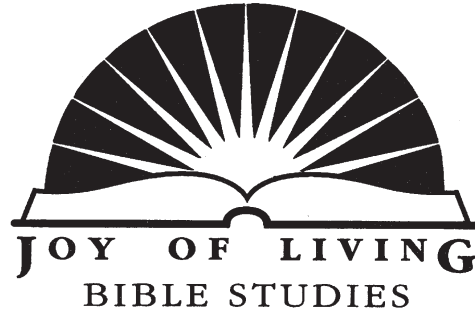


Treasures from the Parables

Lesson 2



The Faithful Servant

Matthew 24:45-51

The parables are very exciting and challenging portions of Scripture. In a way they are like mystery novels; there is always something secret about them, something hidden; thus they are enticing, challenging. There are clues given in each of the parables to lead us to the meaning of it, stimulating us to investigate and discover a hidden truth, which will be a real treasure to us, one that will enrich our lives when we act upon it.

We will begin with a series of three parables from our Lord's teaching in connection with the great Olivet discourse, as recorded in Matthew 24 and 25. These three parables concern prophetic matters, especially matters concerning the last days and the time when Jesus Christ returns to earth, but from three different approaches.

The key note of Matthew 24 and 25 is that the intervening age—between the time our Lord spoke these words and the time He would come again—is to be an age of unprecedented deceit, a time when it is easy to be fooled, when many will be attracted by the glamour of the phony, the glitter of the false, and will be drawn away by enticing siren voices that will lead down wrong paths and confuse many. That is exactly what is happening today, and it is increasing as we draw near to the close of the age. So it is absolutely important that we understand what our Lord means in these parables.

All three parables are an amplification of one word, which our Lord gave to His disciples after He had outlined the course of future events. He said to them, "Watch!" That word is stressed throughout this whole passage.

In Matthew 24:42 Jesus says, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." Also, in verse 44, "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." And again in chapter 25, verse 13, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." It is clear then that He is amplifying the word, "Watch!" It is a command Jesus gives to those that are waiting for His return. Through all the intervening centuries, no matter how long He may delay, He commands us to "Watch!" These three parables are extremely important to us because they tell us what it means to watch.

There have been, in the course of the centuries, two extremes of interpretation of what our Lord meant when He said, "Watch!"—

☛ There have been those who took it very seriously. They studied the signs of the Lord's return, which are brought out in predictive passages in both the New Testament and the Old. They became so involved that they actually set dates for the return of Jesus Christ. Sometimes they even sold their homes and property, put on white robes, and went out on hilltops to wait for the Lord to return. He did not come, of course, and they were disappointed and tried to explain their mistake by intricate interpretations of Scripture. But that is an extreme and wrong interpretation of what "Watch!" means. Our Lord did not mean that we are to be standing forever gazing up into the heavens.

☛ Another extreme interpretation of "Watch!" is to come to the conclusion that we cannot know the time of the Lord's return, and therefore there is no use to worry about it—"Forget it! Just go on living life as you like until He returns. If He returns, then He returns. You can worry about it then. In the meantime, go on living as you please regardless of whether He is returning or not." That really is to live as though He were not returning at all.

The Lord gave us these parables in order for us to understand what it really means to "watch." Therefore when He tells us to "watch," He means we are to involve ourselves in the activities brought out in these three parables. If we do not understand the parables, we will not watch the way He tells us to. And if we do not watch, we will be deceived.

The Parable of the Household

Let us take the first parable, found in Matthew 24:45-51—

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, "My master is staying away a long time," and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Household

Here is a household whose master is away and the household is waiting for him to return. The master has appointed a certain servant and given him responsibility during the time of his absence.

The only activity mentioned is that of feeding the household. This servant has the primary and important task of feeding the household at the proper time. The household must eat, or they can do nothing else. If they do not eat, they will not survive. They can do nothing else until they have established their health and strength by eating.

It is obvious that this situation fits us as believers. The household represents the church, as it says in 1 Timothy 3:15, "...in God's household, which is the church of the living God."¹

The Food

The food represents the Word of God, which is intended to feed the people of God. Jesus said so Himself. When the devil came and tempted Him to turn the stones into bread, He said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Word of God is truth. It is the unveiling of reality. It is the revelation of the way things really are.

