

2 Peter 3:1-13, Matthew 25:1-13 “Before It’s All Burned Up” 9/1/24

Humankind has long known that the earth will not last forever - Astronomers tell us that when the sun cools, the earth will burn up - That sounds like a contradiction, but it is not

As our sun reaches the end of its fuel the cooling will begin - When that happens, the sun’s gravitational pull will lessen, allowing it to expand to an enormous size - Although it will be cooler, it will still be a sun, and its huge size will burn up everything on the earth

In Peter’s day, science had not figured this out yet - But it seems that the Lord revealed it to Peter - 2 Peter 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”¹

Over the years, many have predicted the “End of the World” - The doomsayers had quite a party a few years ago because the calendar of the ancient Mayan civilization ended on Dec. 21, 2012

This event even inspired the 2009 disaster movie called “2012” starring John Cusack, in which a tsunami tosses the aircraft carrier onto Washington DC, crushing the White House and killing the President who was played by Danny Glover² - These days the internet tells me you may stream it on Hulu or on Amazon’s Prime Video

Now that the year 2012 is in the past - It is obvious that the last day on that ancient Mayan calendar was not connected to the last day for the planet earth

In the Christian faith, the number 666 is described as the “mark of the beast” in the Book of Revelation - So it was no surprise that Europeans worried as the year 1666 approached

¹ Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,
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² www.imdb.com

It did not help that the year before, the Great London Plague had wiped out about 100,000 people, a fifth of London's population in that day, leading many to predict the end of times

Then on Sept. 2, 1666, a fire broke out in a bakery on London's Pudding Lane - The fire spread and over three days burned more than 13,000 buildings and destroyed tens of thousands of homes

But in the end, fewer than 10 people perished in the blaze, which, while catastrophic, was not the end of the world³

Jesus' disciples were also curious about the end of the world - In Matthew 24 we read of Jesus leaving the Temple and telling His disciples of its destruction

Then Matthew 24:3 says, "As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus' answer is called the Olivet Discourse, because they were on the Mount of Olives - It is recorded for us in Matthew 24 and 25 - Mark and Luke also record this discourse

But only Matthew recorded the parable we heard about a wedding feast and the parable of the 10 virgins - Many versions of the Bible translate this word bridesmaids or even girls

However, it makes little difference what we call them: bridesmaids, virgins, or girls - Because the point of the parable is not in their virginity or whether they are girls or women, but in the difference between the wise and foolish girls

At first, they all looked alike - Matthew 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom" - Then verse 2 tells us that "Five of them were foolish, and five were wise"

³ Some London Fire information gleaned from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Fire_of_London

This could easily be a parable about those of us who go to Church - We all gather to worship the Lord - Yet we cannot tell exactly where any of the other Church goers are in their relationship with Jesus

I hope that all of us know Jesus as savior and have accepted through the Grace of God the free gift of forgiveness - However, some of us may not yet have come to know Jesus

It is the same with the girls in our parable - Verses 3 and 4 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps"

If the oil represents the Holy Spirit - Outwardly the girls looked the same - But some had lamps that were filled with the Holy Spirit - While the others had no oil - Their lamps were running on empty

In the Church it is the same - It is quite possible to attend Church - To be active in a congregation - To give generously, and to know quite a bit about the Bible - All without having that personal relationship with Jesus

In John 3:7 Jesus tells Nicodemus "You must be born again" - This rebirth is a result of our trusting Jesus - Of our believing in Him - And inviting Him into our life to be our Savior

Without this Spiritual rebirth we are all like the foolish bridesmaids - All dressed up for the wedding feast - But with no oil for our lamps

Today is the time to decide to follow Christ - To make Him our Savior - Tomorrow may be too late - God's Word says, "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation"⁴

This current Church age will end one day when Jesus returns - This is called the Rapture - It is the time when the Church is taken out of this world - While those who are left behind will face terrible judgment

⁴ From 2 Corinthians 6:2

That is why our decision to accept Jesus is urgent - Because this day could come at any moment - And even if The Day does not come soon - We will all still face God - When death claims these fragile bodies of ours - And we do not know when either of these days will arrive

In today's parable, we see the Rapture in the arrival of the bridegroom - Then the foolish realize their folly in not having any oil - But it is too late - They beg some from the wise girls - But the wise girls cannot share their oil - And send them away to the oil dealers

It might seem like the wise girls are being selfish - Or maybe even mean for not sharing - But that is not it at all

It is because we cannot give out salvation ourselves - We cannot fill others with the Holy Spirit - Like the wise girls, sending the foolish away to buy some oil for themselves - We can only point the way to Jesus

We can only send others to the One who can give the free gift of Salvation - They need to seek these things from Jesus themselves

Another lesson in this parable is often overlooked - Verse 5 says, "As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept" - We quite possibly find the 21st century Church in this verse

The early Church felt that Jesus would return at any moment - But He obviously is taking a longer time to return - At least until today

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"

The Lord has delayed His return so that all will have the chance to repent and believe the Gospel - But look at what the girls in our parable are doing - All of them have become drowsy and fell asleep - Here is where the wise girls fall short - They are sleeping as well as the foolish girls

They know the need for the oil - And see that their friends have none - And yet they become drowsy and sleep - Without urging their friends to get oil before it is too late

Is that the Church of today? - We each may be one of the wise girls and rest secure in our salvation through Jesus - But is the Church of today sound asleep? - While our family, friends, and neighbors are unprepared?

Or are we doing our best to see them prepared as well? - Do we share Jesus with others? - Do we point the way to salvation?

If not, when the Rapture does come - We may be among the wise girls; the ones going with the Bridegroom - But our friends, family, and neighbors may be left behind - Because we were too busy sleeping - Instead of pointing others to the Savior

Today there are many who think that what the Bible says will happen in the end of time is about as farfetched as the disaster movie 2012 in my opening illustration where the Pacific Coast suffers a 10.9 earthquake along the San Andreas Fault and most of California collapses into the Pacific Ocean

This skepticism is also a sign that the end is drawing near - 2 Peter 3:3-4 "knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Scoff all they want; it doesn't change the fact that what the Bible says is historically accurate - For example if you research "How many Old Testament prophecies did Jesus fulfill?" - You'll discover that our Lord fulfilled over 300 different prophecies

If God Word says it, it is accurate - The unbelievers may say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" - But those of us with faith in God know for sure that if the Bible says it will happen, it is going to happen

One of the Churches I pastored had a youth group where the teenagers were fond of saying, "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it"

The parable in today's Gospel reading of the wise and foolish girls teaches several important lessons - First, that we all should know Jesus as our savior - So when that Day comes - We too will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever⁵

In addition, our Epistle passage from 2 Peter gives us the assurance that all of this is going to happen, but in God's timing - "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"⁶

We may be one of the wise girls in today's parable - With our lamps full of oil, as we wait for the bridegroom - But are we sleeping - Or are we determined that none will perish - So we are busy sharing Jesus with others so that all will reach repentance

Today's passages call us to be that evangelist who shares our faith at every opportunity we have - Let God use you to make sure everyone's lamps are full of oil - So that they have believed the Gospel, repented, and asked Jesus into their lives

So that they will not have to face the awful fate of being left behind - Then, we will truly be Ready - And those we love will be ready too

⁵ See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

⁶ 2 Peter 3:9