

When I took driver's education, they stressed that one needed to drive defensively. What that meant was a driver was to be watching for anything that might happen unexpectedly and be prepared to handle it. For example, most of you know that deer hunting season begins today. Because of hunters in the woods shooting at the deer, a deer could easily be running and jump out in front of your car. So we need to keep watching at all times for that possibility. If you are driving in town, then you have to keep watching out for children who might dart out into the street right in front of your car. Every good driver knows that he must always be alert and prepared for anything that might happen, because when it does happen, it will probably happen suddenly, giving us no time to prepare. This is rather similar to what Jesus is saying to us in the parable which is serving as the basis for our meditation this morning. So we pray, LORD, KEEP US WATCHFUL FOR OUR TRIUMPH! Even if it appears that He is taking a long time to return, we need to keep on watching, for He will welcome those who are still watching when He does return.

As we approach the end of our church year, our thoughts naturally turn to the end of our life and the certainty that we have of living with our Savior in heaven. The name for this Sunday is called, "Saints Triumphant." We know what the outcome of the last day is going to be for each one of us. That is, as long as we take Jesus' warning very seriously. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. This warning is needed by each one of us because we tend to get complacent as we wait, and that may cause us to let our guard down so that we are no longer watching and waiting as Jesus wants us to be doing. That is why Jesus told this parable: **At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.** (1-2) The parable begins by speaking of ten virgins who were going out to meet the bridegroom and escort him and the bride to their new home. Each one of these virgins appears to have made all of the necessary preparations. Each one of them brought their lamps and went out to wait for him so that they would be ready when he arrived. Even though the bridegroom does not come as soon as they expected him, they all remained there, waiting for him.

**The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.** (5) As they were waiting, they kept watching and looking for signs that he was approaching. They probably had many false alarms, thinking that he was there, when it turned out to be someone else. While they were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive, all of the virgins dozed off for a while. Our definition of "soon" is not always what Jesus' definition of "soon" is. Jesus reminds us that for Him, even a thousand years — a millennium — is nothing more than a day. So even though the calendar tells us that it has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus ascended, that does not mean that Jesus is not coming "soon."

What are we doing as it appears that Jesus' return is being delayed? Are we remaining prepared at all times? Obviously, we need to be going about our day to day business. We will eat and sleep, we will worship and go to work. We will watch one year pass and the new one arrive. But through it all, we need to remain watching and waiting. We are not to become discouraged as though He were not coming at all.

Even though it may appear that He is delaying His coming, one day He will arrive and welcome all those who are prepared for His coming. **At midnight the cry rang out, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!" Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.** (6-7) It was only when the bridegroom arrived that the distinction between the wise and the foolish became evident. They all had made the initial preparations. They all had brought their lamps. They all had gone out to wait for the coming of the bridegroom. They even all arose to greet the bridegroom. But only the wise virgins had brought extra oil for their lamps.

The foolish virgins tried to borrow some of the oil that the wise virgins had brought, but that would not have been enough to suffice for both of them. So they went out to buy some at this late hour. **But 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.** (10) They were ready because they had oil for their lamps. So the question is: what did Jesus mean by the oil for their lamps. Since the lack of oil

disqualified the foolish virgins from entering the banquet, that would seem to represent the absence of genuine faith.

Faith in Jesus as our only Savior from sin is the only thing that will make us ready to enter heaven when our Savior comes back for us. So it does not matter what we are doing in this life — whether we are sitting in church or sitting at home, whether we are driving or at work — when Jesus returns on the last day, He will find us ready only if we have faith in our heart. Even when He comes suddenly and unexpectedly, we will still be watching and prepared as long as we have faith in our hearts.

So what about the five foolish virgins — why did it appear that they were prepared, but were not ready when the bridegroom returned? Obviously that means that they were going through all of the outward motions of being prepared and watching, but they had lost the faith that was in their hearts. And faith is a personal thing — we are not able to borrow it from someone else when Jesus returns. So, even though it appeared they were watching, they were far from prepared when the bridegroom returned.

Even later, when they returned to the wedding feast, they were not allowed to enter. The warning in that for us is that we may have saving faith within our hearts, and we firmly trust in Jesus as the One Who saves us from all sin, but unless we remain in faith right up to the end, that faith will not do us any good. And the longer that it seems to us that Jesus is delaying His return, the more temptation we are going to have to quit watching, and to give up the faith that is within our hearts. Some, like the foolish virgins, will think that they are prepared, but will find themselves locked out of the door to heaven.

While this parable serves as a warning for us to be faithful and constantly watching for Jesus' return, it is also a great comfort in knowing that we will be taken into the marriage feast just as Jesus has promised. We will be those saints triumphant on the last day, and will be privileged to enjoy the unending blessings of our Savior throughout eternity.

So we need to go to our loving Savior and ask His forgiveness for all of the doubts that have crept into our thoughts and minds as we wait for Him to return. We will also want to ask Him to keep us strong in the faith, right up to the end. Just like we have been taught to drive defensively, always looking out for the dangers that might pop up right in front of us, we will want to keep on watching, so that no matter when He does return, we will be watching and be prepared to welcome Him. That watching and preparation is nothing more than faith in Him as our Savior. May that faith remain in our hearts throughout this earthly life until we are taken to be with Him forever in heaven.