

Foolish Virgins (and Big Fish)

Matthew 24:36-25:13

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July 10, 2005

[An audio– visual presentation was shown. Slides of the devastation from the recent Asian Tsunami were interspersed with quotes from survivors, Matthew 24, and Eternity Now (Peter's book on Revelation). As these images were flashed on the screen, a singer sang this question, "Why Does My Heart Feel So Bad?"]

Back in January, just after the tsunami, Chris and Dee Dee Marsh made that awesome video. Had they made it this week, they could have equally well used pictures of London and a flood of fire, and they could have equally used pictures of old Jerusalem under siege. They could have equally used the day you die, whenever and wherever you die.

Matthew 24 is about every one of us, not just people who die in cataclysmic disasters.

Last week, we learned that the end of the age is the end of our age. For He comes for each one of us, and no one knows when. So we must always be ready.

297,000 people died in the Asian tsunami. I did the math and with 6 billion people in our world I figure that's just about the same number that die everyday from slipping in bathtubs, drowning in pneumonia, drowning in rafting accidents like Carol last week. But Peter Jennings and Wolf Blitzer never even report that.

So I supposed cataclysmic disasters are signs that shatter our normal defenses, declaring what's true for everyone of us all the time. That is, time runs out, the flood

will come, not a flood of water, but a flood of fire. The fire consumes or redeems as you resist or surrender. It's judgment.

Well, I don't mean to make light of the tsunami or the ache in our hearts, but thinking of that flood of water and drowning in water, I thought of this guy. What if you were this guy when the flood waters came?

[Peter shows a video clip from The Incredible Mr. Limpett...]

Henry Limpett [thinking to himself while looking at his fish tank]: "I wish I were a fish. Fish have a better life than people."

[Singing...]

"I wish, I wish, I wish I were a fish 'cause fishes have a better life than people.

They don't have all the care and strife of people.

A fish can swim, that's all they ask of him.

A fish is free to roam around the sea, and look for love wherever he can find it.

He flirts with every lady fish as she goes swimming by, and if she gives her tail a swish and blinks a fishy eye, a minnow all at once can be a whale of a guy. I wish, I wish I were a fish."

[The fish tank begins to overflow...]

Bessie Limpett: "Henry, the water. Oh, what a mess."

[Next scene, Henry is at the pier, looking into the water...]

Henry: "I wish... I wish I were a fish."

[Background music...]

"Be careful, be careful, be careful."

[Henry falls into the water.]

Bessie Limpett: "Henry! George, Henry can't swim. Save him."

[As he falls deeper and deeper into the ocean, Henry transforms into a fish.]

What if you were that guy, actually a big fish? Then the day you died to Flatland, this two-dimensional surface world, would be the day you were born into the three-dimensional world of the deep, blue sea.

What if you were made for another world so the day you died to this world, you were born into that other world?

What if the day you died, you became what you truly were all along, a big fish?

Well, if you find yourself thirsty and longing for things this world doesn't offer, or offers but doesn't deliver, maybe you're a big fish.

Why does my heart feel so bad? Maybe I was made for another world.

For the last several weeks we've been studying Matthew 24, and now it's all coming together.

In Matthew 24:1-33, Jesus has been describing the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. For in verse 24 He said that all these things will happen in that generation, and they did. As Daniel prophesied, "the end came with a

flood.” It was a flood of fire. That must have been a cataclysmic disaster, but the Bible ends with a cataclysmic surprise.

In Revelation 21, John looks up, and he sees a new Jerusalem, and the voice on the throne says, “Behold, I make all things new.” On the city gates, of the heavenly Jerusalem, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed. On its foundation are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The city and the temple are built with old sinners, old people made new. It’s the story of her life (their life), redeemed. It’s every moment throughout her time redeemed in His time.

It’s everything old made new.

And so, old Jerusalem, all that work, faith, hope, and love, wasn’t in vain. Old Jerusalem wasn’t in vain. She was a cataclysmic disaster but entirely redeemed.

In space and time, with their lives they had built the Jerusalem of stone. But with their lives, like living stones, God had built the eternal Jerusalem above.

We think faith, hope, and love are tools we use for building the city. (Let’s inspire faith, hope, and love so people will give and we’ll get this project done, get ‘er done.) We think faith, hope, and love are tools we use to build the city. Maybe building the city is the tool God uses for building faith, hope, and love, His eternal city, us.

Faith is the substance of what’s hoped for.

Hope is longing for love.

Love is God.

Faith, hope, and love abide.

Well, we must surrender the city we are building to receive the city God has built.

