Oil in the Vessel
Joshua 24:14-25 Matthew 25:1-13

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus continues His Olivet discourse. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus has been teaching about signs of Christ's return, perilous times, and being ready for His coming. We briefly visited this parable back at the beginning of summer, but today we will go deeper into it and the teaching of Jesus. In this parable, Jews describes ten bridesmaids going to meet the bridegroom. Five are descried as wise or prudent because they carry with them extra oil for their lamps. Five are foolish because they carry only the oil in their lamps. This story is about living faith. It is interesting that all bridesmaids have lamps. All have the outward form, but only half have the inward reality: the oil. In Scripture, oil represents the Spirit. The failure to have extra oil is like having religious appearance without having the spirit within. It's a sobering illustration of the need for spiritual readiness—the need for the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

Right now in the news, we are sold fear--the threat of AI, the outcomes of the elections, the apparent turn to socialism, the affected stock market, wars, virus attacks, Islam, power grid failures, water shortages. And for all these things people attempt to prepare. We hear that there may be snow, and the store shelves empty. Preparing is wise. But what about spiritual readiness? We are told with certainty of Christ's return, and yet there is no urgency. Fifty times in the NIT we are told to be alert, to be ready. Did you know that many scholars say that the bible speaks of Christ's second coming eight times more than it speaks of the first coming? In the meantime, we are to live in trust, to serve, and to obey: "And the people said to Joshua, 'We will serve the Lord our God and obey him'" (Joshua 24:24).

We are called to live in the light of eternity and of Christ's return. The awareness is not to engender panic. It is a mandate for diligence, discipline, spiritual preparedness, a call to be filled with the Spirit and with His purpose. It is a call to be comforted in the truth:

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> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.
> --1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

We are told repeatedly that Christ is returning, but I say again, we seem to live without urgency. We need to follow the instructions that Paul gives to the believers in Thessalonica:

> 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
>
> 4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. --1 Thessalonians 5:2-6

We need to be alert and sober children of light. Right now, I fear, many of use are spiritually still, as though we await His return in the dark. But the bible gives us instruction and encouragement in the waiting:

> And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.
>
> If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

> See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. --1 John 2:28-3:3

We are not to live complacent but consecrated.

Listen, the five foolish virgins settle for a "just enough" oil mentality. Just enough is not what we are called to, Christian. Believers are recipients of God's lavish love. So how do we live in light of eternity, that is, in light of Christ's return? Here are some steps we can take:

1. Appreciate our position: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him"--1 John 3:1. Appreciating our position—our reality as beloved children of God—is the antidote to complacency. It means putting on the breastplate of love and the helmet of salvation; "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet"--1 Thessalonians 5:8. No one else can get us or keep us ready. The prepared virgins could not give oil to those who were unprepared. You are loved with the great quantity and quality of God's lavish love, believer!
2. Anticipate eternity. Maybe, there are attitudes, habits, and priorities in your life that need rearranging. What's in your lamp? The concern

has never been the lamp. It is the contents. Paul writes, "What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthian 2:12). We can't be filled by the Spirit if we are full of ourselves. Paul also writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). Anticipation breeds hope. Hope brings peace and joy. Be led by the Holy Spirit. Shine as a light in a dark world, not as a spotlight on yourself but as a light of procession for the King. Don't' settle with being just enough. Pursue abundance of oil.

3. Aspire to purity. Our righteous position should lead us to right practice:

   "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"--Romans 3:22-24. Christ's salvation restores each believer to righteousness; it is a divine gift not earned by the work of the believer. We can live with joyful confidence. And each believer who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.

Jesus spoke of His return twenty-one separate times. The call to be alert and to be ready is not an admonition to provoke anxiety but it is to inspire holy living—confidence consecration, joy in obedience, a counter to complacency. "Prophecy is practical," writes Brian Bell, "because it should propel us to pursue purity in the present." We are not to become discouraged by what's going on around us. The oil represents the inner presence and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. What's in your vessel? Let me share with you a passage that makes for a great closing to our sermon:

> For this reason, I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
>
> 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. --Ephesians 3:14-21

Amen. Choose this day, choose again tomorrow, whom you will serve.

Passages in support of this sermon:

Joshua 24:14-25

14 "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 17 It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 18 And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

19 Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. 20 If you forsake the

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Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

21 But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord."

22 Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord."

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

23 "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."

25 On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

Matthew 25:1-13

25 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The 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.'10 "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.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

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