



Don't Lose It!

(This lesson is for myself, at least as much as for any of you who read it.)

Whenever I have encountered the question, "Can you lose your salvation?" my simplistic answer has always been, "Why would you want to?" It's kind of a smart-aleck way of saying that the question isn't really important.

I believe the Lord is now teaching me that it is an important question—that, even if I don't intend to lose my salvation, I could perhaps do so through carelessness or inattention. It is not a matter to be taken lightly.

(Background information: In Israel in Jesus' time it was customary for the bridesmaids to go to the wedding house, carrying burning lamps or torches, and wait for the bridegroom to arrive. When he drew near they would go to meet him with their lamps and conduct him to the bride. Then the wedding celebration could begin.)

Now consider this parable of Jesus:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As



the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know

neither the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:1-13 NRSV)

As with every parable of Jesus, He told this story to make a point: the matter of our salvation is not something to be taken lightly. It is literally a matter of eternal life or death.

Jesus' admonition here to "keep awake" does not deal with sleeping. All ten of the bridesmaids took a nap. Rather He is saying, "Keep your mind on your business—remember what's important and equip yourself for it. Don't get caught short of oil." (More about this later.)

St. Paul emphasized in his writings that salvation is a free gift, given by God's grace through faith, and not something that can ever be earned by being good or doing good. Nevertheless he said each of us should "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" (Phil 2:12b-13)

Consider also this passage from Matt. 7:21-23: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'*"

Here, too, Jesus is saying that going through the motions is not enough. It is necessary to live with an attitude and purpose of doing God's will.

Does this mean that salvation is earned "by works" after all? No, it doesn't. It simply means that you can't take it for granted. Praying the "Sinner's Prayer" doesn't get you into Heaven. Joining a church doesn't work. Being sprinkled with or dunked in the water of baptism doesn't do it, either.

What's required is whole-hearted acceptance of God's gift of salvation. It's a desire to be with God, forever, on His terms. If you don't appreciate the gift enough to take it seriously and live your life accordingly, you probably should not think that you have it.



But what if you have truly been saved, given your whole heart and life to the Lord, no question about it? Can you then “backslide” right out of the Kingdom?

I’m beginning to believe that you can. You can become less and less hungry for the things of God; more and more likely to let days go by without any real prayer communication with the Lord, without seeking His will before making decisions; without asking the Holy Spirit to guide your steps each day. Being In the world, it is so easy to allow ourselves to become worldly again, no matter how truly we have sought to live the Spirit-led life.

It is so easy to become like those five foolish bridesmaids who were invited to the party, had every right to be there, but didn’t take it seriously enough to come prepared.

One mistake we make is to try to live the Christian life using only our own determination and strength. But, my brothers and sisters, it can’t be done. And of course God knows that, so He has given us His Holy Spirit to help. That’s why Jesus told the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and empower them.

In the Bible, oil is often symbolic of the Holy Spirit. I don’t like to see symbolism over-used, but I think it is very appropriate in this case. So let me “explain” Jesus’s parable this way:



The Bridegroom is Jesus. The wedding feast is the Wedding Supper of the Lamb—the great celebration in Heaven when Christ will be united with His bride, the Church. The bridesmaids are Christians, waiting for “the end of the age.” The lamps

are our bodies, and the light from the lamps is our Christian witness. The oil is the Holy Spirit that fuels the light. Our task is to keep that light burning brightly, and be ready to meet Him when He comes. And, of course, that day for each of us is the day of our death, unless He returns sooner.

Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be (over and over again) filled with the Spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and He is directing all that we do, the light of our witness is clear and strong. When we fail to renew that filling, our light grows dim and is in danger of going out entirely.

Of all the wonderful gifts God has given us, the most essential to receive and appreciate is the gift of His Spirit living within us. This gift is the source of all of our strength, all of our wisdom, all of our joy in the Christian life. If we neglect it, we can lose it. The great evangelist D.L. Moody once said that we must keep being filled with the Spirit, because we leak.

Of course our three great enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—are all working nonstop to distract us and turn our attention away from the Lord to other things. The world throws difficult circumstances at us and says, “Here, deal with this

one if you can.” The flesh cries, “I need this!” or “I want that!” or “I’m tired,” or “That would sure feel good.” And the devil sneaks in with his lies, telling us, “go ahead—lie, cheat and steal—everyone does,” “You’re not lovable,” and “Find someone to blame.”

Don’t listen to your enemies. Don’t let it happen to you.

