

Ten young ladies were on their way to a wedding. Five of the girls were wise and had prepared for the trip, making certain that they had enough oil to fuel their lamps. Five maidens were foolish. Their minds were preoccupied with other things. It was still light when they left home, but now darkness was coming. The bridegroom was delayed. Their lamps were running out of oil and they had none in reserve. They asked the five wiser maidens if they could borrow some oil from them, but they were refused. "Go see if you can buy some from a dealer," was the reply of those who brought oil. The foolish maidens ran out into the village to try to find oil for their lamps. While they were gone the bridegroom came and when they returned to the feast, the doors were shut and they could not get in.

William Barclay tells us that the parable of the wise and foolish maidens is based on no fairy tale. Even today middleclass families in Palestine celebrate weddings just as the Master described them 2,000 years ago, and still we can imagine that there are some who miss out on the feast!

J. Alexander Findley tells of what he observed during a trip to Palestine: *"When we were approaching the gates of a...town I caught sight of ten maidens gaily clad and playing some kind of musical instrument, as they danced along the road in front of our car; when I asked what they were doing, (my guide) told me that they were going to keep the bride company till the bridegroom arrived. I asked him if there was any chance of seeing the wedding, but he shook his head, saying in effect: 'It might be tonight, or tomorrow night, or in a fortnight's time; nobody ever knows for certain.' Then he went on to explain that one of the great things to do, if you could, at a middleclass wedding in Palestine was to catch the bridal party napping. So, the bridegroom comes unexpectedly, and sometimes in the middle of the night."*

**The question for the morning is this: ARE WE PREPARED?** Do you have oil for your lamp? Who knows what tomorrow may bring? Who knows what kind of severe test we might confront? Who knows what kind of door might open? Who knows if we might even have tomorrow. The bridegroom comes unexpectedly. **Are you prepared?**

**FOR ONE THING, ARE YOU MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU?** Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar tells about a most successful jewel thief back in the Roaring Twenties by the name of Arthur Berry. Berry liked to hobnob with the rich and famous of Boston's elite, except he did his hobnobbing at night when they weren't around. He wouldn't steal from just anybody. As a matter of fact, a visit from Arthur was a status symbol among the ladies of Boston's upper class. The police weren't nearly as intrigued by his status-oriented thievery. And one night they caught him and shot three times. He fell through a glass window, shattered glass stuck in his body, and lay on the ground in excruciating pain. Not surprisingly, he decided amidst the blood, glass, and handcuffs, and muttered, *"I am not going to do this anymore!"*

To make a long story short, Arthur eventually got out of prison two decades later, and settled down in a quiet New England town. There he became a respected citizen, even leading a local veteran's organization. But when it leaked out to the press that this notorious jewel thief was holed up in this tiny New England homeland the nation's media arrived in droves. One young reporter asked him, *"Mr. Berry, you stole from a lot of wealthy people in your life as a jewel thief. Let me ask you a question. From whom did you steal the most?"*

Without a moment's hesitation Arthur Berry replied, *"That's the easiest question I've ever been asked. The man from whom I stole the most was Arthur Berry. You see, I could have been a baron on Wall Street. I could have been a successful business man, had I utilized my God given talents and developed them legitimately. I could have made it big in business but I spent two-thirds of my adult life behind bars."*

**ARTHUR BERRY WAS A THIEF WHO STOLE FROM HIMSELF. He did not use the God given talents and opportunities at his disposal, and it haunted him forever. HOW ABOUT YOU?** If the bridegroom were to come tonight and ask you to give an account of your life, could you say that you had taken complete advantage of the opportunities you have been given?

**Let's narrow the question a little more. HAVE YOU BEEN FAITHFUL IN YOUR SERVICE TO GOD AND YOUR FELLOW MAN & WOMAN?** The year was 1780. In New England there was an eerie dark day that

frightened many people. At noon it was as dark as early night. The birds, as confused as the people, sang a final twilight song and fluttered off into the evening dusk. The cows came meandering home from the pasture and chickens came home to roost. Religious men fell on their knees and begged a final blessing before the end came. **In Hartford, Connecticut the State Legislature was in session and someone moved adjournment thinking that the Day of Judgement had come.** But then a legislator stood up and said, "I am against adjournment. The Day of Judgement either is approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore candles to be brought in." The legislature approved his request. *Have you been faithful in your service to God and your fellow man.? If the bridegroom were to come would he find you at your post?*

**A third question. IS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE ABOUT WHICH YOU WOULD BE EMBARRASSED OR ASHAMED AT HIS COMING?** The great preacher Jonathan Edwards believed in the principle that Jesus taught in this parable so strongly that he felt compelled to put it down on paper IN THE FORM OF A 'RESOLUTION': *"Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge. Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."*

