

WHO ARE WE? THE VISIBLE OR THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

A sermon for Sunday, November 12, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba

Gospel: **Matthew 25:1-13** *“¹At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ ¹³Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”*

My message this morning is for you to self-discern whether you are the **visible** Church like everyone else or whether you belong in the **invisible** church known only to Christ. It is the story of ten virgins - a complete mix: five were wise and five were foolish. The hidden truth is that we believers fall into either category: the wise or the foolish.

In Matthew 5:22, Jesus denounces calling a brother or sister foolish or *Racha* in Hebrew. But this text tells a story about **five wise virgins** and **five foolish virgins**. Five had oil in their lamps and five didn't. Five were ready and five weren't. Five entered the wedding banquet and five were refused. This parable presents Jesus as the bridegroom to illustrate some truth about his Second Coming--- He will show up unexpectedly in **the middle of the night** to emphasize the idea of his sudden coming without warning. The parable is detailed with crucial information

I. The Ten Virgins are Alike On the Surface in Many Ways.

- The virgins appeared **the same, well dressed** and **cute**.
- All **virgins were invited** and all responded positively.
- All **ten had gone out to wait** for the bridegroom.
- All of them **had their lamps** with them.
- All the virgins **wanted to see the bridegroom**.
- All **were in the right place at the right time** for the right reason.
- All of them **expected entry into the wedding banquet**.
- **All had some oil in their lamps** at the beginning.
- **All fell asleep (were drowsy) while waiting** for the bridegroom.
- **All were awakened by the midnight cry**.

- All virgins got up to prepare their lamps.
- All **appeared to be equally prepared** for the bridegroom's coming.

If the ten virgins were to line up in front of us in no particular order **we could not pick out the wise from foolish** -- no way to tell in advance who was wise or foolish.

II. **However, there is One Crucial Difference which we cannot see with a naked eye.** It wasn't a matter of dress or outward appearance. It was a matter of the MIND. Five **were foolish, they had no oil; They were excluded.** There are always **two contrasting ways in life.** There is a **foolish or wicked way that ignores God. There is the WISE way which attains discipline and prudence in life. This way leads a person to do what is right. The Wisdom writer says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).**

- Five Wise virgins figured out somehow thru their wisdom that the bridegroom could arrive late, so they prepared themselves for the event, brought extra oil with them, just in case.

What does the oil represent? Oil represents **inward conversion of the heart** ; It is true change by the indwelling Spirit. *It is the transformation of the mind.* The text calls it OIL, which is TRUE FAITH in Jesus Christ. The **five wise virgins** represent those who are born again Joh 3:16 and truly changed. The foolish virgins represent many lukewarm Christians like those mentioned in Revelations 3:16-17: who are **“neither cold nor hot... (the ones he about) to spit (them) out of my mouth.”**

This is a Lessons for Us Churchgoers. Churchgoers of all denominations and congregations are the **Visible Church outward expression.** The **visible church** consists of regular attendees, friends, visitors, and the great mass of peripheral lukewarm Christians who attend just because ... The **visible church** contains both the **truly converted** and **the unconverted members.** The **visible church is a true MIXED PACK:** Some **know the Lord, Some are seeking the Lord;** And others are **who Jesus calls religious hypocrites.**

I am struck even more by the fact that **these five foolish virgins are never called sinners.** They are **not accused of gross immorality.** **By outward appearance,** they seemed **okay ready to meet the bridegroom.** Had they been visibly sinful women, we could understand why they were shut out. But that is not the case.

- * The lesson is, **going to church is good; coming to Christ is better.**
- *Being baptized is good; **being born again is better.**
- *Giving money is good; **giving your heart to Jesus is better.**
- *Being religious is good; **Committing to Christ as Savior and Lord is better.**

The five foolish virgins did everything right just like ordinary churchgoers do. But they **missed the one important thing that mattered most, Oil – FAITH.** They wanted to

borrow some faith, but **it's impossible to enter Heaven with "Borrowed" Faith.** Surprisingly, the foolish virgins asked the wise ones to give them some of their oil. The refusal may be seen as selfish. But **Oil is faith.** No one can **"borrow"** another person's faith; not dad's, mom's, the pastor's, etc. **Faith** is what affirms our true membership in **the Invisible Church.** You may be Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Charismatic and still be an **untrue Christian - not a Member of the INVISIBLE Church.**

This seems shocking, but it is true nonetheless. Church membership identifies us with **the visible church.** True saving faith makes us members of the **invisible church, known only to Christ.** The **"invisible"** church is made up of **true believers or born again Christians.** Christ's point is this: just because we go to church doesn't make us real or true.

People come to church for all sorts of reasons: Family ties, friendships, to listen to music, to impress people, to conduct business, to get a girl friend or boy friend, etc. We can't gain favor with God by simply coming to church. Not all who say **Lord, Lord will be admitted in heaven.**

Of those things which are evil in themselves people come to church to do. Outward righteousness and inward emptiness is at the display before God. You probably remember Jesus' teaching about **foxes in sheep's clothing.** We had better look at ourselves in the mirror and straighten up.

As I am typing these words, a siren has gone off not far away. I am reminded that life is short and very uncertain. The door of opportunity is now. The door of God's grace is now. When Christ comes back to the earth, the door will close. Let us not act as if we are going to live forever.

HEED TO THE WARNING.

Today is the day of salvation and the door is still wide open to one and all.

Amen!.