

JANUARY 13, 1991

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING

Getting ready! It seems that we are always getting ready for something. Little kids find themselves getting ready to go to school. Older kids are getting ready for Junior High or High School. High Schoolers are getting ready for college. College students are getting ready for a job. People with jobs are getting ready for their next assignment or perhaps a promotion. Older workers are getting ready for retirement. And so it goes, we are always getting ready. All of life here on earth is in a sense getting ready for the next life or life after death. How do we prepare for the next step in life? Someone once told me that the best way to prepare for your next job is to do the very best you can in the job that you now have. I thought that was good advice. How does a small child get ready for school? He learns to share, to be obedient to those in authority, to be polite and considerate of others. In other words, he does a good job of being a preschooler. A grammar school student prepares for high school by learning what is taught and more and so it goes throughout life. The way we prepare for eternal life is to live this mortal life in the best way we can so that we do all we can to achieve the potential that comes with being created in the image of God. Just as a student needs certain tools to help him achieve the maximum from the educational experience, we too in life need all the help that God provides in the presence of the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Through Him, Jesus lives in us to will and to do of His good pleasure and so to prepare us for the life hereafter.

People seem to have a lot of curiosity about the end of time and we as adventists associate the end time events with the Second Coming of Jesus. Jesus had a lot to say about that and how our "getting ready" can affect what happens when He does return. One of the points that Jesus made to His disciples was that the exact time is not going to be known by anyone except God Himself. It is not like someone going to the doctor and finding out that you have six months to live and then you start to put your affairs in order. We are not even going to have six minutes notice and if we are not ready when we realize what is happening, then we will not have time to get ready. The point that is made is that we must be ready at all times. The last portion of Matthew 24 is devoted to a discourse concerning the need to be ready, to watch. This discourse is carried over to the 25th chapter where Jesus related the story of the ten virgins and the wedding celebration.

MATTHEW 25:1 The word "then" refers to the time of the end when Jesus will return. The typical wedding celebration in those days was centered more around the bridegroom than around the bride. In modern day weddings, everything is staged around the big moment of the bride walking down the aisle. In the ancient Jewish wedding everything was staged around the arrival of the groom. The party did not begin until he arrived. It seems that part of the excitement of the event was related to the suspense associated with the uncertainty of the time of the arrival of the groom. The virgins in the story that Jesus told were part of the wedding party, perhaps they would be the bridesmaid in a more modern setting. Their job was to participate in the ceremony and festivities that were to follow and they need to be ready when the groom arrived. Since the groom was expected to arrive at night, they were to be prepared to light the way to the place of celebration. Jesus described the group as being made up of two subgroups – some were wise and some were foolish. The distinguishing character of the two was that one part of the group was prepared for the unexpected and the other part was not prepared.

There may be some significance in the fact that the preparedness centered around the presence or absence of oil for their lamps. Some have argued that the oil is representative of the Holy Spirit

in our lives and that this is the preparation that Jesus was implying. We certainly can argue that the Holy Spirit is essential in the life of the believer, that He must be in control, and we need to be always filled with the Spirit. However, the parable can be applied to other elements of preparedness, also. Certainly part of being prepared is having done what Jesus told us to do. To have lived a life that demonstrated the kindness and compassion that He taught, to have loved our neighbor as ourselves and to have honored God (by our obedience) above every other relationship are ways to be prepared.

MATTHEW 25:5-9 There was no difference in the watchfulness of the wise and foolish. Both slept. Both did not know when the groom would arrive. Both were expecting to go to the wedding celebration; however, both were not equally prepared. The wise group had provided a supply of oil for their lamps and the foolish group had not thought it necessary. So many times we go through life not thinking that we need to have a source of light that is external to ourselves and that works OK for a while. But when the darkness lasts longer than we expected we find that our own internal resources are inadequate. The foolish girls tried to borrow oil from the wise ones. The wise ones could not remain responsible to their duty in the wedding ceremony if they would run out of oil because they shared it with someone else. The wise virgins had oil but they were not the source of oil. The foolish ones were advised to go the source of oil and obtain what they needed. But it was too late.

MATTHEW 25:10-13 They tried to correct the unpreparedness but it was all for naught. The opportunity had been missed. Their major problem was that they thought primarily about themselves and what was important to themselves. They had made it easy on themselves and had not considered the impact of their actions on how it might affect the bridegroom. They needed to provide the light so that others could better focus on the bridegroom. They were there strictly for their own fun and had not considered the purpose of their being included in the marriage celebration. When they finally obtained some oil, they came to the place of the celebration and found themselves locked out. They had missed their purpose because they approached life thinking only of self. This is the reason that the bridegroom indicated that he did not know them. He may have thought that he knew them when they were invited to come the marriage; however, their actions showed that they were really not the kind of people that he thought they were.

We are to watch, or more appropriately, watch out that we are who we think we are in relationship to the Kingdom of God. Have we really made Jesus Lord of our lives or are we just living for self and thinking only of what is convenient for us. If we are not focusing our lives on the Bridegroom named Jesus and are not preparing for His coming to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, then we may find that we will be on the wrong side of the door when the celebration starts.