

Throughout Scriptures, from the events in the Garden of Eden narrated in Genesis to the Grand Final Chapter of the history of earth as delineated in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, God has used a Bridal paradigm to speak again and again of His Son's relationship to His Church. Scripture shows clearly that from before the foundation of the earth, God the Father has always planned to choose and prepare a perfect bride for His Son and present her to Him at the end of the age. It was this desire that caused Him to put into motion this wondrous thing we call the created world. It is staggering to realize that in His perfect knowledge of man's rejection of His friendship, His love was so vast that He planned to save us from ourselves and the effect of our sins even before they had taken place in time! Truly can we sing "What wondrous love is this, oh my soul, oh my soul? What wondrous love is this!"

Just days before His death, Jesus told a parable about 10 virgins that is especially important to us in these days.

"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. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

"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. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

"'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.'

"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.

"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Matt 25:1-13

I recently read a commentary on this Scripture that arrested my attention. Gary Wiens in the book "Bridal Intercession" notes that all ten virgins are members of the wedding party. They are expecting the bridegroom's coming, they are his friends, and he obviously "knows" them or they wouldn't have been attendants at the wedding. When considering this, it becomes apparent that all ten of these ladies are pictures of believers in the Body of Christ. And it is in *this* setting that Jesus remarks that half of them are wise and half foolish.

Let's set the table for a Word banquet, okay? This parable is about a bridegroom who is returning for his bride. Who does the bridegroom represent? Jesus. The virgins are his friends

who are anticipating his arrival in the night. The virgins represent the Church, the very Bride of Christ!

What do their lamps represent? His life in us. **"You are the light of the world....let your light shine (like a lamp) before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."** Matt 5:14,16

What does a lampstand do? It holds light that shines to illumine the way in a dark place. The lampstand also represents our ministries to Him lived out in the world. **"The mystery of the seven golden lampstands is this: ...the seven lampstands are the seven churches."** Rev 1:20
This is simple truth, yet ever so profound when spiritual application is made.

But there is yet more in this parable. All of the virgins know the bridegroom; all of them have lamps. But there is this little matter of oil, sufficient oil for those lamps. Some only brought enough light "for the present moment." Others brought enough to last until the bridegroom showed up.



What does that oil stand for? It is the oil of intimacy. It is the oil of intimate relationship with our Lord. It is oil that lasts when darkness falls. It is the oil of knowing Him, the oil of a fruitful overflowing that can only come from an ongoing deep relationship with the Lord of Life on a one-to-one basis. It is the oil of friendship deepened by a lifestyle of relating to Him that holds all

other relationships, all other ministry, everything else as secondary Him. It is the oil of exclusivity.

Wiens makes the most interesting observation at this point. He notes that when Jesus wove this parable, he interjected into it a strategic delay. The bridegroom didn't come when He was expected. Nor did He come at a convenient time. You will note that night fell, yet still he had not come. All ten virgins grew weary and fell asleep. Had he not delayed, there would never have been the crisis that resulted in these women being categorized as either foolish or wise.

What did the delay have to do with anything? Everything! It forced the issue of "Sufficient Oil" all the way to the forefront. Oil for the day may be likened to fuel for the moment, fuel for the everyday tasks of a person. For those of us in ministry, Oil for the day is enough oil to prepare a sermon, teach a lesson, counsel a person, or facilitate a small group bible study. But that is quite different from having enough oil for the long night, for the answer we didn't expect from Him,

for the unexpected crises that arises. Oil for a day is one thing; oil for anything and everything (including cataclysmic unexpected events) is quite another.

As I have studied this interesting slant on the parable of the 10 virgins, I have been made aware of a tendency within me at times to slough off in my personal time spent with the Lord. I regularly seek Him when preparing for ministry, but sometimes slack off on simply spending time with Him in everyday living. I have at times arbitrarily brushed off the value, the blessing both to Him and to me of continuing intimacy with Him simply because He is so worthy, simply because He loves me.. But seeking His wisdom or anointing for ministry can border on idolatry if it means using Him as a *means* to an end, rather than as my utter *end*. What a far cry this is from the richness He desires to pour into and over me and ultimately through me. It borders on being a harlot's love. It is "using" Him in a way that is so below His holy worth and loveliness.

Today, I purpose to buy oil from the Oil Merchant. Today I go to obtain oil from the Only One who can give it to me. I confess today that I cannot obtain this oil by "borrowing" from others. It is like yesterday's manna; it sours after its intended purpose. Today I come home to the place of resting in the Presence of my Savior King.. How about you?

Lord, I choose (like Mary) to sit at Your feet. I choose to drink of the fellowship of Your heart. I choose to listen to You. I will eat the Bread of Life and Drink from Your fountains. Wash me with Your Word. You are my End. I have nothing; nothing for today, and assuredly, nothing for the long night. Your pleasure is the reason I live.

Bridegroom King, I come to You to buy oil. I readily confess that it is not to be purchased at a "big box store" (if you will, a nice church service or while "doing ministry"), but rather with frequent one-on-one time spent alone with You.

As I soak in the oil of Your transforming Presence, My Friend, I will have an abundance of oil. As I live and move, as I minister in the little corner of the world You have entrusted to me, I will have plenty of oil for the long night. My lamp will not fail; nor will it go out; it will cast illumination for all to see - - - You.

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'" Behold, I come, my Beloved!