

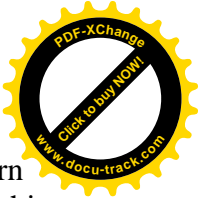
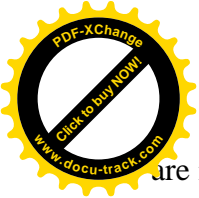
JESUS AND THE BRIDESMAIDS

Matthew 25:1-13

How many of you are aware that last Wednesday was “Storm Awareness Day”? I just happened upon it listening to the radio. A Red Cross representative was interviewed who said that we should not think in terms of ‘if’ a big storm hits but ‘when’. We saw that in Brisbane just a week ago when three storms hit the city. The Red Cross guy said the big message is ‘be prepared’. He said ‘Don’t assume the government will do it all. You must be personally prepared, now. That way you will greatly reduce the trauma you might go through’. (eg photos). So the message is: Be prepared! That’s my theme for this morning too. Be prepared! What for? A storm? No something much, much bigger. And it’s also not a matter of ‘if’ but ‘when’. What is it? I’ll give you a clue. Today is the first Sunday in Advent. (What is Advent about?) It’s the time in the Christian calendar when we think of Jesus coming. Traditionally we think of Jesus coming as a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem. But the season of Advent is also about Jesus’ second coming. Then we won’t say ‘ohh shame’, how cute, when we think of the children doing the baby Jesus story. Then it will be “Oh God” as we stand in stunned awe as we see Jesus coming on the clouds to judge all the world. Are we getting ready for that? Are we prepared?

That’s the point of Jesus parable here in Matthew 25. Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives looking over at the temple. (Show photos) He has told his disciples that the temple will be completely destroyed (24:1,2). His disciples come to him and ask him (24:3) “...when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Jesus goes on to explain nobody knows exactly when; (:36) “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven not the Son but only the Father.” So it means his disciples need to be vigilant, because it could be any time (:42) “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...(:44) you must be ready”. And to make the point sink in Jesus does his usual thing; he tells a story, a parable. (25:1) “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.” What we have here is a lovely Jewish wedding scene. When a Jewish couple got married in those days it consisted of three parts. First there was the engagement when the fathers of the bride and groom made a formal settlement. In other words, these were arranged marriages and the groom’s family had to provide a substantial gift (payment) to compensate the bride’s family for the loss of the daughter. Then there was the betrothal when the couple made their vows in the bride’s home. And thirdly there was the actual wedding feast day, usually about a year later, depending on how long it took the groom and his family to build the a new home connected to the groom’s family home. When everything was ready the groom would come at night with all his friends to fetch his bride from her father’s house and bring her to his new home, the whole group all going in procession. The procession would see the bridesmaids with lamps showing the way, making a very happy march to the house and the wedding party. It was a very happy occasion singing and dancing all the way, eating and drinking at the feast, lots of laughter. It’s party time!

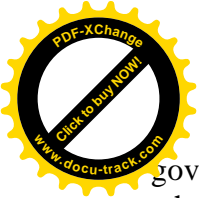
Now having set the scene we see that the focus of Jesus’ story is on the bridesmaids, the ‘ten virgins’. (:1) tells us these ten young women, were, from outward appearance all the same; because they were all invited they would all be dressed in wedding clothes and ready with their lamps. (:5) tells us that they all fell asleep because the bridegroom took so long in coming. That reminds me of the story I read of a couple who had met and set their first date for Friday night at 8pm. The girl didn’t know the bloke well enough to know that he was constantly late for everything, so when it was 9pm she figured she had been stood up. So she took off her make up, put on her pajamas, grabbed a pile of junk food and lay on the couch to watch TV. The door bell rang some time later and it was her date. He stared at her for a second and said; “I’m almost 2 hours late and you’re still not ready.” Jesus didn’t explain in his parable why the groom was delayed. But in a sense those in the know would expect it. You know in our Australian weddings the focus is on the bride and brides



are invariably late. Well in those days the focus was on the groom, wondering when he would turn up. You never knew, so you had to factor that in. You had to be prepared for that. And it was on this point we see the difference between the bridesmaids. Jesus tells us five of them were 'wise' and five were 'foolish'. (:3) *"The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. (:4) The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps."* Now this is significant because Jesus tells us that the groom was really late (:5) *"The bridegroom was a long time in coming"*. All the girls had fallen asleep. That was not the problem, given the long delay. The problem was that long delay used up the initial oil for all the bridesmaids. Only the wise ones who brought extra oil were prepared when the groom suddenly turned up at "midnight" (:6). They quickly trimmed their lamps and pour in the oil and they are set to go to meet the bridegroom. But the foolish girls haven't got that extra oil. So they are stuck. Here's the bridegroom and they are not ready. They can't get ready, they don't have the essentials. Desperately they ask the wise girls for some oil. Those girls realize they can't share what they have because there's not enough for both sets of girls. Then the wise girls will run out as well, half way to the groom's house. So the foolish girls head off to buy some oil. In the meantime the bridal party has arrived at the groom's house and we note how Jesus says so forcefully (:10) *"And the door was shut."* Bang, times up! Feel the deep sense of tragedy as (:11) tells us the foolish girls race up to the house and ask to be let in and they are told (:12) *"I tell you the truth, I don't know you."*