A mother wrote to CATHOLIC DIGEST saying that one day when she was heading up the stairs with a basket containing the last load of folded clothes, herding her three little ones in front of her for bedtime, her eldest child, Peggy, who was then in kindergarten, picked that moment to begin one of those questions that seem to intrigue all children at some time. *"Mommy," she asked, "If it were the end of the world, and everyone was getting ready to die..."* The mother stopped, shifted the basket on her hip, and said an ultraquick prayer for wisdom to answer this question. *"Yes?"* The mother prodded her daughter. The little girl finished her theological inquiry: *"If the end of the world came, would you have to take your library books back?"* **That young lady did not want any unfinished business in her life.**

**HOW ABOUT YOU?** *Is there some unfinished business in your life that needs to be taken care of? Is there anything about which you would be embarrassed or ashamed if the bridegroom were to come today?*

**Here's another important question concerning the uncertainty of tomorrow: DO PEOPLE YOU LOVE KNOW HOW MUCH YOU APPRECIATE THEM?** Sometimes we wait too late to say, *"I love you," or "Please forgive me," or "Thank you."* You may know the story of William Stidger, a businessman who experienced a shattering emotional breakdown. His energies were depleted. His enthusiasm for life had vanished. He was depressed. He sought help, but did not progress. Days passed. One day an insightful friend said to William, *"When was the last time you singled out one of your acquaintances who has been gracious to you and expressed appreciation?"* That question annoyed him, but he went home that evening and in the isolation of his living room he selected some stationary and, for the first time in two decades, he remembered a high school English teacher. He had not even thought of her in years, but she had taken an interest in him. She had helped him to discover a love for poetry he didn't know he had. She imagined that he might be worth something after all. He wrote her a simple letter. Three days later, by return mail, a letter came from her. In the tremulous handwriting of a long-retired teacher she wrote, *"My eyes are blinded with tears as I write. You are the first student in all my career who has ever written me a letter to express thanks."* She continued, *"I will keep it as long as I live."* With her response to his letter in mind he thought of someone else. And so, he wrote another letter and another. He didn't even notice when he got well, as he discovered the joy of expressing his love and gratitude to others.

**If you knew that the bridegroom was coming today, are there some people to whom you would want to express your appreciation or your love? Who knows what tomorrow may bring? Why not do it now?**

**Here is ONE FINAL QUESTION concerning the coming of the bridegroom. WOULD HE FIND YOU A STRANGER OR A LIFELONG ACQUAINTANCE OF HIM?** When Queen Mary of Orange was about to die, her chaplain came to comfort her with some reading from Scripture. He was concerned whether she was prepared for this journey. She replied, *"I have not left the matter till my last hour."* **YES, SHE WAS PREPARED!!**

An old Scotsman expressed the same sense of assured preparedness as he faced eternity. As a friend offered some sayings at the end, he replied, *"I thatched my house when the weather was warm."* **HE WAS READY!!**

Dr. John Mitchell relates a story about seeing a friend who was in the last day of his life. When Dr. Mitchell came to his bedside, the man reached out and grabbed his hand. *"Oh, John," he whispered, "I'm so sick."* Then his head dropped back and they thought he was gone. But after a moment he opened his eyes again. *"John, is that you?"* he asked. Dr. Mitchell replied, *"Yes, it's me."* The dying man said, *"My, my, I'm so disappointed. I was expecting to see the Lord and all I saw was you."* **There was a man who knew that his Redeemer lives!**

**We have no idea when the bridegroom is coming. BUT IT PAYS TO BE 'PREPARED.'**

**It pays to have that sense of URGENCY that says that it might be at ANY MOMENT.**

The National Football League did a study on scoring in the NFL and discovered that in the **last two minutes of the first half** and the **final two minutes of the second half**, more points are scored than in any other time of the football game!

**So, imagine that the bridegroom is coming today.** Have you done the most you can with the opportunities God has given you? Have you been faithful in your service to God and those around you? Have you taken care of those things in life that could embarrass you or you might be ashamed of? Can you think of persons to whom you ought to express your appreciation and love? Finally, how is your relationship with the bridegroom himself? Is he still a stranger to you or do you know him as **YOUR BEST FRIEND**?

Some folks in Iowa read in the weather forecast column of their local newspaper sometime back *that "there is a 90% chance of tomorrow."* I personally hope that the chances are better than that. But who knows?

**Let's not be foolish. LET'S BE PREPARED!! Amen.**