

The Tragedy of the Unprepared Life

There's a true story that comes from the sinking of the Titanic. A frightened woman found her place in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the raging North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they cast off. She was granted three minutes or they would leave without her. She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly pushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in.

Now that seems incredible because thirty minutes earlier, she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over the smallest diamond. But death had boarded the Titanic.

One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment, she preferred three small oranges to a crate of diamonds.

There are events in life, which have the power to transform the way we look at the world. Jesus' parable about the ten virgins offers one of these types of events, for the parable is about the Second Coming of Christ. But Jesus doesn't come right out and say this. Rather, he lets the story describe it for him. The woman on the sinking Titanic understood, in the light of her current circumstances, that she must make preparations for living on a lifeboat. Diamonds would not suffice, only the precious resources of an orange were good enough. Likewise, in this world where Christ may return at any moment, the parable warns, we must be ready.

Weddings are one of these kinds of events. And every time I have a wedding, I admonish those in the wedding to be ready, to make a special effort to be ready on the day of the ceremony. I plead with them to arrive early and be dressed and ready to go. Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't. Jesus' parable about a wedding, is told not from the vantage point of the bride and groom, but of the ten young maidens who had been invited to the happy occasion, five of them were foolish, said Jesus, five of them were wise. What was the measure of their wisdom? In a word, their readiness to be a part of the event. All of the young women had oil in their lamps, but five had an additional supply.

This is, of course, foreign to our concepts of weddings today. Weddings in our society are announced for a specific time and place, and if things are late in getting started, those invited guests begin to fidget a bit. But in first century Palestine, a wedding could happen anytime within several days. The uncertainty was considered a part of the excitement of the wedding. The bridegroom hoped to catch some of the bridal party napping. But fairness required that some announcement be made, so just before the big event a messenger was sent through the streets

shouting: Behold the bridegroom commeth." The alert ones in the wedding party would respond, and the others would be left behind.

In Jesus parable, the cry came at midnight. This was often the case; most bridegrooms chose to come late at night. The sleeping attendants were awakened. It was then that they realized that they did not have enough oil in their lamps to get through the night. Panicked, they attempted to borrow some from the other bridesmaids. But they responded, "If we give you our oil, there won't be enough for us. Hurry out to the dealers and buy some yourself." So the five foolish maidens hurried out, but by the time they returned the door had already been closed. They knocked on the door and pleaded to be a part of the festivities, but the groom said: "If you belonged at this event you would already have been present." Jesus concluded: Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

What is this parable suggesting to us? I would like to make a few suggestions...

Some things cannot be borrowed.

Some things cannot be put off.

We can miss out on great opportunities.

What's Your Purpose in Life?

Josh McDowell tells about an executive "headhunter" who recruits corporate executives for large firms. This headhunter once told McDowell that when he interviews an executive, he likes to disarm him. "I offer him a drink," said the headhunter, "take off my coat, undo my tie, throw up my feet and talk about baseball, football, family, whatever, until he's all relaxed. Then, when I think I've got him relaxed, I lean over, look him square in the eye and say, 'What's your purpose in life?'

It's amazing how top executives fall apart at that question." Then he told about interviewing one fellow recently. He had him all disarmed, had his feet up on his desk, talking about football. Then the headhunter leaned over and said, "What's your purpose in life, Bob?" And the executive said, without blinking an eye, "To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can." "For the first time in my career," said the headhunter, "I was speechless." No wonder. He had encountered someone who was prepared. He was ready. His purpose, "To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can." You and I might not express it that way, but do you doubt that this is one man who has extra oil for his lamp? (by Gary Nicolosi from *Preparing for the End Time*)

Preparedness

John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew his Lord would return at that time the next day. He said in effect, "I would go to bed and go to sleep; wake up in the morning, and go on with my work, for I would want Him to find me doing what he had appointed."