

The prophet Isaiah said of Israel, *"They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not..."* (ISA 3:9). These words also describe America right now. Our nation has sinned just as Sodom did. We've become a society where any ungodly act can take place without a trace of shame. **I believe America has come to the very brink of the abyss.**

Even the world agrees that things have gone too far. I recently read a newspaper report quoting rock stars who became famous years ago for their immoral acts on MTV. Today, these same musicians are aghast at the horrible filth being spewed on America. They say the immorality taking place is the worst they've ever seen. Just a few years ago, these performers took pride in ushering immorality to new heights. Now they shake their heads in disgust at what they see. They admit, "Even we can't handle what's going on today. This country has totally stepped over the line."

How will the Lord respond to our shamelessness? When evil abounded in Israel, God answered with economic ruin and depression. It seems the only way he could get the people's attention was to take away their livelihood: *"The Lord... doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread..."* (ISA 3:1). This clearly means economic disaster.

I believe economic hardship is also the only way God can capture America's attention. How else can He take hold of a sin-mad nation other than by affecting every person's wallet? He's telling us, just as He told Israel, "I'm going to trouble your economy. You're going to see me cut off your years of prosperity."

Isaiah then describes an unusual scene: *"In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying,*

A Christian In Name Only

We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach." (ISA 4:1). Seven virgins were trying to make a special arrangement to marry a certain man. Yet, no love or courtship was mentioned in this arrangement. Not a word was whispered about an engagement, intimacy, forsaking others, remaining faithful.

What's going on here? Isaiah is telling us, "These women don't want a husband they can love or who'll supply their needs. All they want is this man's name. They're looking for a loveless, non-committal marriage, to provide them with a certain status."

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(ISA 4:1)

Often in Scripture, the number seven represents spiritual things. Most likely, these seven women are meant to represent a certain people who appear to have a part in God's kingdom. They're telling this man, "We'll make our own living and provide for ourselves. All we want is your name, to take away our reproach. We want to appear good before the world. Your name will give us that kind of status."

I believe Isaiah is speaking of the church. And the man these

seven women wish to marry is Jesus. The prophet is illustrating something important here. He's saying that in times of turmoil, would-be believers will try to have a marriage of convenience with Christ. **Yet such believers are Christians in name only.** They'll want to appear spiritual, claiming to be part of the kingdom of God. But they'll try to cut a deal with the Lord. They'll say, "I want you, Lord. But I want to go my own way and do my own thing. Just give me your name. I want to be seen and known as one of yours, your bride."

Such people don't want to be clothed by Christ in garments of righteousness. They don't want to have intimacy with the Lord, or to be dependent on Him. **They only want to live unto themselves.** They want no obligations, no commitment. By their attitudes, they're telling the Lord, "Let me enjoy my association with you. Then others will see me as good."

We're seeing Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled right now. Churches in America and around the world are filled with millions of people calling themselves Christians who have no intimacy with Jesus. They spend no time in prayer with Him, nor pick up their Bibles to see what He desires of them. Incredibly, God has continued to bear with these people, blessing and prospering them. Yet they can't even bring themselves to say a simple, **"Thank you, Lord. What do you want from my life?"**

Somehow, these people have attached themselves to Christ's Name. Yet they did so wholly on their own. Our Lord won't have any part of such an arrangement.

The wise virgin, however, has great passion for the Bridegroom. She constantly longs for intimacy with Him: *"My beloved is mine, and I am his..."* (SOS 2:16). Indeed, the cry of the true Christian is, "Lord, I don't want just your name. I desire you at all times. I think of you every night, as I go to bed. And every morning when I wake, my heart goes out to you."

"O LORD, we have waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early..." (ISA 26:8-9).

Yes, the true believer declares, *"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels."* (ISA 61:10).

All these things will happen "in that day" (Isaiah 4:1)

The Lord is now shaking our nation. And we're about to see Isaiah's prophecy come to pass. God is going to deal with us as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah, because *"...the child behaves himself proudly against the elderly, and the base against the honorable..."* (ISA 3:5).

