

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 1 May

## Children's Talk: Be Prepared

- What does it mean to be “prepared”?
  - Ready for what comes next
- Sometimes we don't like to prepare because we want to enjoy what we are doing now and not worry about the future
  - Doing dishes before eating
  - Cleaning up toys before moving to the next thing
- Spiritually prepared:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> make sure you are focused on the Lord and others
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> enjoy yourself and relax
- The Lord's parable:

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: “Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!” Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise answered, saying, “No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.” And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. (Matthew 25:1-10)
- Both groups got to rest and relax while they waited; they weren't lazy or anything like that!
- But one group had first prepared oil and the other hadn't, so they were ready for when the Bridegroom appeared
- The other group was not ready, so they missed the wedding
- It is ok to rest, relax, enjoy yourself; but make sure you first are ready to care for others when the time comes.

# Spiritual Fatigue

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

1 May, 2022

Constant attention, to anything, is unsustainable. No matter how important the subject at hand is, focusing all of your attention to one thing, all the time, will eventually wear you out. I got thinking of this with the war in Ukraine: when it first began it was at the forefront of many peoples' minds, and so they looked for ways to make a difference. Some of that sentiment remains; but the initial shock has worn off, and a kind of fatigue has set in. What once was shocking is now the norm. What once elicited action now gets a shrug. It is unsustainable to constantly pay attention; and the same principal applies to even the most important things in life, such as spiritual things. We cannot always be alert, and so we need to learn how to accept the times of rest that the Lord gives us along with the work that needs to be done.

Through the ages many spiritual groups have taken the attitude that the more time spent thinking about God, the better. This idea is even drawn from the Word, which speaks of the need to be vigilant spiritually. There is for example the parable of the servants watching for their master's coming:

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. (Luke 12:35-38)

We should be like servants, constantly alert and ready to serve our Lord, regardless of the hour at which He arrives. In other words, we should be prepared to take the opportunities that come our way to serve our neighbour or to grow in our regeneration. We should be on the look out for what the Lord has in store for us.

But just like with situations like the one in Ukraine, constant vigilance gradually turns to fatigue. Outwardly we see it with the overwhelming needs to be served. I've noticed this with the recent floods: there were so many organizations trying to offer help that it became overwhelming to try to keep up with them all. Imagine trying to keep up with every charitable organization in the world. Aside from the simple logistics of it, the emotional fatigue would be a problem too. There is not enough time in the day nor room in our lives to feel the weight of every single person's suffering. To hold all of that compassion would be unbearable. Even picking a single focus can become fatiguing: to pour energy and time and resources into a problem over months and years desensitizes us to the problem and leaves us drained.

Inwardly, within oneself, there is the same problem. We are messed up and broken people, with an eternity of growth and spiritual rebirth ahead of us. If right now we tried to focus on every single evil and flaw we could not possibly make any progress whatsoever. And like with the outward problems that we see, even in picking one issue to work on we can become fatigued. There may be a kind of excitement when you first realize there is room for improvement. There is energy in renewing a spiritual practice or in recommitting to being a better person. Yet just like

with anything else, as time passes the energy wanes, we become desensitized to the importance and significance of that particular evil, and we become exhausted from returning to it again and again and again. Even little flaws become weighty if we are constantly on guard against them. It's like living the life of a grazing animal, eternally under the stress of predators. It's a stress that never lets up and never goes away fully. We cannot sustain that kind of life.

The Lord calls us to vigilance; and yet constant vigilance is unsustainable. The Lord does not ask the impossible, and so there must be ways of being vigilant without becoming fatigued. The important starting point is to realize that on our own we cannot ever sustain a spiritual focus. It is only by turning to the Lord again and again for His strength and His perseverance that we can remain focused on the task at hand. The Psalms put it this way:

Unless Jehovah builds the house,  
They labour in vain who build it;  
Unless Jehovah guards the city,  
The watchman stays awake in vain.  
It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To sit up late,  
To eat the bread of sorrows;  
For so He gives His beloved sleep  
(Psalm 127:1-2)

No matter how dedicated we are to supporting a cause, no matter how committed to being on guard against evils, it is all in vain if we are not relying on the Lord. Because even if we cannot hold the pain of the whole Human race, He can; and even if we cannot confront the enormity of the hells that attack us, He can. He can do these things, and so it is in relying on Him that we can too.