Peter urges us to "crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). There is a certain quality about the Word of God that is like milk to a baby—it feeds and establishes spiritual life. Paul mentions the "solid food" of the Word (Hebrews 5:12,14). That food is something that the more mature Christian can ponder. There is strength to be derived from it. It is absolutely essential and fundamental to spiritual growth and to understanding life.

Many Christians are confused about the need to study the Word. They think of it as an option, or as something to do if you are especially religious. But that is not what it is for at all. It is for those who want to know God and grow spiritually. The Word of God is the revelation of who God is and what He is like. It reveals the way things are—in life, in death, in the spiritual realm, in the physical universe, as well as in the world of ideas and thoughts, and in the social life of humanity. It touches everything. You never can understand life and reality unless you know and understand what the Word of God has to say.

The Servants

The servant represents those who are appointed to teach within the church. This does not only mean pastors, evangelists, or theologians. It includes Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, Bible study leaders, and parents who teach their children at home. It is anyone who is in the position of teaching another within the body of Christ.

In this parable you will notice that the Lord takes note of two kinds of servants: the faithful and the unfaithful. The faithful are those who feed, continually and plentifully, the ones entrusted to their care. Jesus says, "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns" (Matthew 24:46). First Corinthians 4:2 tells us, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." This servant was given the responsibility, the trust, of feeding the

other servants. To be deemed a faithful servant, it was necessary for them to fulfill that duty.

What about the unfaithful servant? This is the one who fails to feed the household of God. The Lord tells us what happens. The servant has his own agenda, and he begins to lord it over the other servants, and to beat and abuse them. He indulges his own appetites to extremes, and eats and drinks with the drunken. When the master returns, he finds the servant failing in his primary task. The servant is condemned and sent to a place of frustration and eternal defiance against the will of God. There, people weep out of a sense of lost opportunity, and gnash their teeth in defiance of God.

All of this underscores the importance of feeding yourself on the Word, which will enable you to feed others. In order to teach the Word of God, one must first know the Word of God. This then is an essential aspect of "watching"—to feed and be fed by the Word of God.

What Does God's Word Accomplish?

What does the Word of God accomplish that makes it so absolutely, fundamentally, necessary?

First, the Word of God reveals Jesus Christ. It is through the Word of God that we are given the faith to believe who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished on the cross on our behalf so that we may be born again by His Spirit (see Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23; John 3:3-6). If it does nothing else than that, it has achieved its major task. It is not to give us information, primarily; it is to help us to see a Person, the Lord Jesus. As the opening words of Hebrews puts it, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

What the Son says to us is the ultimate revelation of life. To see the Son, through the Word, is to find your heart attracted to Him, this spotless Son of God, in all the magnificence of His strength and greatness. That is the Bible's primary purpose. When you read it, read it for that. Read it to find Christ, because He is on every page of the Old and the New Testaments. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ—and this is what eternal life is all about, knowing Him (see 1 John 5:20; John 17:3).

Second, the Word makes possible increasing self-understanding, and therefore knowledge of and guidance for yourself. James says the Word is a mirror: when you stand in front of it, you will see yourself (see James 1:23-25). There is no other book in the world that will do this. There may be helpful insights in psychology and psychiatry, but the Bible goes much further than any of these; it truly helps you understand yourself. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Third, the Word will change you and direct you so that you will make a difference—your life will count. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, cor-

1. The church is not a building, but is made up of all those, in heaven and on earth (see Ephesians 3:14-15), who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior.

recting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God will use the Word in your life to change you and equip you, so that your life will be worth the living, something worthwhile. John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In the Word of God we discover what real living is all about.

Fourth, the Bible explains the cause and cure of family, social, and world problems. You cannot understand what is going on in your family life, your social life, and in all the problems that are before us in international affairs, unless you see it from God's viewpoint, the viewpoint of the Bible. The Bible gives us a worldview that fits all the symptoms. It explains them logically and reasonably, and offers the only possible remedy for them. It gives not only the cause, but also the cure, so that no one need any longer be a part of the problem, but may become a part of the solution.