Soon the Lord's righteous judgments will be apparent to everyone, as He begins cutting off prosperity. And as "that day" approaches, many will claim to be married to Christ. But they'll be attached to Him in name only. Tragically, they won't be His at all.

We're also going to witness an incredible scene from Jesus' parable: *"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."* (MATT 25:5). All the virgins, both foolish and wise, were asleep. Christ is describing a slumbering church just prior to His coming. He warns in Mark, *"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he*

find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (MK 13:35-37).

I find this image in Christ's parable hard to comprehend. How could these wise virgins be slumbering? **How could any godly servant, who has prepared for Jesus' return for so long, be asleep as the Lord approaches?**

That's when I began to see the hard truth of Jesus' parable. I recalled Christ's prophecy that in the last days, a great falling away would take place in the church. Then I remembered Paul's admonishment: *"Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."* (ROM 13:11). Paul's warning suggests that just before Jesus returns, a great slumber will fall upon many Christians. Even the righteous will be in danger of falling asleep.

Paul also warned, *"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* (EPH 5:14-16). The apostle is urging, "Wake up, saints. Don't be sleeping virgins. Be wise, and stay watchful for the Lord's return."

Make no mistake about who Paul is addressing here. He's speaking to *"followers of God... dear children"* (EPH 5:1). He also says, *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night."* (1.THESS 5:6-7).

Many believers are going to be tested by this great slumber. Right now, we're living in a dark hour, with midnight quickly approaching. Our Lord's return is closer now than ever. Yet, as I look around, I see many believers falling into a deep sleep. Indeed, over the years this spirit of slumber has already overtaken multitudes.

Consider a man who claims to be a Christian. This man seldom if ever prays. Yet he spends hours in front of his television watching sports. He also has time for hobbies, leisure activities, hunting and fishing. **But he makes absolutely no time for the Lord.**

God is merciful to this man. He blesses him, prospers him, provides for his family. Yet this same man who claims to love Christ can't even take five minutes to get on his knees and say, "Thank you, Lord." He's in danger of becoming a Christian in name only.

Now think of a woman who says she's a Christian. She spends hours on the telephone with friends. She makes time each night to watch her favorite TV programs. And she whiles away hours reading. Yet she has no time for intimacy with Jesus. **If she prays, it's only on occasion, when a crisis comes upon her family.** But the Lord simply isn't much on her mind. She also is in danger of becoming a Christian in name only.

Such believers aren't prepared for their Lord's return. **With each passing day, their lamps are dying out.** The meager relationship they have with Jesus is slowly passing away. Yet the Scriptures clearly warn: *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..."* (HEB 2:3).

Why would the Lord want slumbering, lukewarm, disinterested followers in heaven with Him?

Why would He want those who are ashamed of Him here on earth, who are bored with the things of God, who couldn't care less about church, fellowship and intimacy with Christ? Our purpose in heaven will be to worship the Lord and serve Him forever. How could anyone expect to enjoy eternity there, if they can't tolerate a walk with Jesus here?

Some may answer, "Things will be different when I die. I'll suddenly be changed. The Lord will give me a new heart in that moment. Then I'll want to worship Him."

My response would be that death doesn't change anything. You're going to be known then as you're known now. And the character you possess here is the same character you'll have when you stand before the Lord. If you're a couch potato now, you'll have the same character then. **If you die a half-hearted believer, a Christian in name only, that's how you'll be revealed on the Day of Judgment.**

The Bible says we all have to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. When that time comes,

the Lord will ask us to give Him an account of our life. He'll demand to know how we spent our time. How do you expect to answer Him? He's recording everything you say and do here. You won't be able to deny anything when He opens up the heavenly record. Will His book reveal that you hardly ever gave Him a thought?

You might claim, "Well, I know God loves me."

