

## 12. Build Up the Church by Being Ready When Jesus Comes

We have all sung this old, familiar song repeatedly:

When Jesus comes to reward his servants,  
Whether it be noon or night,  
Faithful to him will he find us watching,  
With our lamps all trimmed and bright.

The song is one of readiness and preparation. It comes from the idea and meaning of the Lord's *Parable of Ten Virgins* in Matt 25:1-13:

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. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 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. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

### ***The Uncertain Time, Yet Imminent Coming of the Lord, Jesus***

What is apparently a paradox is one of the greatest truths of the Bible: the Lord Jesus' coming is at an uncertain time, yet it is imminent to every Christian who has lived during the 21 centuries since his ascension. The Lord and the apostles taught the uncertainty of the time and the imminence of when he will come. Jesus said in Matt 24:42-44:

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Peter conveyed the very same meaning in 2 Peter 3:10, "10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

The Revelation concludes with the announcement of the Lord's coming, nuanced with expectation and uncertainty. In Rev 16:15, the Lord said, "15 "Behold, I come like a thief ! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." The entire message of the Bible concludes with the imminence of the coming of the Lord in Rev 22:12-13, "12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

## ***The Readiness of Believers of and for All Time***

All believers since Christ died and all believers until he comes again must be ready for the Lord to come. If we are ready, the church, the bride of Christ will be ready. Both the parable and the song from the introduction teach the lesson of readiness. In addition to asking, "Are we ready?" we should also apply certain readiness scriptures to ourselves.

We are to watch and pray. When the disciples were in the garden while Jesus was praying, they fell asleep. They had been told, "Remain here, and keep watch with me." After the first time, Jesus warned them in Matt 26:40-41, "40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. 41 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'"

In 1 Peter 5:8-9, Peter used the word *alert* to describe the urgency and need of our continuous preparation and expectation: "8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

Christians are to be watchful and ready. We must not only watch out for the dangers of an evil world and beguiling tempter, but we must repent when overcome. In Acts 17:30-31, Paul taught:

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

## ***Ready and Watchful Members for a Ready and Watchful Church***

If each church member is ready and watchful, the church will be strong and ready to receive the Lord. What a great day that will be. But for the cowardly and unbelieving, disaster will come with the Lord. In Rev 21:8, John wrote, " 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

For those who are ready and watching there will be the right to the tree of life. Jesus said in Rev 22:14, "14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

As the chorus of the song says: "O can we say we are ready . . . / Ready for the soul's bright home." If we are ready, the church will be ready and strong, when the Lord comes.

## ***Conclusion***

To be ready and watchful means to be obedient when the Lord comes. In Rev 1:1-3, John tells what we are to do to be ready:

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

We must read the word of God, we must hear the word of God, and we must take to heart the word of God. Why? Because the time is near for us and for the church for the Lord to come.

Near for us though it is, Rev 2:10 teaches how long at time that we are to be ready and watchful: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."