

Sermon Notes on Mt. 25:1-13, Trinity Last

1. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII and VIII, paragraph 19, rightly points out that our text speaks of the visible Christian Church which also contains hypocrites. They look just like the true Christians but are not true Christians. Our text should cause each of us to examine himself. As Paul says at II Cor. 13:5: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves." The Law always accuses. This text is primarily Law. It shows us our hypocrisies. I Pet. 2:1 to all of us: "Lay aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby."
2. A Lutheran commentator has written about this parable: "The bridegroom is Jesus Christ, Jn. 3:29. The feast is the blessedness of heaven prepared for all His true followers. The foolish virgins are such as have indeed received faith, but have kept only its outward semblance, hoping to find acceptance on the strength of past merits. The wise virgins are such as are careful about providing and keeping fuel for their faith, in order that their lamps may not be extinguished at a critical time. The oil is the grace and salvation of God offered and given in the Word, by the work of the Holy Spirit. The bridegroom is apparently delaying His coming, II Pet. 3:9. But He will surely make His appearance for the last great judgment at a time when He is least expected."
3. To interpret a parable correctly so as to edify people is not always an easy task. One of the rules of interpretation states: "Do not go beyond the point of comparison." That is good advice. The parable does not teach that one-half of the members of the visible church will be lost. It does not teach that people are saved by their own works and merit. In this parable the "slumbering and sleeping" (vs. 5) do not denote unpreparedness. (At Mk. 13:36 it does denote unpreparedness). The parable does not teach that the coming of Christ will be at night. Always be careful not to exceed the point of comparison. Very often the last sentence of a parable guards you from exceeding the point of comparison. In this case it reads: "Watch therefore, because you do not know the day or the hour (of His coming)."
4. Sometimes a good preacher can make a good observation from a parable even if that is not the point of comparison. For example, the preacher might correctly say that the door of God's grace is always open for all to enter. But when He closes that door on judgment day, the time of grace and mercy has come to an end. Or the preacher might correctly say that Christians cannot save each other just as the wise virgins could not give their oil to the foolish virgins. But that is not the central thought. Christian teachers and preachers must always be on their guard not to foist their own cute and novel ideas on people. The sinful flesh tempts us to do this sort of thing. As St. Paul says at I Cor. 14:26: "Let everything be done to edify the people." We are not entertainers but teachers who teach God's Word, not our own.
5. The Kingdom of heaven or the Kingdom of God (they are the same) is the gracious reign and rule of the Triune God, for Jesus' sake, in the hearts and lives of redeemed sinners both in this life and in the one to come. God initiates and maintains this Kingdom through the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments.
6. The majority of the Kingdom parables are found in the Gospel of Matthew, eight in chapter 13 and three in chapter 25. The parables in chapter 25 are peculiar to Matthew. Always remember that both the Baptist and Jesus came saying: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is here." Mt. 3:2; 4:17. In the majority of cases the word "Kingdom" means either the Gospel, the Church or Everlasting Life. All are by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
7. Martin Luther's first of the ninety-five theses reads: "When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said 'Repent ye' He meant that the whole life of the Christian was to be one of repentance."

Sermon Outline on Mt. 25:1-13, Trinity Last

Theme: AM I FOOLISH OR WISE?

Introduction: Our parable speaks of the Kingdom of God, the visible Christian Church, the sum total of those who profess to be Christian. We know from this parable and from the parable of the weeds among the wheat that there are hypocrites among the Christians, people like the foolish virgins who looked wise but were not.

I-A DESCRIPTION OF THE FOOLISH

A-They look just like the wise. In our parable evidently the foolish virgins looked just like the wise ones. The wise virgins did not discover the foolishness of the foolish until the bridegroom came. They had deceived the wise virgins. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-30) the workers cannot distinguish the weeds from the wheat but know that they are there. At Mt. 13:23-36 Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites seven times. They appeared very holy and righteous to the Jews but were like stinking graves inside. At Gal 2:11-14 Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy. He also caused the others to commit hypocrisy. He knew and believed that it was not wrong to eat with the Gentiles. But by withdrawing they gave the impression that they were more righteous than the others. Hypocrisy is spiritual foolishness.