The Bible tells us plainly that the problem is humanity and our sinful nature. It tells us that we all sin and fall short of perfection (see Romans 3:23). James 4:1-3 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." The only remedy is Jesus' death on the cross. By faith in this, our sin is forgiven, and we are given a new life in Christ Jesus. Our old sinful nature is dead. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

That is the beginning. Then as we grow in the grace and knowledge of God, we become both salt and light in this sin-darkened world. We are salt in the sense that we act as a preservative, stopping the spread of evil and adding flavor to the lives of others. We are light in the sense that we can share God's truth with others in order that they, too, may come to know the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Fifth, the Bible gives specific answers to many questions on life and death. Are there other beings in the universe? The Bible answers that (see Ephesians 3:10; Romans 8:38). What happens after death? Who hasn't asked that question? The Bible can answer it (see John 14:2-3; Philippians 1:21-23). What happens to a society that lets down the barriers and allows everyone to do what is right in their own eyes? The Bible can tell you (see Judges 17:7—21:25), and it is unquestionably true. How did sin and death enter the world? Why is there so much suffering? (See Romans 5:12; Genesis 3:1-19.) Oh, the many questions that are answered in the Word.

Six, the Word reveals the future and the past. It goes back to the origin of the universe and of humanity, and then looks onward to the end of history and tells us what the final pattern of events will be. No other book can do that; there is no other source of knowledge like that.

Finally, seventh, the Word protects from unknown dangers.

When we know what God says in the Bible and we live in obedience to what He says, we are protected from dangers so vast that we can't begin to comprehend—demonic assault and oppression, the occult, hidden temptations, and many dangers of the unknown. We may not know the nature of those dangers or even of their existence, yet obedience to God's Word will cause us to avoid them and be protected from them. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

We See the Results

A Christian who learns to feed on the Word becomes stable, alive, and vital. Whenever a church takes the Word of God seriously, you will always find it to be alive, extremely vital, changing the society around it.

Sadly, however, the church in many places has grown incredibly weak. Instead of changing the society around us for good, we have become like the society in which we live. Many churches are made up of people who are constantly at one another's throats, quarreling, self-indulgent, immoral. Why?

The Word of God puts its finger right on it! "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a). These people are immature; they have not been properly fed. They need the milk of the Word of God. And why haven't they been fed? It is because those who have been given the responsibility have been unfaithful. All too often they not only neglect teaching the truth of the Word, they begin to misuse, for their own benefit, those whom they are responsible for. This is usually because they no longer believe they will be accountable to the Lord when they face Him at His return. That is what Jesus says: "But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants" (Matthew 24:48-49).

When there is no longer belief in Jesus' return and our accountability to Him, there is no longer incentive to feed the people. And there are many negative results for the believers who are not being fed.

- ☛ First, there is no inner strength or nourishment for the human spirit. There is no vital contact with God. There is no personal, individual knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and therefore, there is no inner strength in life.
- ☛ Second, there is ignorance of self. They do not understand themselves; they cannot. They don't understand why they do the things they do. They haven't learned how to be set free from the sin and guilt that holds them captive. They have no concept of what makes life worth living. This creates a tremendous demand for self-knowledge. Psychiatry and other sciences try to work in these areas and quite honestly try

to help, but can help only to a degree. People turn to these empty cisterns of human help to find the self-knowledge they are lacking because they do not know what God, who created them, says about them in His Word. Second Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

- ☞ Third, there is no power to live godly lives. Instead there is division, quarreling, and fighting with one another. They don't understand the fruit of the spirit (see Galatians 5:22-25). They don't know that it can only blossom in the life of believers as they remain in the Lord and allow His Word to remain and work in them (see John 15:4ff).
- ☞ Fourth, there are world conditions that baffle and depress them. Numerous Christians are absolutely baffled by the conditions taking place in the world. They do not know what God has said. They do not realize that everything is moving according to God's schedule.
- ☞ Fifth, there are no answers to the eternal questions they ask. Death is a frightening thing. They do not know where to turn when they face it. They don't know that Jesus said to His followers, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:1-4).
- ☞ Sixth, there are widespread delusions about the past and the future. They seize upon any semi-reasonable sounding explanation of where people came from, regardless of whether it lines up with facts or not. They don't know or choose not to believe that God said He created the heavens and the earth (see Genesis 1:1). They leap upon hopeful dreams of the future that are not based upon the stark reality of human evil. Again, they either do not know or reject what God has said in 2 Peter 3:10-13, "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 done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells."
- ☞ Seventh, there are dark powers that move in to take over and possess the spirits of these people. More and more widely in our day we are finding this taking place. They either don't know or refuse to listen to God's direction in the Bible that would keep them from these evils.

