

# FOOLISH OR WISE?

In order to understand a scripture fully and grasp the meaning behind the story with all its depth and application to us, there is a helpful tool we can use. *That tool is to understand the story in the time that it took place.* Now I am not saying, as many have, that in taking all the trappings of culture back in Jesus' time there is no meaning for us today. That would be the same, if we could, as if people in the future would look back on a story from our times and say "That was then and it has no meaning for us today".

There are what has been termed universal truths - labeled because no matter where we travel on this earth that truth holds no matter what over time. Then how much more do Biblical truths surpass universal truths and can apply today just as when the words were spoken through the prophets or by Jesus Christ himself? We cannot simply dismiss these stories as tales of the culture! Biblical truth is timeless and rich in reward. We must seek it FIRST as the scripture from Matthew 6:33 and the song we sing says "Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you". And whatever really, really matters is answered in this book – the Bible!!! Foolish – lacking good sense or judgment and wise is good judgment, showing experience and knowledge, so are you foolish or wise?

*The story of the ten virgins is a great example of being foolish or wise.* A story despite being almost two thousand years old and of a different culture can teach us Biblical truth, a pearl of great price that we can take in and realize as a treasure to truly be excited and joyful about!!!!

*This story of the wedding* as told here continues to be repeated all over the Middle East, even today. If we were to tell this story today it would be recognized by many of the culture in the Middle East. A wedding in the Middle East was a great occasion. It was custom for virgins to remain with the bride until the bridegroom called for her. One never knew the exact time of the wedding and the arrival of the bridegroom. The arrival of the bridegroom was announced ahead by a messenger. Another important detail is that no one was allowed on the streets after dark without a light. The villagers took the longest way possible so that the most people could celebrate with the newly married couple. A wedding was such an event that men could stop their studies of the Law to attend the wedding feast. Couples did not go on a honeymoon; they went to his house and for a week celebrated the

marriage. Once the couple arrived at his house, the door was shut, and the ceremony began late comers were not allowed in!

*This parable is told right after the parable of the faithful steward. There is a strong message here of foolishness, wisdom and preparation. Within those themes are truths we may not want to face or come to grips with in our lives. A phrase we have heard numerous times comes to mind – “Forewarned is forearmed”.*

Scripture really does answer the “questions of life” and how we can have the BEST outcome not just a good one. Jesus, himself, gave us over forty parables covering nearly a dozen areas of life from what the Kingdom of God is like... to individual responsibility of one who CHOOSES to live as disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ.

Now notice that the scripture begins with ten bridesmaids. They were dressed alike in festive clothing, had oil lamps, and they all knew the bride and bridegroom. Then they all fell asleep. This was quite common as I said before because they never knew when the bridegroom would arrive. Life was going on as usual. Nothing really separates the ten until the bridegroom arrives. It is then that we discover the foolish and the wise in the group. Sadly, this is the state of many Christians attending church today. There is no detectable distinction. All attend church, sing hymns, recite prayers, fellowship, and may serve on a committee, but are they prepared?

*It is possible for one to know **about** Jesus but not know Jesus. Same with the Bible, one may **know** the Bible but **not live** for the God of the Bible. One may be a good person, know all the doctrine, and have no relationship with God. I will repeat again – “**Religion is NOT about the rules, it is about relationships**”. We must have that relationship and live out our life because of it. God loves us and we in turn must love others. We can choose not to, but as a disciple we are commanded to love one another and love the Lord our God*

We see almost immediately that in this parable the ten virgins must wait for that bridegroom to come and get his bride for the ceremony. **Waiting**, that awful quantity we must deal with day in and day out. Anyone that has been in the service knows the old saying – “Hurry up and wait”. Waiting is a normal function of our lives. We wait for a birth, we wait for the meal to be cooked, we wait for an answer to prayer. However we are to wait, BUT we are not to worry, remember the verses about not being anxious for tomorrow?

Here are some interesting percentages... 12% --- stress out over criticism from others... mostly untrue 10% --- are anxious about health (and, of course, the worrying made the health worse) 30% --- fret over things about the past that can't be changed 40% --- worry

about things that will never happen Only 8% --- lost sleep over real problems that would be faced. Most of our worries are completely pointless.