I would answer, "He surely does love you. And there will be many others like you on that day, whom the Lord loves. But He is also a God of righteousness and justice. That's why His people died in rebellion in the Old Testament wilderness, even though the Bible says again and again that God loved them. **The fact is, they never allowed their hearts to be changed. And many are heading down that same path.**"

Don't misunderstand. God loves and yearns over His repentant though slumbering people. All He wants from them is an open heart to hear His voice and a passion to hear from Him. Yet, even after they've heard warning upon warning, many true believers also ignore the Lord and neglect His gift of salvation. In my spirit, I hear Jesus saying of such people: "Not only do they neglect Me. And not only have they laid aside all passion for Me. They don't even think about Me. I'm not even a passing thought to them anymore."

Here is a loving word of warning to all "wise virgins" who have begun to slumber.

If I could express God's grief, I would sum it up this way: The Lord hurts over multitudes who were once wise virgins. At one time, these people longed for His coming and diligently prepared to meet Him. They were wide awake, their hearts on fire, their minds and souls full of passion for Christ. **But over time, these same wise virgins began slowly turning away from Him. After a while, they crossed a line. And now they've joined the company of foolish virgins Jesus describes.**

You may claim, "I'm not one of those foolish virgins. **I admit, I'm not the fired-up witness I once was**

for Jesus. But I don't feel like I've crossed a line. I still have love in my heart for Him. I read my Bible, I go to church faithfully, and I'm a dedicated spouse and parent."

But do you now have a passion for Christ? Do you hunger and thirst for more intimacy with Him? You confess your love for Him. But is it cold or lukewarm love?

If you're truly a wise virgin - if you've never forsaken your intimate love for Jesus - consider this warning from Proverbs: "***Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.***" (PROV 19:15). You may not think of yourself as slothful. But sloth is the exact word to describe the spiritual mire of many Christians who once were passionate for Jesus.

Sloth overcame them when they began allowing foolish, fleshly things in their lives they would never have permitted before. As they indulged these things, they gradually let their zeal begin to wane. And soon they were missing their dedicated times of prayer and devotion. Slowly, they turned into half-hearted, lukewarm believers. And over time, they fell into a dangerous slumber.

"His watchmen are blind: they are all dumb, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber."
(ISA 56:10)

I ask you, are you getting lazy in your love for God's Word? Are you no longer redeeming the time, but instead wasting hours on the Internet or in front of your television? Heed the clear warnings of Scripture: if you become sluggish, falling into spiritual slumber, you'll eventually cross a line you never could have imagined happening. And you'll cast yourself into the company of foolish virgins. **You'll be given over to a deep sleep. And before you even realize it, the flame in your lamp of preparation will flicker out and die.**

This issue of slumbering Christians has been burning in my spirit for years now. Indeed, I believe God is speaking the same message to many other shepherds today, as He did to His prophets of old. Yet multitudes of God's spokesmen have fallen asleep, just as the sheep in their care have. Isaiah described what we're seeing today,

when he cried out, "***His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.***" (ISA 56:10).

Christians in name only will be left out of God's eternal purpose for them.

The unwise virgins were not present at the marriage supper. They were shut out completely. Jesus' parable gives us a clear truth we must accept: when the Lord came, only those who were prepared were allowed to be with Him.

According to the parable, "***At midnight there was a cry made...***" (MATT 25:6). As I look around at the church scene today, I not only see lazy shepherds and slumbering saints. I also see pleasure-mad Christians who are moving fearlessly and headlong into lusts of all kinds. Yet, in spite of all this wickedness and sloth, God has not forsaken His people.

Instead, He has commanded His faithful shepherds to cry out a warning. And this holy remnant of watchmen will not be silenced. In spite of being mocked, scorned and ridiculed, these servants cry aloud the message that burns in their hearts: "The hour is now midnight. And the Bridegroom is coming for His bride. Jesus will soon be at the door. Christian, be ready to meet your Lord." Here is the cry of the hour: "Be ye ready." **Are you ready? Have you been preparing to meet Jesus face to face?**

Yet the Bible tells us a second cry will also be heard. We don't hear this cry as yet. But soon we will. We'll hear it as God now begins to move in power to get the attention of a backslidden world. And we'll hear it as we see Jesus' words being fulfilled before us: "***Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.***" (LK 21:26).