How to "Watch"

Now what is our Lord saying to the believer, the Christian? Well, He is saying that if you are going to watch for His coming, if you are truly going to be ready to meet Him face to face, whether through death or through His glorious return, the first essential is that you must know the Word of God. You must read and learn and study and seek to know Him.

How well do you know the Word of God? Even in churches with a reputation for knowing and teaching the Bible, there is still much biblical illiteracy. There are people who do not know anything about the Bible at all, because they don't bother to read and study it for themselves.

I want to ask you to measure yourself by three tests which are given in Hebrews 5:11-14, by which you can check yourself as to how much you know of Scripture. I am not going to ask you how far it is from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, and I do not care how many kings there were in Israel, or how many in Judah. Those are not the important questions. But here are the three things that will test you.

- ☞ First, can you tell the difference between right and wrong, especially when right looks wrong, and wrong looks right? Have you learned how to use Scripture in order to tell the difference?
- ☞ Second, can you translate Scripture into right conduct? Have you learned how to apply what you read to your own life, so that it changes you and you end up doing the right instead of the wrong?
- ☞ Third, can you teach others? Are you able to help someone else? Or have you been a Christian for many years, yet you still do not know how to teach anyone else, since you still need to be taught the first principles of the Word of God?

These are the ultimate tests. They are very important, because if you are not on the way to these goals, then you do not have much of a chance to stand in these days of deceit.

We are living in a time in history when we are flooded with more pressure to accept false ideas than we have ever had before. Widespread delusions are abounding based on philosophies that are basically, fundamentally wrong. Yet people are accepting them with the utmost gullibility.

You will never be able to stand against this flood of deceit unless you know what God says in His Word, the Bible. If you do not know the Word, you will be sucked in—you will not be able to stand. Are you willing to commit yourself to the principles for which Jesus Christ stands? Is your heart saying, "I'm going to learn the Scriptures; I'm going to study and know the Bible"? That will take resolve on your part, and it will take continuing exposure to the Word, both publicly and in private. Embarking upon this study is a great first step.

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Lesson 2 Commentary.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Lesson 2 commentary, “The Faithful Servant,” covering Matthew 24:45-51, or from your teacher’s lecture?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

The parable we will study this week is the second of three parables in Matthew 24 and 25 that concern Christians as they wait for Jesus Christ’s return.

Second Day: Read Matthew 25:1-13, concentrating on verses 1-12.

The wedding in this parable is a first century Jewish wedding, and the customs were different than they are today. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* explains, “Normally the bridegroom with some close friends left his home to go to the bride’s home, where there were various ceremonies, followed by a procession through the streets—after nightfall—to his home. The ten virgins may be bridesmaids who have been assisting the bride; and they expect to meet the groom as he comes from the bride’s house...though this is uncertain. Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch [lamp]. Those without a torch [lamp] would be assumed to be party crashers or even brigands.”¹

1. Jesus was explaining to His followers what it would be like prior to His return. From Matthew 25:1, to what does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven at that time (the time before His return)?

2. In Matthew 25:2-4, some of the virgins were wise and some were foolish. What was the difference between the two groups?

3. When the bridegroom was delayed, what did the virgins do? (Matthew 25:5)

4. When the watchman called out that the bridegroom was on his way, the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. What problem did the foolish ones have, and how did the wise ones suggest they solve it? (Matthew 25:6-9)

5. From Matthew 25:10-12, what was the result of their foolishness?

6. Personal: Have you ever missed out on something because you weren’t prepared? How did you feel about it?

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), notes on Matthew 25:1.

Third Day: Review Matthew 25:1-13.

1. The virgins went out to meet the bridegroom. From the following verses, whom does the bridegroom (the future husband) represent?

Matthew 9:14-15

John 3:27-30

2 Corinthians 11:2

Ephesians 5:25-32

Revelation 19:7-8

2. The Lord Jesus is the bridegroom, and the virgins are those who are waiting for Him. Unfortunately, there are some who say they are Christians, but they don't want Him to return yet. They say things like, "But I want to get to do _____," or, "I want to experience _____." Instead of living for the Lord, eager to see Him, they want to plan out their own lives. What does James 4:14-15 say regarding your life and the future?
3. Read Titus 2:13. How does the Apostle Paul refer to the return of the Lord?
4. Personal: Are you eagerly waiting for Him? How do you honestly feel about His return?