Feel the pain here. Imagine you are invited to a wedding, let's say to play in the band, but on the way you realize you have forgotten your instrument and you dash back home and arrive a bit late for the wedding. You get to the door and the guy there says "Who are you? Sorry I don't know you. You're not on the list." And the door is shut. How would you feel as you stand there? I want you to feel that feeling, because this is for real. How prepared are you to meet your Lord? How prepared is your close friend, your child, your brother, your sister, your work mate? How prepared are you? What if Jesus came back tonight? What if you died in a car crash tonight? When Jesus comes again, as the long awaited groom, to take his bride, the church, back to the 'place he has prepared', then the door will be shut, all bets will be off, then all choice will be gone. Then we will all be judged on how we have responded to Jesus in the here and now. Then *"...at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father."* (Phil.2:10,11) Then there will be so many who will say: Jesus I never knew you were the Lord, or sorry I didn't take you seriously, or I heard about you, but, you know how it is, I was so busy, I had other things on my mind. Please Jesus, we see you now, as Lord, please let us in. And he will say "Who are you? I don't know you." And the door will be shut. And many will be left standing outside, eternally standing outside, forever adrift from the love of God. The door is shut.

Coming back to the five foolish bridesmaids, at the first reading of Jesus' parable it seems a bit rough that the door is shut on them and they are locked out because they forgot to bring extra oil. I mean everyone forgets things at times. Yes we do, but why do we? It's usually because our minds are on other things. Now, that may be due to stress, or indulging a passion or who knows what; but the reality is: that which is really important to you do not forget. That which is constantly occupying your minds you cannot forget. If you are really excited about something, truly desiring something you won't let yourself forget. If we are serious as Christians then we know that Jesus is coming. We see ourselves as the church, as the bride of Christ and we long for the coming of the groom. The coming of the groom, the coming of Jesus to judge all creation, is not something we fret about. It does not scare us. It is something we long for. More than that it is something we work towards, we strive towards. Our worship, our evangelism, our giving, our serving, are all things we do to help bring the kingdom. We can't just be passive about church and God. God has a plan to save the whole world. Guess how he's going to do it. Yes, through the church. That's it. That's God's whole plan. It relies on the church. Christ has done his part, now we are his voice and his hands. Do you want to see an end to climate change and horrific storms? Do you want to see an end to greed and financial melt downs? Do you want to see an end to violence, to rape and abuse, to poverty and



government corruption? Do you want to see an end to sickness and death? Well, it will all stop when Jesus, the groom, comes again. And when will he come? No one knows. But we do know it will be when all the 'elect' have been gathered, when all God's chosen have come to the faith. And we know that God's plan to gather the elect is to be done by what, by whom? The church!

I know that the coming of Jesus seems to be "*a long time in coming*" (:5). And so we go about every day life, studying, working, playing, laughing, crying, just like every body else. It's hard to tell the Christian apart from non Christian in the day to day grind of life. But there is a difference. The true believer in Christ is prepared for his coming. He is ready to greet his Lord and say "I'm so glad to see you. I've been longing and praying and working for this day for a long time." How do we get ready for this day, how can we be prepared? Well the parable gives us a few clues. One is that there are some things in life that cannot be borrowed. We see that when the foolish bridesmaids try to get some oil off the wise girls, but they can't. Faith is one of those things you can't borrow. You can't be saved by your mother's faith. You can't be saved because your friend believes, or because you have some membership paper (attestate) from a church. You have to believe for yourself. You personally need to meet Christ and trust him alone for forgiveness and eternal life. (Tonight I am going to preach on where true faith comes from, could be very good for you to be there). If you have faith in Christ, then it is something you nurture. Spiritual readiness results from intentional habits. The oil that keeps your light burning comes from daily bible reading and prayer, bible studies with others, regular worship. Perhaps you are thinking, yeh, yeh, but I'm too busy for all that. I'll think more seriously about faith in Jesus when I am older. I'm too busy now for church, for bible study, that can come later. Can it? Will it? When? What if Jesus were to come back tomorrow? Would you be ready? What if you had a heart attack from work stress, are you prepared to die and meet your maker? You know what Jesus thinks of that attitude don't you? He called the unprepared bridesmaids what? -"*foolish*". What does he say at the end of his parable: (:13) "*Therefore keep watch, because you don't know the day or the hour.*" How ready are you? How ready are those you love? What will you do about it? Remember when Jesus comes there is no time to change any more. "*The door is shut.*" When Jesus comes again and all injustice and suffering is gone, and the new earth is shining ready for eternal life, what will he say to you: "Sorry I don't know you"? Or will he say "Hi John, Hi Sally. We have both been longing for this moment for a long time, haven't we? Come on in and enjoy the wedding feast.'