We must surrender the temple we are building to be the living temple God desires.

Yet, surrendering the old is painful and terrifying. In Matthew 24:1-33, Jesus prophesies a lot of pain, and yet He tells us it's birth pain. We're being born and all creation is a womb in travail. Last time we talked about how painful and terrifying it must be... to be born.

I blocked it out, don't even remember it.

I remember the look on my children's faces that first moment after they were born... absolute shock. They were buck naked, surrounded by totally foreign substances: light and wind.

In terror, they opened their mouths and their lungs filled with wind. They screamed until they realized they were home in the light.¹

Can you imagine Henry Limpett's first breath in his new world? He opened his lungs, thinking he was drowning, only to breathe in his greatest desire.

In the movie, The Abyss, divers experiment with breathing oxygenated liquid so they can dive to depths unimagined. You may remember the scene where Ed Harris takes his first, terrified breath of fluid. The doctor says, "He's okay. He's okay. He breathed fluid for nine months in the womb. It just takes a moment for his body to remember."

Actually, technically, we don't breathe fluid in the womb. We only pretend to breathe air, using fluid, because oxygen is delivered to our bodies through the umbilical cord.

In fact, our lungs seem entirely foolish in the womb. They're just an empty cavity in our chest, like a hole in our heart waiting to be filled. The empty space is actually the presence of the future.

Maybe our empty longings in this life are the presence and promise of the future.

And maybe our last sensation of drowning in this world is our first sensation of eternal life filling our lungs somewhere else.

Baptism corresponds to this, says Saint Peter. It corresponds to the ark, passing through the flood of water. Paul says, "In baptism we're buried with Christ." That is, drowned and raised with Christ through faith.²

Christ is the ark.

That's why we take people down to the river to baptize them because they're big fish, made for another world.

Anyone in Christ is a new creation, writes Paul. A new spirit (even Christ's Spirit) lives in them, in this world, as they groan within themselves, waiting for the redemption of their bodies. Their longing—their faith, hope, and love—is the presence of the future, the presence of another world, and the coming King.

Throughout Matthew 24, Jesus talks about His coming, "The coming of the Son of man," parousia. He says it will occur in that generation, and yet of that day and hour (the close of the age) no one knows.

Last week we talked about the two dimensional world of Flatland, and that at His coming (parousia), Christ takes us out of Flatland.

His coming is one event, yet it intersects our world in every place and possibly every time. So the end of *your* age is the end of *the* age.

Parousia literally means “effective presence” or “manifest presence.” So He’s coming on the clouds of heaven, and all eyes will see Him... and yet, He’s here all the time. Right? “Wherever two or three are gathered. . .” He promised His followers, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

He’s coming in manifest glory, unveiled glory, apocalyptic glory. So all eyes see Him... and yet He’s always here in veiled glory. So only some eyes will see Him, those that want to see Him: big fish, perhaps—guys like Henry Limpett, longing for another world.

Jesus is coming to Flatland, and yet, Flatland exists in God. As we saw last week, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” And even if He can’t be comprehended as a “thing” in Flatland, things in Flatland can only be comprehended in Him.

We don’t comprehend light, but with light, we comprehend everything else.

Jesus is the light. He is the truth.

You can’t know anything without faith in truth.

Jesus is the logos, the word, the meaning.

You can’t say anything without faith in meaning.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for,” like the presence of an absence, like an emptiness waiting to be filled... filled with things that seem foolish in Flatland, but are the very substance of the new creation, indeed, the very substance of the creator, our Father.

Jesus is light, truth, meaning, God for us.
 Jesus is justice, the judgment of God.
 Jesus is beauty, the glory of God.
 Jesus is grace, the love of God poured out.
 Jesus is life, He is what makes life meaningful.
 Jesus is the plot to the story,
 without the plot, life is a million facts, and none
 have meaning.

In the movie, *Big Fish*, Will Bloom returns home to be with his dying father, Ed Bloom. Will wants to know his dad, but Will is an empiricist. He lives in Flatland, dryland, this two dimensional world.

The problem is his father's stories are bigger than life (this life), so Will thinks they're lies, and his dad's a fake.

Will [confronting his father about being similar to an iceberg]: "That's the way it is with you dad. I'm only seeing this little bit that sticks above the water."

Ed: "Oh, you only seein' down to my nose, my chin, my..."

Will: "Dad, I have no idea who you are because you've never told me a single fact."

Ed: "I told you a thousand facts, Will. That's what I do, I tell stories."