Fourth Day: Review Matthew 25:1-13, concentrating on verses 1-4.

Remember, in a parable the Lord uses natural things to teach a spiritual truth.

1. Each of the virgins took a lamp with them. The purpose of a lamp is to give light, for use when it becomes dark. From each of the following verses, what do you learn about light?

Psalms 119:130

Proverbs 6:23a

2 Corinthians 4:6

Ephesians 5:13a

2. The lamp—or light—is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of knowledge or understanding. We use it the same way today. We say, “I’d like a little more light on this subject,” meaning “I need more knowledge of it, or a little more understanding.” Read Proverbs 1:7a. What is the first step for gaining true knowledge?¹
3. Read Proverbs 2:1-6 and describe what our attitude and actions should be as we seek knowledge and understanding.
4. What does Proverbs 2:10b say regarding knowledge?
5. Personal: What is some truth or knowledge from God’s Word that has become pleasant to your soul?

Fifth Day: Review Matthew 25:1-13, concentrating on verses 3-4.

The wise virgins took extra oil for their lamps; the foolish virgins didn’t.

1. Oil, throughout the Scriptures, is commonly used as a type or picture of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Zechariah, the prophet was given a vision of two olive trees standing, one on each side of a lampstand, and the oil from the olive trees dripped into a bowl on top of the lampstand. It was the oil, constantly flowing down, which caused the lamps on the lampstand to burn. Zechariah was told that the oil symbolized the Spirit of God (see Zechariah 4:6). Read Ephesians 1:13. What do you learn about who has God’s Holy Spirit?
2. The “Advocate” is another name for the Holy Spirit. According to John 14:26, what will the Holy Spirit do for the Lord’s followers?
3. a. Read John 16:7b-13. What does the Holy Spirit prove the world to be in the wrong about? In other words, what does He convict them of? (verses 7b-11)
 - b. What does He do for the Lord’s followers? (verses 12-13)
4. a. Read 1 Corinthians 2:11-14. What is one of the reasons we have been given God’s Spirit? (verses 11-13)

1. There is a certain measure of knowledge that can be gained by those who don’t know or fear the Lord, but that knowledge only goes so far. You can learn about the facts of biological, social, and intellectual life without knowing the One who created all life, but without knowing and fearing the Lord you cannot understand the full range of what life and living entails.

- b. How does the person without God's Spirit view the truth of God's Word? Why? (verse 14)
5. Personal: God has given us teachers and preachers to equip us (see Ephesians 4:11-12); however, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the spiritual understanding of what they are teaching (see 1 John 2:27). He is the oil that ignites the lamp of understanding. Why don't you take a moment and thank the Lord for the truth that He has taught to you?

Sixth Day: Review Matthew 25:5-13, concentrating on verses 12-13.

1. When the foolish virgins tried to enter the wedding banquet late, what did the bridegroom say to them? (Matthew 25:12)
2. a. All the virgins had been waiting, but the key to entering was whether or not the bridegroom knew them. The absence of oil for their lamps proved that they were unknown to him. Read Matthew 7:21-23. From verse 21, who will enter the kingdom of heaven?
- b. Although these people may have done many good deeds in Jesus' name, what does He say about His relationship to them? (verses 22-23)
3. Read Matthew 7:24-27. What is the difference between the wise and the foolish man?
4. a. Jesus is not speaking of doing good works to gain eternal life. Read John 6:28-29. What is the work that God requires?
- b. Read 1 Timothy 1:16. What is the result of doing this "work"?
- c. Read John 17:3. What is eternal life?
5. Personal: It is quite possible for us to know many things about Christianity, but not know the Christ of Christianity, and never really let Him make any changes in our hearts or lives. As we have seen in this week's questions, when we put our faith in Him and what He did on the cross, we are sealed with His Holy Spirit, who reveals to us God's truth, gives us understanding of what He has said as we read and study His Word, and enables us to respond with an attitude of trust and obedience. Then, in the hours of darkness and trial, the Holy Spirit will hold us steady and our light will shine brightly. We will know and be known by Him. Are you wise or foolish?