

If It Were a Snake It Would Have Bitten You **Matthew 25:1-13**  
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – All Saints Sunday (November 6,) 2011

Matthew 15:1-13 1 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 9But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." 12But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

It was one of my father's well used aphorisms – today's sermon title: **"If It Were a Snake, It Would Have Bitten You."**

**Interpretation:** Open your eyes. Pay attention. It's right there in front of you.

**Situation:** When someone came to him and said they couldn't find something, or couldn't do something, and it was pretty obvious that the person did not try, or did not try very hard.

I believe it was **Mark Twain** who *said his problem with the Bible was not what he couldn't understand, but what was patently clear that he could understand.* That's what bothered him.

Today's scripture is pretty plain – wrapped in a story, a parable – but nonetheless quite plain.

It tells us **THREE THINGS** quite plainly:

OH, one more thing – that **applies to all three of these points:** Jesus spelled it out in his first few words. **This is THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN he is talking about.** The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (particularly in Matthew) is the most important thing Jesus talks about. His first sermon, like the sermons of John the Baptist, begins with: "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND." And ALL the rest of Jesus preaching and teaching is all about the Kingdom of Heaven.

OK the three points about the Kingdom of Heaven:

- 1. Excuses do NOT equal Results.**
- 2. You've got to have your own.**

### 3. Pay attention.

#### 1. Excuses do NOT equal Results.

Can I be plain here? **Art Rooney** once said, **“They must never mistake our being kind for being weak.”** I think he was on to something. And I think Jesus, on behalf of his Father, the Lord God of Creation, might have improved on that: **“They must never mistake kindness for weakness NOR STUPIDITY.”**

Surely, I think that God must get a little tired of some excuses, as though we really think God is stupid. Excuses we wouldn't have used on school teachers nor parents nor anyone we think has half a brain.

#### Excuses do NOT equal Results.

If you were getting married, and the preacher failed to show up to do the wedding, other than falling over dead of a heart attack in the back parking lot of the church, I'm not sure what excuse the bride or groom would find acceptable.

Same for the bridesmaid. That's what Jesus is saying.

**It's your job. DO IT!** You leave early to allow for traffic; you make sure the dress is picked up before the day of. You do what you need to do, to do what you are supposed to do.

Excuses just don't work.

Do you know people who act as if they believe that so long as they have some sort of excuse, it doesn't matter if they do what they were supposed to do?

Have you run across people who appear to spend more time and creative energy coming up with excuses for not doing a job than it would take to try to do some problem solving to get the job done.

So – when it comes to the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – guess what. No excuses. You either get it or you don't. It's pass/fail. No excuses.

I am sometimes amazed when people spend no time whatsoever with God – in prayer, in Sunday School, in Bible study – and then say, ***“I just don’t understand God. Why does He act this way?”***

Oh, clearly, God’s ways are strange and mysterious. We never have God in a box. But – really – it’s like walking into a concert hall and picking up a violin for the first time and ranting at the conductor because you are not able to play the piece of music in front of you.

OK – so, like Mark Twain, we may not like this. BUT, it’s pretty plain. Jesus says that in the Kingdom of Heaven, **Excuses do NOT equal Results.**

**2. You’ve got to have your own.** The **MOST COMMON EXCUSE** I’ve heard when it comes to this passage is: ***WHY DIDN’T THOSE WISE VIRGINS SHARE THEIR OIL? THEY WEREN’T VERY CHRISTIAN, IF YOU ASK ME.***

That excuse doesn’t work because: (1) excuses don’t equal results, and (2) you can’t use somebody else’s faith.

Where the first point about excuses was quite literal, this one is a little bit symbolic. But it’s no less true.

There are some things – indeed many things – that ought to be shared. That’s what Christians do – we share. The early Christian Church set the model: **from each according to his ability to each according to their need.** But some things, you just can’t share.

- ⊕ You can’t live on somebody else’s reputation.
- ⊕ I can’t wear Justin Bieber’s clothes.
- ⊕ Your grandmother and grandfather’s faith won’t work for you, when you hit the wall in life, and need to rely upon faith in God to get you through it.

**You’ve got to have your own.**

And, if you don’t, then there are consequences.

I quite frankly don't know how some people get through some things in life without a **faith of their own**, their **church family**, and **prayer in which they know the sound of God's voice**.

But, as much as you and I may feel sorry for them, and pray for them, and tie a knot in a prayer quilt for them – it's not the same as them having their own.

Finally: **3: PAY ATTENTION**. You might prefer to quote Jesus here as saying: **BE PREPARED!** And I can't argue with that.

They are two sides of the same coin.

Either way, it seems to be **THE OVERALL POINT OF THE STORY**.

The Kingdom of Heaven – when you look at all of Jesus' teachings – is clearly not merely about where one goes when they die. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. That's what Jesus said. His words, not mine.

This is not just an admonition to be better prepared than a Redd Fox – for "WHEN THE BIG ONE COMES." For when the roll is called up yonder. For when the final judgment day comes.

No – it's about living now.

Jesus is here. He arrived in this church today before any of us did. He is with us, just as He promised. We just need to be watching for Him. **If He Were a Snake, He Would Have Bitten You!** We need to pay attention to the ways in which he shines his light into our lives and through other people, as well as through us.

- ⌘ How many of these people – these blessed saints, who are signified as the cloud of witnesses all around us – did we give the attention they deserved?
- ⌘ How many times have we lost, or let go of, someone or something that we really didn't pay attention to like we should have?
- ⌘ When on a holy day, such as today, when the veil is parted and they are closer than at any other time – how many of us pay attention to hear them?

There is NO EXCUSE, Jesus says, for us to get so tied up with lesser important things of life and not PAYING ATTENTION to what's really important.

Today. May TODAY be the first day of the rest of your life, where you

- ⌘ **stop making excuses,**
- ⌘ **stop relying on someone else to do what you need to do,** and
- ⌘ **pay attention to the many ways Jesus is trying to get your attention every day.**

The saints are cheering you on. They want nothing more than for you to have all that God intends you to have.

**You DON'T HAVE TO FAKE IT. Just make it real, honest, and open to what God will do with it. And then you don't have to worry. God will do all the rest.**

Don't be foolish. Keep your lamps trimmed and burning.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.