

**St. Michael and St. George Cathedral, Grahamstown**

**Date: 12 November 2017 (Remembrance Day)**

**Text: Matt. 25:1-13**

**Title: Sanctified but Foolish**

My sermon of this morning has two parts.

Firstly, I will briefly say few words about the Remembrance Sunday. Secondly, I will engage with Jesus' discourse on the parable of the Ten Virgins from the gospel reading of this morning.

Firstly, today is the annual Remembrance Sunday. Remembrance Day is celebrated on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month. The Day goes back to when the First World War ended at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1918. However, in the context of South Africa, the day is marked on the Sunday closest to November 11. This day is commemorated as a remembrance for those who lost their lives in the First World War, the Second World War and other wars and conflicts in different parts of the world.

The observance of this day is neither to celebrate any triumph nor is it about boasting about accomplishments in wars. Rather, it is about showing respect for those who chose to serve their countries and in certain instances, paid the sacrifice of laying down their lives so that we who are here now can have the life that we know.

Accordingly, we remember several million soldiers and combatants who lost their lives in these wars. We remember those who were killed on the battlefield, those that died resulting from diseases, the bereaved, families that were shattered, the wounded and injured, and those who were held in the silence of unspeakable memories of warfare. For our today, these people gave their yesterday. They sacrificed their lives so that we might have better lives today.

I challenge us this morning to make a commitment to live noble lives by living in peace and harmony with one another irrespective of our races or culture, just as Christ taught us: “to live in peace with all men”. I urge us to live as good neighbours so as not to undermine the sacrifices of these past heroes.

Now, the second half of my sermon: In the gospel reading of today, Jesus said in verses 2-4 as follows: ***Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. (NIV)***

In this context, Jesus again through the parable of the Ten Virgins engaged with His disciples on the subject of the Kingdom of Heaven. He emphasised the need for conscious preparation and readiness if anyone must see and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

I presume that the disciples and followers of Jesus Christ were curious about the Kingdom of Heaven. These disciples might probably have read the Old Testament or possibly have heard from their fathers about the Kingdom of Heaven. However, since there was no one that has lived in heaven before coming to earth to give an account of what heaven is like, these disciples, as well as many people today will ordinarily find it difficult to answer the queries that may be associated with the subject of Kingdom of Heaven. Fortunately, Jesus came into the scene and was able to satisfy His disciples' curiosity and inquisitiveness. Jesus was able to answer many of their queries and say more about what is obtainable in the kingdom of heaven, and most importantly on how to get there. This assignment was easy for Jesus because He is a citizen of heaven. He hailed from there. For instance, in ***John 6: 38*** Jesus traced His origin and nationality to Heaven. He said: ***“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”*** Also, in ***John 6: 46*** He said, ***“No one has seen the Father except the one whom is from God; only he has seen the father.”*** Jesus Christ is not just a citizen of heaven; He is the Prince of the King of Heaven. In fact, He runs and operates the affairs of heaven with God His Father. He said in ***John 10:30*** that ***the Father and I are one***. These references validate the authenticity of Jesus messages about the Kingdom of His Father. Jesus indeed is the best candidate to tell anyone about His Father's Kingdom. Therefore, if we follow His instructions and templates, we should be sure that we would not miss our way to Heaven.

There are certain key facts that we need to note about the parable of the ten virgins that Jesus used to illustrate the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus used ten virgins to illustrate this message. The use of virgins here has its implications. We shall come to it soon. Also, we must know that the ten young girls had the intention to meet with the bridegroom. The ten of them further prepared and took practical steps to meet with the bridegroom. For instance, the Bible tells us that the ten young girls got dressed, they all took their lamps and they all left their homes to meet with the bridegroom. All of them also experienced the delay of the arrival of the bridegroom.

However, the important point to us is that despite their intentions and efforts, Jesus described five of them as wise and the other five as foolish. Jesus' primary basis for describing five as wise and the other five as foolish was simply dependent on their degrees of preparedness to meet with the bridegroom. The questions are: Did they all take steps and prepare? **Yes**. Was the nature of their preparation the same? **No**. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with them. What makes the difference between them was that the wise were ready and made sure that they had no room for excuses to deter them from achieving the purpose for which they set out from their homes.

Why did Jesus use the virgins to illustrate the Kingdom of Heaven? How does this speak to us in our contemporary Christian living? The use of young girls that were described as virgins may be said to signify purity and holiness. It may also signify sanctification that is, people without blemish. In our time, it may be related to the Christians, the born-again people that is, those who have been sanctified by the blood of Christ shed on the cross for all. However, despite the sanctification and purity of these "virgins", Jesus described five of them as foolish. The description of five as foolish speaks volume about the possibility of Christians that have been sanctified but in the sight of God are foolish. It may be said therefore that being born-again alone may not be the criteria to be categorised as wise in the sight of God. After all, in **Hosea 4:6**, God said, my people are perishing from their lack of knowledge. Here, God was talking about His people, His chosen race, which is Israel. This means the people of God may also perish because of their ignorance and foolishness just as the five foolish virgins.

The wise young girls were referred to as prudent simply because they gave due diligence, they prepared, and made sure that their lamps would not go out until they meet with the bridegroom. They never compromised with whatever would make their lights go out. Choices do have implications. Friends, the choices we make do have implications. Apostle Paul advises in **I Cor. 6:12** that although all things are permissible but not all things are beneficial. The wise girls had the option of sharing their oil with their friends but that may not be beneficial to them because it may mean losing that which kept their light burning and thereby missing the bridegroom. They refused to give out their extra oil not because they do not love their fellow girls but because they know they may lose their lights that signified their preparedness for the arrival of the bridegroom. Apostle Paul encourages us in **Philippians 2:12** to guard our salvation with fear and trembling. This means to give no room for chances and the devil. It means to give no room for our light to go out as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. My message this morning is that we must not allow our oil to dry up. I urge us to become closer to the word of God to renew the spirit of God in us to keep our lights burning and shining. It is mentioned in the parable that the oil is to be purchased which means that a price is to be paid to get it. The price to pay is to read the word regularly and to live the life of this word daily.

As I close, I wish to tell us that when the happening of an event is inevitable, the wisest thing to do is to prepare for it. The coming of the bridegroom is inevitable then, we must be ready if we are wise. I leave us with this question: If Christ should describe you based on your preparation for His coming, which group will you belong- the wise or the foolish?

Amen.

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