

## BEING PREPARED

There is a poignant scene in one of the later Anne of Green Gables books where Anne visits her childhood chum Ruby. Ruby is dying of tuberculosis – consumption, as it was called then. Everyone knows it, including Ruby, but no one speaks of it. One evening the normally chatty Ruby reveals her fear of dying to Anne. She's not afraid she won't go to heaven – she's a church member, after all – but she just can't imagine what life there will be like. Her life here had been focused on parties and projects, beauty and boyfriends, things that made the life to come seem alien and unreal.

As Anne walks home afterward, her thoughts of Ruby's frivolous life and shallow ideals bring her to the realization that "when she came to the end of one life it must not be to face the next with the shrinking terror of something wholly different . . . the life of heaven must begin here on earth."

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 reminded me of this story. While the parable's point is being ready for Jesus' return in glory and judgment, it is also appropriate for each of us to consider since "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

The wise virgins had taken extra oil along with their lamps, while the foolish had only enough oil to make their lamps burn for the present. They made no provision for the future. When the bridegroom came at midnight, after they'd all fallen asleep, the foolish wanted the wise virgins to give them some of their oil. The wise ones refused, not because they would not share, but because they could not. God gives to each of us the grace that we alone need, neither too little nor too much.

Paul admonished Timothy to teach people not to be arrogant or put their hope in wealth, but to hope in God and be rich in good deeds in order to "lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age" (1 Tim. 6:19). And Jesus Himself admonished His followers not to store up treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

The thing that hit me the hardest in the parable was the fact that half of the virgins were unprepared. If the numbers in the Bible are as significant as the words, it is a frightening thought that fifty percent of us, who profess to know Christ and are awaiting His return are, in fact, strangers to Him. Suddenly "many are called but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14) and "small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matt. 7:14) take on greater gravity.

While the gate is narrow, it is presently still open. Now is the time when we can "seek the Lord while He may be found" (Isa. 55:6). The fullness of His grace (John 1:16) is still available to us. There will come a time when "Knock and the door shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7) will no longer be in effect. My hope is that none reading this will be among those standing outside saying, "Lord, Lord, open up to us."