B-They lack the most important thing. Why did Jesus call five of the virgins foolish? Because they lacked the oil in their lamps. Why were the weeds in the parable of the weeds and wheat rejected? Because they bore no fruit. Why was Jesus so severe with the scribes and Pharisees at Mt. 13:24-30? Because they were impenitent. They were living in sin. They had no true faith. They had no true fruits of faith. Why did Paul call Peter a hypocrite at Antioch? Because he tried to make a work of the flesh appear as a truly good work.

II-A DESCRIPTION OF THE WISE

A-They are what they appear to be. Their purpose was to be ready when the bridegroom would appear. They had to have oil in their lamps to meet the bridegroom. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the wheat truly was what it appeared to be. It was worth storing in the granary. The disciples of Jesus were what they appeared to be in comparison with the scribes and Pharisees. They were sinners but they confessed their sins. Their life very often was not what it was supposed to be, but the Holy Spirit lived in them and caused them to do good works. Paul, in comparison with Peter at Antioch, ate with the Gentiles thus assuring them that the Jews were no holier than the Gentiles. Likewise today, true Christians are what they appear to be, sinners who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus.

B-They have the most important thing. If you want to be sure that you have the right thing, read Ps. 51 where David confesses his sins, throws himself on the mercy of God and longs to live a life pleasing to God. Read Jn. 15:1-11 where Jesus calls Himself the Vine and His children branches, fruitful branches. Read Eph. 2:1-10 where Paul gives a beautiful description of the true Christian. By himself he is dead in sin, but God has raised him from the dead and caused him to live a life of good works.

C-They are ready for the Lord's second coming. Luther once said that if he knew that the Lord were coming today he would go about planting his apple tree. He would not need to do anything other than he was already doing because he was ready at all times. In this life, disasters usually give us some warning. We know when a storm is coming. We know when sickness is coming. But the Lord will give no warning about His second coming. Suddenly He will knock at the door. Will you be ready? Are you foolish or wise? Examine yourself.

TO GOD ALONE BE THE GLORY AND THE HONOR!

Sermon Outline on Mt. 13:47-50, Trinity Last Sunday

Theme: EXAMINE YOURSELVES AS TO WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE FAITH. PROVE YOURSELVES. II Cor. 13:5

Introduction: It is the last Sunday of the church year. We need to examine ourselves. We are to examine ourselves before we go to communion. I Cor. 11:28. Job and David asked God to examine them. Job 31:6; Ps. 26:2; 139:23. In Gal. 6:4 we read: "But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. A good example of that is in I Cor. 15:10: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

I-THE WICKED (vs. 49 of the text) WILL BE CAST AWAY ON JUDGMENT DAY

A-The visible church and the Gospel are like a dragnet. Our text compares the kingdom of heaven (the church) to a dragnet which brings in all kinds of fish. The fisherman does not know, while fishing, which are good or which are bad fish. Likewise in the church the preaching of God's Word brings in both sincere believers and hypocrites, those who do not believe what they confess. In the parable of the wheat and tares (Mt. 13:24-30) believers and unbelievers are compared to wheat and weeds. While they are growing up it is difficult to distinguish the two. The fisherman does not separate the fish while the net is still in the water. The farmer does not attempt to separate wheat and weeds while they grow. In the church we cannot distinguish between believers and hypocrites.

B-The final judgment will reveal the hypocrites. In our text we are told that the angels will cast the wicked into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. In the other parable (vss. 41-42) we read: "The angels will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." The fact that we cannot distinguish hypocrite from true believer in this life is a very sobering thought. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

II-THE JUST (vs. 49 of the text) WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER (vs. 43)

A-These are represented by the good fish in our text and the wheat in the other parable (vss. 24, 30). These are sowed by God Himself and will bear good fruit. They are the ones who heard the Word of God and observed it. They are those who constantly confessed their sins and received forgiveness of sins. These are those who are faithful to death and receive the crown of life. These came out of the great tribulation and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Can I know whether I am in this group? YES. With Paul I can say: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:38-39. The true believer hears Christ say: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." Jn. 10:1 The true believer rejoices in this. He hears Christ say: "My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." Jn. 10:27-29. The true believer rejoices in these words. He is like Paul who said: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." I Cor. 15 Paul was honest about himself and about God but the grace of God in Christ was the key to everything. That made him certain.