Will: "You tell... lies, Dad. You tell amusing lies. Stories are what you tell a five year old at bedtime. They're not elaborate mythologies that you maintain when your son is ten, and fifteen, and twenty, and thirty. And... I believed you. I believed your stories so much longer than I should have,

and then when I realized, of course, that everything that you said was impossible, everything, I felt like a fool to have trusted you. You're like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny combined, just as charming and just as fake."

Ed: "You think I'm fake?"

Will: "Only on the surface, Dad, but it's all I've ever seen. Look, I'm about to have a kid of my own, and it would kill me if he went through his whole life never understanding me."

Ed: "It would kill you, huh? What do you want, Will? Who do you want me to be?"

Will: "Just yourself. Good, bad, everything... just show me who you are for once."

Ed: "I been nothing but myself since the day I was born, and if you can't see that, it's your failin', not mine."

Well, Will begins to investigate his father's stories and finds that basically, empirically, they're true. It's just that they're more than empirically true.

Will only sees the facts.

His dad sees the facts but also the meaning. His stories are facts, infused with wisdom, love, truth, justice, grace, beauty—meaning.

Will sees people.

Ed sees persons—as if people are more than we know.

Will would see a tall, insecure man.

Ed sees a story, a giant needing to find a bigger town.

Will sees his mom.

Ed tells stories about a magical lady in a river, a big fish that could only be caught with a wedding ring.

My dad used to tell me stories, and all the facts were infused with meaning. Life was about love and grace and mercy and truth and God in heaven, Jesus come down, and His Spirit in our hearts.

As a child, I believed.

As an empirical young man, I doubted.

So Will Bloom wants to know Bloom, Ed—Bloomed. Will thinks that seeing is believing, but maybe believing is seeing. So until he believes his father's story, he can't see him or know him.

Maybe his father is mostly under the surface of this world.

Maybe his father has a heart that lives in another world.

Maybe his father isn't simply a thing in this world.

Maybe his father is really a big fish...

one more curious thing about Ed Bloom, he's always thirsty.

Well, maybe he's the *product* and *presence* of another world.

Paul wrote, "The Jerusalem above is our mother." We're the *product* of another world.

The book of Hebrews says we've already come to the heavenly Jerusalem. It's the *presence* of another world. Jesus said, "The kingdom is at hand."

So the King has come,
 and the King is coming.
 He's here in veiled glory
 (some eyes see Him),
 and He's coming in unveiled glory
 (and all eyes will see Him).

In Matthew 24, Jesus says He's coming like a thief. Not that He is a thief, but He's coming like a thief. Actually, He's a bridegroom and "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, but who may abide [endure] the day of His coming."

We are His temple. We are His bride. He is the bridegroom, but He's coming like a thief at an hour we don't expect.

Several years ago, late, late one hot summer night, I came home unexpectedly from a cancelled trip. As my bride lay sleeping in her own little world, I didn't know how to wake her so she wouldn't be terrified.

I jiggled the lock, and out of the darkness I heard her terrified voice, "Who is it? Oh my God, who's there?" (Sometimes just terror can kill a person.)

For an instant she believed I was a thief, and I'd come to defile her temple.

Immediately, I said, "Honey, honey, it's me!"

Instantly, she recognized my voice for she had been longing for my "parousia," my manifest presence.

She recognized my voice, and I went from thief to bridegroom. She threw herself into my arms and surrendered her temple with joy. And I filled her emptiness with myself, my life.

I wouldn't have done that unless she recognized me first. For if she hadn't recognized me first, it wouldn't

have been love and life, but rape, and she wouldn't have known me, but only her own deepest fears.

Next verse, Matthew 25:1,

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Scholars try to explain this according to ancient Jewish wedding rituals, but they can't seem to explain why there's no mention of the bride, and why these ten virgins go to meet the bridegroom with oil lamps.

- “Virgins” is the word, not “bridesmaids.” It’s a word that even refers to men in places.
- Paul writes to the Corinthians saying, “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”
- Each virgin holds an oil lamp. Each virgin is a lamp stand.
- In Revelation 1:20, Jesus says the seven lamp stands are the seven churches.
- Exodus 27:21, it was a perpetual statute that olive oil lamps would burn on lamp stands in the temple.
- Throughout scripture, olive oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and fire *is* the Spirit—purifying, consuming, ever present in the temple, and falling on the church at Pentecost.
- We are the church.

We are the temple.

We are the bride.

We are the new Jerusalem coming down.

- Revelation 21, John sees the new Jerusalem “coming down as a bride adorned for her husband. The glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb (Christ within her).”

