

**“Stay Prepared”**  
Matthew 25:1-13  
October 13, 2013  
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A young and passionate pastor in his prayer decided to preach his message without any preparation or any notes. His intent was to remove his personal interpretation, but totally he wanted to count on the Holy Spirit’s work within him. On that Sunday morning, in passion, he gave a long sermon to the congregation. He wondered how his message went. He prayed about it and heard a voice from above. It was the Holy Spirit saying, “My loving servant, you did a good job last Sunday. But why don’t you study when you preach next Sunday?” (I have studied a lot on this sermon!!)

As a pastor, one of my roles in our church ministries is to study and share the meaning of God’s words with you every Sunday. I don’t have every answer to your Biblical questions nor do I memorize the Bible, either. Probably, it might be faster to Google it on the internet if you need an immediate and accurate answer! Sometimes, I struggle with the Bible. For sure, there are stories in the Bible that are hard for us to understand or difficult to apply to our modern culture. Therefore, it is important to understand the Scripture from the social perspectives of the times. Studying this helps us to gain more understandings of the spiritual meanings and insights of our faith. Definitely, we need to understand mysteries of the Bible with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but we need ears, eyes, patience and study to fully listen to the Holy Spirit. Don’t give up the Bible. God is still speaking to us through the Bible!

New Testament scholars agree that the concept of the Kingdom of God is the most important point in Jesus’ teachings and ministries. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Kingdom of heaven is mentioned forty one times and 108 times in the New Testament. And the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry is not “up there” but “right here and right now”, not “transcendent” but “eminent” in our daily lives. Let’s think about our Scripture reading. Why did Jesus talk about the story of virgins for his teaching on the Kingdom of heaven? What does our story tell about the Kingdom of heaven? What do these words mean?

Today's parable is about ten young virgins waiting for a bridegroom to come to a wedding. Five were foolish and five were smart. To make our story short, the foolish virgins took lamps, but no extra oils. The smart virgins prepared having enough oils for their lamps to greet the bridegroom. Every bridesmaid wanted to be prepared to meet the bridegroom. Jesus challenged his disciples to be alert and encouraged them to get ready and be prepared. So no bridesmaid will miss the wedding. Do you have some reactions to this reading?

I want to explain to you a perspective to understand our story. It is an allegorical interpretation. This kind of storytelling was a popular type of storytelling during the middle ages. This particular approach was used for symbolizing God's will for us. For example, in our story, Jesus is the bridegroom. The followers of Christ can be divided into two camps: five foolish = five foolish followers. Five wise = five faithful followers of Christ. The wedding feast = heaven. So Jesus shared the secret of the kingdom of God using these images. Since St. Augustine and in the middle of ages, this has been one of major approaches to the Bible. It gives us more spiritual sense and moral meaning. I am fine with this. But I don't want you to misunderstand our reading as a punishment warning rather than as a joyful message. Every bridesmaid didn't want to be locked out of participating in the wedding celebration as we do not want to be locked out of the Kingdom of God. The point here is there is joy and excitement anticipating to be in the Kingdom of God. We don't want to miss this awesome experience! Are we preparing? If you are a fan of the 49ers or Giants, you may have experienced the joy and excitement waiting for the championship. There are no championships in the Kingdom of God, but you will carry the same anticipation of joy and excitement with you to heaven. Be prepared as the smart bridesmaids were!!

Let's explore wedding culture in the time of Jesus. We need to remember that there were not many great events to enjoy together in those times. Israelites lost their country and experienced destruction of their temple. The country was a colony of the Roman Empire. People suffered from poverty, oppression and political turmoil. The feelings of loss, abandonment, and despair dominated people's daily lives. In the midst of bitter reality, a wedding was a true celebration. There was food, fellowship, laughter and pure joy for the community. If you were there, you wouldn't miss this wonderful opportunity. If you forgot it, it would be a great loss to you. Jesus took this celebration for a metaphor of the Kingdom of heaven. Another thing that we need to remember is

that in the time of Jesus, there were no street lamps. In Jewish tradition, the wedding party could begin when the groom shows up. The role of bridesmaids was important. Their lamps were supposed to light the path home for the wedding party and all the attendees. Since Israel was an occupied country, the law of that time allowed no one to be on the street after dark without a lamp. If you were there in the darkness in the middle of night, you could have been arrested by Romans. So having lamps ready would provide for both the safety and direction of the wonderful wedding party.

Last Sunday, “No Luau Luau” was a special party for us. I was impressed by your generous hospitality and giving. This was like a wedding party that Jesus described to the Kingdom of heaven. I want to thank our Tongan families, Luau dancers, Geri Ann Alviso’s leadership and the congregation’s contributions. And the food was delicious! There was joy and celebration. I believe that it was a glance of God’s Kingdom. I hope that our Sunday worship is a celebration each week and participation in God’s kingdom. Our Sunday worship is not a gathering for your Christian responsibility but should be a joyful, exciting fun celebration that you don’t want to miss. This is what God wants for us. Amen.