

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Matthew 25:1-13

1. “Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. And five of them were prudent, but five were foolish. 3. Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them; 4. but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5. And while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6. But at midnight a cry was made, ‘Behold the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him.’ 7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8. But the foolish said unto the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.’ 9. But the prudent answered, saying, ‘No, lest there will not be enough for us and you; but go rather to them who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ 10. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. 11. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us.’ 12. But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say unto you, I do not know you.’ 13. Watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes.”

2nd Lesson: HH 522

Let us consider what the Divine mercy is. The Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every man, and is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved except by Divine means, which means the Lord reveals in the Word. The Divine means are what are called Divine truths, which teach how man must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads man to heaven, and by them He implants in man the life of heaven. This the Lord does with all. But the life of heaven can be implanted in no one unless he abstains from evil, for evil obstructs. So far, therefore, as man abstains from evil, the Lord leads him out of pure mercy by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world and afterwards to eternity. This is what is meant by the Divine mercy. And from this it is evident that the mercy of the Lord is pure mercy, but not apart from means, that is, it does not look to saving all out of mere good pleasure, however they may have lived.

SERMON

Parable of the Ten Virgins: Preparation For Heaven
A Sermon By Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

But the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Matthew 25: 4

Ten Virgins:

In describing the kingdom of heaven, the parable of the ten virgins makes a striking contrast between two kinds of people. Some people are wise or prudent while others are

foolish. The Lord uses the parable as an illustration comparing preparation for heaven on the one hand (prudent virgins) and spiritual irresponsibility on the other hand (foolish virgins). Prudence dictates there are times to use caution, common sense and good judgment. But foolishness can make us stumble into negligence, silliness or saying or doing something hurtful.

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the “ten virgins” are all people in the church, both those who are in good and truth, and those who are in evil and falsity (AC 4638). This parable is about people in the world who hear the Word and from it have some knowledge of the Lord and His commandments. Yet some people are prudent and some are foolish.

Heaven:

As we approach the subject of preparation for heaven let’s consider first some of the descriptions of heaven the Lord gives us in the Word of Heaven And Hell: heaven is a life of honesty and justice pursuant to the moral and civil laws of society and spiritual truths according to the Lord’s teachings in the Word (HH 530); heaven is also love (HH 14) and is within everyone (HH 33); heaven is a common sharing, for it shares all it has with each one (HH 73); and heaven is charity towards the neighbor from the Lord (HH 250).

These are just some of the spiritual characteristics of the Lord’s kingdom in the heavens. When people abide in them during their life in the world the kingdom of the Lord is present upon earth. But in order that heaven descends upon earth and people enter heaven upon leaving the world there is something we must do.

Take Oil in Your Vessel and Lamp:

The Lord uses the parable of the ten virgins to also describe what people must do to freely enter heaven. What must a person do to inherit eternal life? Like the five prudent virgins we must take oil in our vessels and lamps. The Lord’s kingdom is one of love of the Lord and a life of charity toward the neighbor; we know this. However, the way to get there, i.e., to heaven, is to shun evils, to obtain truths from the Word and then apply them to life by living according to them.

We learn from the Arcana that “oil” is the good of love, “vessels” are the doctrinal things of faith, while “lamps” represent truths in which there is good (AC 4638:2).

The five foolish virgins represent people who are in truths in which is no good (AC 4638:3). The carelessness of the five foolish virgins tells us about people who know the truths in the Word but do not heed its admonitions. They do not put good in the truths they know.

Goods are implanted in truths when a person lives by them. Many of us know that truth is of the understanding. Good relates to a person’s life or how he lives. A person may know truths but may not live the good that truth teaches. In this case, there is no oil or

good in the truths the persons understands. Therefore, a person must take oil or, in other words, do what is good according to the truths he understands.

Why Take Your Own Oil?

So we ask: why should you acquire your own oil? The reason is no one can do this for us. As we consider preparation for heaven, notice that the five prudent virgins refused to give of their oil, saying to the foolish, “there will not be enough for us and you, but go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” The appearance is that the prudent virgins behaved uncharitably by refusing the help those virgins who were in need. That is not the case though. In the Heavenly Doctrine we’re told that in the spiritual world the good life of one person cannot be transferred to another (AC 4638:6). Like the prudent virgins each of us must take oil in our vessels and lamps.

The five prudent virgins are saying of themselves that they have received truths from the Word. They have shunned evils and fought against temptations. Therefore they are delighted from true happiness derived from living a good life from the Lord.

The message of the prudent virgins to the five who are foolish is this: you have not lived by the truths that you have learned from the Word; you have pursued your own happiness; you have lived as you have pleased; therefore you have received your delights in loving yourself and in entertaining in all manner of sinful lusts; you have satisfied yourself. In simple terms, you have not prepared yourself for heaven.

There is an important message here. You must acquire your own oil. You must be accountable and at the same time take responsibility in allowing the Lord to prepare you for heaven. The five prudent virgins were not behaving uncharitably. They simply could not give the good life they had acquired for themselves (from the Lord) to the five virgins who were foolish. The foolish virgins picture people who neglect to capitalize on the opportunity, while in the world, to take oil in their vessels and lamps.