Deep down, everyone in this nation and throughout the earth knows humankind has reached critical mass. There's an inner knowledge, a mounting intuition, that this world can't continue as it is. Something supernatural has to happen. There must be some kind of intervention from on high. **Signs all around us are pointing to the Lord's soon return.**

That day is getting ever closer. And as that moment approaches, darkness and turmoil are going to increase in the earth. The foundations of every society will be shaken to their core. Even now, Jews all over the world are crying, "Our Messiah is finally coming. We can feel He's right at the door."

When the moment of our Lord's appearing finally comes, this cry will go up from the slumbering church: "Our lamps have gone out!" Many will realize they don't have what it takes to endure. The cold and lukewarm will suddenly rush around, desperate to make up for lost time. **They'll plead with their pastors, "Help me, I don't know what to do. I'm spiritually dead. Please, tell me how I can face this." But many of those pastors will be as confused and perplexed as their sheep.**

Jesus has already warned us in His parable: "While they went to buy, the bridegroom came..." (MATT 25:10). The wise virgins had told the foolish ones to go buy oil for themselves. But while the foolish virgins were gone, the Bridegroom came.

When that moment arrives, we won't have time to develop Christ's character in our soul. We won't have time to build up our spiritual resources. And it's going to dawn on the slumbering that they're not prepared. They'll cry out in anguish, "I'm empty, dry. I've wasted all my time pursuing foolish things. I've completely wasted my life. The Lord is appearing, and I'm not ready."

When the Bridegroom closed the door, the foolish virgins were left outside, crying, "Lord, open up. Let us in." But the Bridegroom answered, "*I know you not.*" (MATT

25:12). What a frightening prospect. At that point, nothing else can be said. No further appeal can be made. **The Lord will declare, "The door is shut."**

Here is proof in Christ's own words that only truly saved believers will be included in His bridehood. All who tried to hold onto sin in this world - who wanted only His name but not His love - will be left out.

Now Let Me Give You the Good News

The good news is that there's still time. The door is still open. And the Lord's greatest desire is to have you at His side for the marriage supper of the Lamb. He loves you even in your negligence. And if you're honest, you'll agree with His Word: "Yes, this parable describes me. I've grown lazy. I don't want to become a foolish virgin, and drift away. I want to be ready as the day of the Lord approaches."

If you want to be a wise virgin, there are two steps you must take. They're simple steps, but they can't be overlooked if you're to be included among the wise virgins:

1. Make Christ the center of your thought life. Let the Lord be in all your thoughts. When you wake up in the morning, whisper His name. At night, as you're going to bed, call out to Him in thought and on your knees.

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (PHIL 4:8). Let this verse be the basis of a simple prayer for you throughout the day: "Jesus, you are

true, honest, just, pure, lovely. You are my Good News."

Paul writes, "*The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise...*" (1.COR 3:20). God records all your thoughts. He knows every time you think of Him. So, give Him all your "thank you" thoughts.

2. Pray throughout the day, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." This simple prayer is the oil for your lamp. Praying it daily is how you begin to prepare to meet the Lord. You're telling God, "Father, I'm not worthy to be called by your Name. I need your mercy. I realize I'm not what I thought I was. I thought I was a pretty good person. Yet, whatever meager goodness I may possess gains me nothing. It's all filthy rags in your sight. I know I can't be saved by my good works. I need your grace. I humble myself before you now. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

When the publican first prayed this prayer, Jesus said of him, "*I tell you, this man went to his house justified...*" (LK 18:14). In other words, here was one to whom Jesus will open the door.

"Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (HEB 9:28). Let me ask you one final question: are you looking for His return? Do you long to see Him?

Repent, and determine to seek Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. He promises that if you do, you're sure to find Him. He will open every door to you.

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