantly late for everything, so when 9:00 pm rolled around, she figured she had been stood up. So, she took off her makeup, put on her pyjamas, grabbed some junk food

and plopped down on the couch for a night of TV. The doorbell rang, and it was her date. He stared at her for a second and said, "I'm almost 2 hours late, and you're still not ready".

The parable didn't explain why he was delayed. He couldn't blame it on his wife, as most men do nowadays, for making him late. All we know is that he was delayed.

Now, if you were to look at these bridesmaids, I figure they were all dressed similarly. They all had their lamps. They all fell asleep. In appearance, it would have been hard to tell one from the other. Looks can be deceiving.

1 Samuel 16:7b, "for the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

So how does your heart look? I think in our churches today, we see many people who look the same. They come to church, bring their Bibles, sing the songs, and put their money in the offering plate. In our church, you have young people who say " yes, ma'am, and no, sir. They are active in their youth groups; they bless you with their testimonies and their songs. They attend church camps and prayer groups at their schools. By all appearances, they seem to have a relationship with the Lord. But just as the bridegroom in the parable told the five foolish virgins, "Depart from me, I do not know you," the same thing may happen to them when they leave this earth. Despite what you've heard, good people go to hell. Ephesians 2:8, For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

I've heard the testimony of a preacher who was a church pastor. One day, he heard a pastor on the radio say that he was a sinner and that being a good person couldn't save him, and he realized for the first time that he was

lost. He dropped to his knees and asked Jesus to come into his heart. A pastor lost, heading for the very place he had been warning people about.

You can look the part, play the part, and talk the part, but acting doesn't get you to heaven.

John 14:6, Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, except through me.

You can fool your friends, you can fool your family, you can fool your church and your pastor, but you can't fool God.

Another thing that the 10 virgins had in common was their intentions. They all had good intentions. They all knew what they had to do and intended to do it. But five were prepared and five were not.

This reminds me a lot of the people today. If you are here today and have never accepted Christ as your personal Saviour, but you intend to someday, then you are heading for trouble.

Young people intend, after they get older, after they've had some fun and sown their wild oats, to accept Christ. They get older and then get married, and the wild oats have been sown. Then their jobs and families take priority. They want the nice houses and the nice cars. They are so busy with the kids that they don't have time to accept Christ in their lives. Then the kids grow up, and the marriage is unstable because they have focused so much time on everything else that their marriage is on the rocks, so instead of accepting Jesus, they work on their marriage, or they get a divorce and start a new life. They get old and set in their ways and think it's too late to accept Christ; their heart hardens to the point where they don't care anymore. But if you were to ask them their intentions along the way, they had good intentions. As King Agrippa told Paul in Acts 26:28, "You almost persuaded me to be a Christian".

You don't know how long you have on this earth. I heard about a lady this week who went to work as usual—had good health and no history of sickness. Collapsed at her desk and died for no apparent reason. You could leave here today and have a car wreck, or get into an accident of some type, or drop dead like this woman did.

You see, almost like good intentions don't cut it. If you nearly make it to Heaven, in your eyes, you still spend an eternity in Hell.

Maybe you are here today, and you have already accepted Christ. The five wise virgins were prepared. They had brought the extra oil, but they all fell asleep while waiting.

Have you ever done anything like that? You rent a movie you're excited to watch, but halfway through, you fall asleep. You are watching the race on TV, only to miss the last 50 laps, and you wake up with no idea who won. Been there, done that.

I think there is a lot of sleeping going on in the churches today. I'm not talking in the pews; I'm talking in the world. The Bible tells us in Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world. Can the lost see Jesus with your light, or do your wicks need a little trimming? When I think of trimming, I think of removing something. What in your life needs to be removed? What sins are hindering your relationship with the Lord?

Maybe you are like the five foolish virgins we talked about before. You have good intentions to tell that friend or coworker about the Lord. The next time you see that family member, you intend to talk to them about their relationship with the Lord, but then you don't want to cause a fight. Christians are sleeping, lost souls are all around us, dying and going to hell, and we act as long as it's OK with us; it just doesn't matter.

Maybe the Lord has been working on you to do something. Get baptized, teach a class, go on a mission trip, become a pastor. Lost people are not the only ones with good intentions. It's time to get off our duffs, trim our wicks, and be the light of the world as Jesus commanded us to. We have the best news, the greatest gift that we need to share with the world. We all will have to stand and be judged one day. 2 Corinthians 5:10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.

The sin most of us forget about is the sin of silence. Not saying is sometimes worse than saying it wrong.

Because some day, just as it says in verse 10, the door is going to be shut. It will be too late. If you are here today and have never accepted Christ, you may never have another chance. If you are here today and need your wick trimmed to be the light you should be, you can do so today.