We have to take our own oil in our vessels and lamps because in the spiritual world the good life of a person who shunned evils and obeyed the Lord’s commandments cannot be given to another person who had not put forth his own effort. From a practical standpoint, this spiritual reality also applies to our life while here in the world. For example, the accomplishments and successes of other people around us can be encouraging. But no one can give you his enthusiasm, or motivation, or commitment. You have to compel yourself into action.

Likewise, a further example is you may encourage another person and render support. And this is the right thing to do. But you cannot somehow transfer your eagerness or sense of responsibility to that person. This person has to be given as much opportunity as possible to excel on his own and to even suffer the agony of failure. No one should be denied the opportunity to rise or fall. All of our experiences, good and bad, provide a spring board for growth.

The parable of the ten virgins speaks about everyone in the church who has knowledge of the Lord and His commandments that teach us how to live. You have take oil in your vessel and lamp right now while living in the world because, as said in the Arcana, “everyone’s life remains with him after death” and “a person has to be made ready for heaven throughout his entire life in the world” (AC 7439:3). Once again, in the spiritual world the good life of a person cannot be transferred to another (AC 4638:6). But people who during their life in the world have obeyed Word enter heaven in the next life. These kind of people are described by the five prudent virgins who were ready and went in with the bridegroom to the wedding.

Preparation For Heaven:

So this takes us to what kind of things may a person do in preparation for heaven? Because we have a hereditary inclination toward evil we are susceptible to the desire to sin. A person can therefore exercise prudence by relying upon the truths of the Word to combat against evil. He may remind himself that the Word commands people not commit adultery, murder, steal, bear false witness or covet.

The Lord said “watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes.” The Arcana tells us these words of the Lord “mean an eagerness to live according to the commandments constituting a person's faith” (AC 4638:10). So, a person may turn to the Lord for inspiration and enthusiasm to continue living a heavenly life.

In the Apocalypse Revealed the Word says people who shun evils as sins are in the good of life; and the good of life desires truths, and acknowledges and accepts them (AR 379). In preparation for heaven a person can turn away from sinful attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. While so doing he makes himself willing to obey the wonderful truths of the Word. So long as the person obeys, the Lord in turn can gently bend the person’s inclination away from hell and then in the direction of heaven. In His mercy the Lord can then help the person become somewhat unresponsive to worldly cares that are trifling and of little use.

When To Prepare For Heaven:

And so we ask when should we prepare for heaven? Before answering we should acknowledge first that the Lord in His mercy and wisdom actually began our preparation for heaven long ago when we were barely conscious of ourselves and the world around us. As we learn from the Heavenly Doctrine it is quite astonishing beyond measure that as long as a person “abstains from evil the Lord leads him out of pure mercy by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world and afterwards to eternity” (HH 522). Just think that the Lord was leading us when we were little infants oblivious to comprehending the world around us.

And the same may be said of regeneration, the miraculous process by which the Lord can recreate us anew as He reshapes and fashions us for heaven. The Arcana tells us that

“regeneration, or the implanting of the life of heaven in man, begins from his infancy and continues even to the last of his life in the world, and that after his life in the world it is perfected to eternity” (AC 9334:3). And so, even in our infancy when we were unable to cooperate and participate with the Lord, in His mercy and wisdom He was preparing us for heaven.

Infants are unable to teach themselves. Infants have not yet developed awareness of the “as of self.” They are not able (not yet) to exercise their freedom according to reason although they possess the capacity. But still the Lord is preparing them for heaven. In His Providence He has provided them with parents, or teachers, or other responsible adults or ministers, who play their role along with the Lord in the preparation of infants for heaven.

But for us who are of adult age now is the time to continue preparation for heaven by learning truths from the Word, shunning evils, and living according to the Lord’s teachings while we are here in the natural world. All the while we are taking oil in our vessels and lamps. But the time will come to slumber and sleep and then arise. We will leave this world behind and enter the spiritual world. The hope is that upon awakening in the spiritual world we have allowed the Lord to prepare us for heaven.

Concluding Ideas:

As we consider the subject of preparation for heaven there is a greater question to ask yourself: Do you want to go to heaven? It is important to contemplate these things because as revealed in the Arcana “everyone’s life remains with him after death and man must be prepared for heaven by his whole life in the world” (AC 7439:3).

The parable of the ten virgins teaches about the lot of people who have obeyed the Lord and others who have lived wickedly in disregard of the teachings of the Church. The prudent who live a life of reformation and regeneration while in the world enter heaven while the foolish cast themselves out of heaven and instead live among their like in the hells.

The Lord opens heaven to everyone who freely receives by shunning evils and living a good life from His Word. But keep in mind that “no one is admitted into heaven from mercy alone, regardless of how he has lived in the world” (AC 7439:3). It would be contrary to order for the Lord to somehow convert evil into good and thus elevate everyone into heaven. The Lord is forever gracious, allowing heaven to every person in the measure in which he is willing to receive. Like the ten prudent virgins let’s be wise by listening well to the Lord and obeying Him.

The Lord said “everyone who hears My words and does them I will liken to a wise man. But everyone hearing My words and not doing them will be likened to a foolish man” (Matthew. 7: 24, 26).

Amen.