But even with the Lord on our side we cannot keep working 24/7. There is a cycle that the Lord has given us that has rest built into it. In the Word it is talked about as the Sabbath.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of Jehovah your God. In it you shall do no work. (Exodus 20:8-10)

The command is two-fold: not merely to have a day of rest every seven days, but also to do work for six. Spiritually speaking both elements are crucial: there must be work, followed by rest, followed by more work and more rest. We all know that it would be wrong to have no care for others or our own self-improvement. We know that spiritual growth takes hard work. But it would be equally wrong to believe that we must work all the time with no rest. If we do not allow ourselves to enjoy the rest the Lord provides, then we are not completing the full spiritual cycle. The same cycle is present in the parable of the watchful servants from earlier. Yes, they had to remain awake, regardless of the hour; but when their master did arrive they were given rest, and were even served by him. Having watched faithfully, they were given the rest they longed for.

Practically speaking how do we incorporate this rest into our daily lives, so that we can sustain care for others and sustain the inner work of repentance? The six days of work and one day of rest don't give a strict timeline: we have many

Sabbaths in a given day, and the work leading up to a Sabbath may last weeks. But what we can do is be mindful of which state we are in at any given point, especially when it seems like we don't have much left to give. When tired, exhausted, worn down: are you in a state when you need to keep going, or a state when you need to let go, turn it all over to the Lord, and find rest? If it is the former, and there is more work to be done, remember to still look to the Lord. You cannot do it on your own. Remember also that the rest will come. The Lord's will is not that we be caught up in an eternal battle. There are battles; but there is also peace, deep peace, real peace, in the Lord. On the other hand, if you find that you are in a season of spiritual rest, don't forget to enjoy it. The hells will inspire guilt for feeling content when there is so much suffering, guilt for not working when there is so much to be done. Don't let the hells rob you of your Sabbaths. Lean into the rest that the Lord gives you.

This is not a simple cycle to learn. It is far easier said than done. You won't always know what season of life you are in, whether one of determinedly pressing forward or contentedly sitting back. Nor is it easy to embrace the state you are in, and to feel it fully. It comes down to more of a mind-set and a lifestyle than a specific action. A mind-set of turning everything over to the Lord, and a lifestyle of focusing on the spiritual task at hand. The more we develop these the more we will be like the ever-watchful servants. The more, indeed, we will be able to remain mindful of the Lord without getting burnt out. In fact, the Teachings of the New Church say that for those who have developed a genuine faith in the Lord, that faith is present regardless of whether they are conscious of it:

As regards faith, anyone who receives and possesses faith is constantly mindful of the Lord. This is so even when he is thinking or talking about something other than Him, or else when he is carrying out his public, private, or family duties, though he is not directly conscious of his mindfulness of the Lord while he is carrying them out. Indeed that mindfulness of the Lord present in those who possess faith governs their whole being, but that which governs their whole being is not noticed by them except when they turn their thought specifically to that matter. (*Secrets of Heaven* §5130)

This is a blessing for the times when we feel that we are not doing or being enough. Even if we are simply going about our daily tasks, and as long as we have been working on having faith in the Lord, we are doing enough. Being vigilant does not mean spending every waking moment thinking about spiritual things.

Even with this faith, and this mind-set, and having done the hard spiritual work, we will still become spiritually exhausted. There is no way around the fact that at times life will get hard. It's all too easy for that exhaustion to become despair, especially if we are bearing the weight of the world on our shoulders. But we are not alone in bearing whatever load we have. The Lord bears it up on our behalf as well. When we need to carry it, He will give us the ability to do so; and when we need to put it down and rest a while, He will hold it up still then, waiting for when we are ready to return to the task. Although we may struggle, if we put our faith in the Lord, He will lift us up.

He gives power to the weak,  
And to those who have no might He increases strength.  
Even the youths shall faint and be weary,  
And the young men shall utterly fall,

But those who wait on Jehovah  
Shall renew their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.  
(Isaiah 40:29-31)