

**Ps 78:1-7; Josh 24:1-3, 14-25;**

**1 Thess 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13**

### **Ultimate Preparedness Training**

If you are a scout, you know the motto: “Always be prepared.” Training is available for civil preparedness – in case of emergency, disaster, earthquake and so on. You can learn cpr from the Red Cross – also child and infant resuscitation. All these ways of being prepared are important – even vital.

Today, we turn our hearts toward ultimate things. Some call these final things. We are advised to “put our house in order.” When we hear this from our doctor, some of us have a cold, sinking feeling. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Thessalon’ica. He offers pastoral comfort and consolation to church members who have lost a loved one and are concerned about that dear soul in eternity. His prayer is that we “do not grieve as others do who have no hope.” Our dear pastor, Paul the evangelist, informs us about these ultimate matters, so that we will not be anxious or afraid. Let’s stay here a while. The fear of death has a paralyzing and hindering

effect on us spiritually and emotionally. Paul says that there will come a day that has been prophesied by many of the prophets in the Bible. Jesus Christ will appear and command all His own to be resurrected to New Life. The archangel will echo the Lord's command. The heavenly trumpeter will sound the signal. And Jesus will descend from His throne and enter the world as the glorious Lord – the firstborn to eternal life in the flesh. This is the great and glorious day spoken of by so many – right up to and including John of Patmos in his book of Revelation.

There aren't any Red Cross or FEMA training courses to prepare us for that day, when time ends and Christ's Kingdom comes to earth. Tuning our hearts to God's Word, staying in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus' example day by day – these are our training courses. Listen to a story by Laura E. Richards: *(edited for length)*

*Some children were at play in their play-ground  
one day, when a herald rode through the town,  
blowing a trumpet, and crying aloud, "The King!*

*the King passes by this road to-day. Make ready for the King!"*

*The children stopped their play, and looked at one another.*

*"Did you hear that?" they said. "The King is coming. He may look over the wall and see our playground; who knows? We must put it in order." The playground was sadly dirty, and in the corners were scraps of paper and broken toys. One brought a hoe, and another a rake, and a third ran to fetch the wheelbarrow. They labored hard, till all was clean and tidy.*

*"Now it is clean!" they said; "but we must make it pretty, too, for kings are used to fine things." Then one brought sweet rushes and strewed them on the ground; and others made garlands of oak leaves and pine tassels and hung them on the walls; and the littlest one pulled marigold buds and threw them all about the playground, "to look like gold," he said.*

*When all was done the playground was so beautiful that the children stood and looked at it, and clapped their hands with pleasure.*

*"Let's keep it like this!" said the littlest one; and the others cried, "Yes! that is what we will do."*

*They waited all day for the coming of the King, but he never came. Toward sunset, a man with travel-worn clothes, and a kind, tired face passed along the road, and stopped to look over the wall. "What a pleasant place!" said the man. "May I come in and rest, children?"*

*The children brought him in gladly, and set him on the seat that they had made out of an old cask. They had covered it with an old red cloak to make it look like a throne.*

*"It is our playground!" they said. "We made it pretty for the King, but he did not come, and now we mean to keep it pleasant for ourselves."*

*"That is good!" said the man.*

*"Because we think pretty and clean is nicer than ugly and dirty!" said another.*

*"That is better!" said the man.*

*"And for tired people to rest in!" said the littlest one. "That is best of all!" said the man.*

*He sat and rested, and looked at the children with such kind eyes that they came around him, and told him all they knew; about the five puppies in the barn, and the thrush's nest with four blue eggs, and the shore with golden shells. The man nodded and understood all about it.*

*By and by he asked for a cup of water, and they brought it to him in the best cup. Then he thanked the children, and rose and went on his way; but before he went he laid his hand on their heads for a moment, and the touch warmed their hearts.*

*The children stood by the wall and watched the man as he went slowly along. The sun was setting, and the light fell in long slanting rays across the road.*

*“He looks so tired!” said one of the children.*

*“But he was so kind!” said another.*

*“See!” said the littlest one. “How the sun shines on his hair! it looks like a crown of gold.”*

*(americanliterature.com accessed 11-06-17)*

Published in 1881, this parable still speaks to hearts of all ages.

Let’s look at Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins waiting for the Bridegroom. All are virtuous and pure. Matthew placed it after the one about the good slave and the evil slave. The first slave makes provision for those in his care. The second eats and drinks with drunkards, ignoring his charge to care for the household.

Then comes the story of the ten virgins.

After it, the tale about the three managers who receive five, two and one talent of silver from the master before he goes on a journey.

In each case, those with faithful commitment to the task they have been assigned are the ones the master rewards. What is the lamp oil? What are we supposed to have plenty of as we wait for the Bridegroom?

I believe we obtain this oil in the market place of life, among *“those on the margins, behind the hedges and on the street corners. We invite them in, no matter how battered and broken ... and so we are graced by the Spirit to serve them. May we be the five virgins found faithfully filling our lamps with Jesus' oil – becoming familiar with His face **now** so that he's no stranger **then**.”* (Brad Jersak, clarionjournal.com). Now is the time to store up. We have many chances to do so. On that day, it will be too late. No second chance.

**We are preparing by storing up the oil of Christ's mercy. Amen.**