B-And so, let us examine ourselves. God tells us in II Cor. 13:5 to examine and prove ourselves. Job and David were not afraid to ask God to try them, to test them. Why? Because they did not want to lose their souls. They were sinners but they were redeemed sinners. That made them fruitful, just and righteous. Now they <sup>has</sup> shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Mt. 13:43). He who <sup>has</sup> ears to hear, let him hear. Next Sunday we will say "Happy New Year!"

1. Mt. 13 contains seven parables: 1) The Sower, vss. 3-8 explained in vss. 18-23; 2) A man sowing good seed, vss. 24-30 explained at vss. 36-42; 3) The mustard seed, vss. 31-32; 4) The yeast hidden in three measures of flour; 5) A treasure hidden in a field; 6) A merchant seeking beautiful jewels; and, 7) The dragnet, *vss. 47-50.*
2. The second and seventh, the man sowing seed and the dragnet, are very similar. The similarity: the kingdom of heaven, the visible church on earth, contains both genuine Christians and hypocrites. The Lord will separate them on judgment day. Both end with "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Clearly the Lord says: "Examine yourself now." Read both parables. Study them carefully.
3. In the Gospels the church is usually called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. Both mean the same thing. The word "church" occurs only twice in the Gospels. At Mt. 16:18 it means the invisible church which even hell cannot destroy. At Mt. 18:17 it means the visible congregation. The word "church" is used often from Acts 5:11 to Rev. 22:16. Our text, Mt. 13:47-50 speaks of the visible church, congregations.
4. The invisible church is the total number of those who HAVE true faith in Jesus in their hearts; the visible church is the total number of those who PROFESS the faith. The invisible church is hidden in the visible church. Only the Lord knows who belongs to the invisible church. II Tim. 2:19. The visible church contains those who hear God's Word, profess to be Christians and give such evidence by their living. Christians cannot look into each others' hearts.
5. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Eph. 4:5,6. The previous vs., Eph. 4:4, also says: "One body and one Spirit, just as you have been called in one hope of your calling." From the Garden of Eden until the last day there is only one invisible church. Christ says it is within you. Lk. 17:20,21. It is only one. Jn. 10:16. It is holy, cleansed by Jesus' blood. Eph. 5:25-27. It is universal and timeless. Acts 10:43; Jn. 17:20. It cannot be destroyed. Mt. 16:18; Ps. 46:5; Lk. 1:33; Jn. 10:28,29. The invisible church is the only saving church. Jn. 3:16; 14:6.
6. The main purpose of our text, Mt. 13:47-50, is self-examination. We must ask ourselves: "Am I a member of the invisible church?"
7. If a member of a congregation is living in known sin, we must discipline that person. Mt. 18:15-18; I Tim. 5:20. Paul told the Corinthians to excommunicate the man who was living in sin. I Cor. 5:1-5. When he repented, Paul told them to restore this man, II Cor. 2:5-11. But weak Christians, who are not living in sin, must not be excommunicated. Read Rom. 14; I Cor. 8. The strong and mature must help and teach the immature and weak. Php. 3:15. Read Gal. 6:1-5 carefully. Christians must love each other dearly and do everything to make other Christians grow.
8. A dragnet, Mt. 13:47, is suspended in the water between two boats which slowly proceed to the shore. When they reach the shore the fishermen pull the dragnet onto the land. They put the good fish into vessels and throw the useless fish back into the water. Likewise, the Gospel is constantly gathering people into the visible church. When judgment day comes the angels will separate the wicked from the just. They will throw the wicked into the furnace of fire where there will be eternal grief, weeping and gnashing of teeth. In this life there are hypocrites in the visible church. To root them out is dangerous. Read Mt. 13:29-30. The Lord and only the Lord is the final judge. Jesus said: "Beware of hypocrisy." Lk. 12:1. Hypocrites are counterfeit Christians.
9. Hypocrites are the product of the sowing of Satan, Mt. 13:38. Satan is more powerful, more intelligent than we are. I Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:16. He caused Judas' suicide. Jn. 13:2; Lk. 22:3. He tempted Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:3. He caused all of Job's grief. Job 1:12. We can resist him only by faith in Christ. I Pet. 5:9. When he tempted Jesus, Jesus used only the Word of God, not His own cleverness.