And of course the good news is that you can keep it from happening to you. I won’t tell you that it’s easy. Like every worthwhile endeavor, you have to work at it in order to accomplish anything. But there are things you can do to “top up your tank” with the oil of the Holy Spirit.

(1) Ask for God’s help. Come before Him on your knees and confess your waywardness, your inability to stick to the task of being His disciple. Do this as often as you need to. Just be sure you mean it. God looks at your heart, not just your words.

(2) Establish a regular prayer time—ideally every day. For most people, first thing in the morning works best. During that time, ask the Holy Spirit to be in you and to give you the wisdom and the energy and the power to serve God this day. Also develop the habit of spending half the time just listening. You may not actually hear anything with your ears, but God can tell you things without using words, and you will find that you “just know” what His will is, and anything else that He wants you to know.

(3) Remember, this is NOT, NOT, NOT about earning Heaven. It’s yours as a gift, bought and paid for by the blood and suffering of Jesus. Rather, this is how you cooperate with God as He prepares you to live there. Like a potter, He is turning a lump of clay—you or me—into a work of art, a vessel fit for the Master’s use.

(4) Be willing to let go of anything you don’t need—anything that gets in the way of your ability to focus on the Lord. Remember that your task is to “do the will of the Father.” But don’t just arbitrarily start discarding—ask Him what to keep and what to let go of.

One more word, from the mouth of Jesus straight to me—and you— “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17)

I hope this is helpful. I pray that none of us will allow ourselves to slip out of the Master’s hand.

Blessings —

Brother Roland

The story is told of a family that moved into a new community. They were promptly visited by two elders and the pastor of a nearby church who cordially invited them to attend the services on the Lord's Day. The man assured them that he would come just as soon as he got straightened out. Several months passed, and he still hadn't put in an appearance, so the minister called again and repeated his invitation. But he received the same reply. The fellow hadn't yet gotten everything straightened out, but he'd be there just as soon as he did. A few weeks later he died, and his widow asked to have the funeral services in the church. The preacher graciously agreed. It was indeed a sad affair. Later when a member of the congregation asked the pastor if the man was a Christian, he answered, "He never attended services here, and no one can recall ever hearing him give a testimony of his faith in Christ, so I can't say. I only know he was a man of his word. He promised to come to church just as soon as he got straightened out—and he did!"



See: 2 Corinthians 6:2; Acts 17:30

At one time, Daniel Webster was considered the greatest of all living Americans. He was outstanding as a statesman, lawyer, orator, and leader of men. Twenty-five national leaders attended a select banquet in his honor. One man at the banquet asked Mr. Webster, "Sir, what is the greatest thought that ever entered your mind?" Without hesitation, Webster replied, "The greatest thought that ever entered my mind was the thought of my responsibility to God." As he spoke, he wept, excused himself from the banquet, and went outside to get control of his emotions. When he returned he talked for thirty minutes about man's responsibility to God.

—Carl G. Johnson, *Ready for Anything*

See: Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 1:1-6; Romans 12:1,2; 1 Peter 1:22-23



It is impossible for us to be the children of God naturally, to love our enemies, to forgive, to be holy, to be pure, and it is certainly impossible to us to follow God naturally; consequently the fundamental fact to recognize is that we must be born again.

In new birth God does three impossible things: the first is to make a man's past as though it had never been; the second, to make a man all over again; and the third, to make a man as certain of God as God is of himself.

—Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

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Be Prepared

The parable of the ten bridesmaids teaches us that it is very important to be continuously being filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that we are always prepared and able to do God's will.

Puzzle:

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Words:

TEN VIRGINS
BRIDESMAIDS
WITH THEIR LAMPS
FIVE WERE WISE
TOOK SOME OIL
OTHERS FOOLISH
WITHOUT ANY OIL
GROOM WAS DELAYED
GIRLS GOT DROWSY
TOOK A NAP
ABOUT MIDNIGHT

HEARD A SHOUT
GROOM IS COMING
BRIDESMAIDS ROSE
TRIMMED THEIR LAMPS
FOOLISH ONES
NEEDED OIL
WISE ONES SAID
GO AND BUY
SO THEY DID
BRIDEGROOM CAME
THOSE WHO WERE READY

WENT IN TO THE
BANQUET
DOOR WAS SHUT
OTHER GIRLS RETURNED
LORD LET US IN
BUT HE WOULD NOT
YOU DO NOT KNOW
THE DAY OR HOUR
WHEN HE WILL COME
SO BE PREPARED