*A second lesson we can take from this parable is that no one can do it for you. Think about it, no one could wear a parachute in your place, and no one can loan you theirs! It just doesn't work that way. Preparation is like that too. You cannot expect others to prepare and then you borrow from them. You really need to prepare for events yourself and that is made very clear in the parable. The foolish wanted to borrow oil from the wise. It was not like the foolish bridesmaids could not have brought their own oil, possibly instead of sleeping. They **chose to not be prepared** and would have to suffer the consequences of their actions or inaction in this case.*

Speaking of preparation, A study found four out of ten people live paycheck to paycheck. *If they live life that way how are they living their spiritual life? Are they preparing or like the foolish bridesmaids choosing not to?* This further illustrates how the responsibility of preparation must be taken on by each person, not unlike the foolish maidens wanting to borrow from the wise maidens.

*Character cannot be borrowed it must be something you wear. We cannot live on the "spiritual capital" others have already stored up, which means we must have that personal relationship with God.*

*Faith must be your own, not your grandma's, not your parents, not your friends, or those you attend church with. You don't catch faith like a cold. A few other things we cannot borrow – love, respect and knowledge, all things we earn over time. Remember Jesus talking in Matthew 3 about the Jews claiming since they were Abraham's children and descendants, they were also his spiritual descendants. Jesus rebuked them for such thinking.*

There are times when things can be borrowed or shared, but I believe God is saying here OUR life should be a life of preparation, being accountable for our own faith and relationship with God. Matthew Henry a famous minister who wrote Bible commentaries said "Many care not to live the Christian life, but want to die the death of the righteous". Stark terms, yes, but today's parable is one of many instances where the lesson is spelled out very clearly. Remember we are not alone there is the Holy Spirit and fellow believers to guide and direct us.

In Hebrews 3:12-14 "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.” That is the real and clear meaning of preparation, good judgment. Just as stated before, there are things you cannot borrow from another but must make it your own. Just as the wise bridesmaids were prepared and could not lend oil to the foolish bridesmaids because of the real possibility of their light going out.

*Being prepared is first an attitude.* It is right thinking. It is hopefulness. It is willingness. It is humility recognizing the God is in control and that I’m not. All of these reflect an attitude of readiness. It means to keep on loving others. It means not giving up. It means persevering in the face of adversity. It means keeping our eyes on Jesus. It means remaining faithful to our calling. It means not letting things discourage us and succumb to our fears.

*Being prepared is commitment.* This means being ready for whatever God has for us. It means being ready for God’s plan and ready to fulfill out part whatever that may be.

*Being prepared is a lifestyle.* It is living out the ways of Jesus. It is living in ways that are consistent with the character of the kingdom. It means being faithful at ALL times. Not just when someone is looking. Not just when it is convenient. It is a lifestyle that reflects the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit. Does this all sound too spiritual? Well, maybe we as disciples should discuss, and pass on spiritual things. If we never talk about them, how can those around us including our children learn of spiritual things? We cannot be like the “children of Abraham” and expect these things to somehow be absorbed?

We are fast approaching Advent, the very season of preparation. Will you take time like the wise maidens and prepare or will you try to slide by another Advent season with no preparation other than the busyness we chose to pick up from the culture? How many more seasons will you let go by before preparing for the coming of Christ? I am not even talking about the Second Coming. Maybe you have not even let Him come the first time. Just going through the motions will not get into the wedding ceremony as we see from the story. We cannot delay anymore the preparation. Our lives must reflect that which we believe in and more importantly we must live our faith not only inside these walls, but out there!!!

With Veterans Day only a few days away I am reminded that no soldier wants to go into a battle without being prepared. They want to be disciplined, ready for any circumstances that may come their way. That certainty only comes with hours and hours of preparation. Is our “battle”, a spiritual one, any different? - Absolutely not!!! This I believe is what is behind

today's parable of the foolish and wise maidens. *We must be prepared by equipping ourselves.* Just as the lamps needed the oil to function, so we too need the Holy Spirit to function and "shine" as disciple of Christ. For as Benjamin Franklin stated - "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Years ago, a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals. Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. "Are you a good farm hand?" the farmer asked him. "Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man. Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him.

The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work. Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!" The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew. When you're prepared, spiritually, mentally, and physically, you have nothing to fear. Can you sleep when the wind blows through your life? The hired hand in the story was able to sleep because he had prepared and secured the farm against the storm. When we prepare and secure ourselves against the storms of life it is by grounding ourselves in the Word of God.

Be prepared by being wise not foolish. Amen.