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

What’s a foolish virgin? Maybe a virgin who marries a man for his kingdom and all His things but doesn’t know the man or what he wants. And what he wants is her, intimate communion with her (if he’s a good bridegroom).

A few months ago we preached on marriage in heaven and intimate communion in heaven. Referring to life in heaven, I said, “Maybe once I have my spiritual body I could just, like, say, ‘Hi, Dad,’ and walk right into him and commune with him. Maybe Jesus could just, like, lean right into me, and enter me, and fill me with Himself and His joy.”

I didn’t mean physical sex, but the greater thing it’s designed to refer to.

I freaked some people out, and I understand why.

The next day, I got an e-mail from a friend at church. She told of the most remarkable and recent encounter with Jesus. Then she wrote,

The Holy Spirit filled each healed place with the health and purity of my youth.

When we were done Jesus was sitting by my side on the little twin bed. He had the sweetest smile, though the distinct features of his face were a little fuzzy. He leaned toward me and I kind-of froze. I thought, "What the heck is He doing? Am I going mad or is He about to kiss me?" Which is kind-of funny when you realize He knew what I was thinking.

Anyway, He leaned toward me and went into me. Just like you described it yesterday. He went right into me, and I was filled with a joy and glory so overwhelming I pulled away in shock. He just chuckled at me while I cried and apologized for freaking out and He said, "That's okay, we have time." It was the most beautiful experience... there are no words to describe it. Then I just said that I thought I needed to sleep now, and He said okay and laid down next to me, and I fell asleep weeping with joy.

Maybe that's why we still have time... to recognize Him here before that day, so we don't freak out, like a foolish virgin.

Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For 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, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to

meet him.” Then all those virgins rose 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, “Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.”

You know, you can’t borrow the Holy Spirit.
You can’t borrow a personal relationship with God.
You can’t borrow a longing for Jesus.

Verse 10,

And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he answered, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Notice the bridegroom doesn’t say, “You’re late,” or “You’re bad,” not even, “You’re foolish.” He says, “I don’t know you,” which can also be translated, “I don’t recognize you, I don’t see you.”

“I don’t know you,” which means they don’t know Him, which means they never actually waited for *Him*, just their idolatrous image of Him and His things. They don’t know Him. How would they have come to “know Him” or “see Him?” Well, isn’t that what oil and lamps are for... to seek things in a dark world?

I guess they didn't think they needed to seek Him because they already *knew* Him. But they didn't. If He came, they'd probably crucify Him, like a thief.

Yet those that came prepared to seek because they didn't know, came to know Him in the darkness. They came to know the glory veiled, so they welcomed the glory unveiled.

He wasn't a thief; He was their bridegroom.

Jesus is already in this dark world. He's the plot to the story. He's the meaning, grace, and truth. He's the love of God poured out. He's the Light of this dark world. See, He's even the oil and fire in your lamp.

But if you don't care about fire *now* and light *now* and truth *now*, what makes you think you'll know Him when He comes on the clouds of heaven?

There are people that call themselves Christians, say they're waiting for Jesus, and don't even know Him. Their life is an act. They glory in their flesh, and delight in death.

They think Jesus is coming to reward their act, pay them for their deeds, and can't wait to see Him fry the wicked.

What makes us think we can delight in the death of the wicked and then believe we will welcome the very substance of mercy? What makes us think we can delight in falsehood, and then surrender in ecstasy to the truth?

Foolish virgins, what makes us think we'll want to surrender the temple when He comes, if we don't long for Him when He's gone?

Yet, how can we long for Him if we never knew Him at all?

Well, virgin bride,
 He's the very oil and fire in your lamp.
 He's the longing that makes you look...
 His Spirit in our hearts crying, "Abba, Father."
 His Spirit forms the emptiness within you longing to be
 filled.
 His Spirit makes the cavity in your chest, longing to
 breathe Him in.

So don't despise the longing or fill it with other things.
 Don't despise faith, hope, and love.
 Stay thirsty!
 His presence takes the form of longing in this world.

You were made for another world,
 that's why your heart feels so bad.

Your body is crying at 3 a.m...
 Your teen screams, "I hate you"...
 Can you hear Him?
 Evil steals your marriage...
 Your job is ripped away...
 Can you feel Him?
 You feel sick with anxiety...
 Loneliness is all you know...
 Can you taste Him?

The darkness hangs thick around you...
 You have no place to call home...
 Can you see Him?
 Death surrounds you and invades you...
 Your life seems to go up in smoke...
 Can you smell Him?

He says to you, "I AM the Light that shines in the darkness. I AM the River that quenches all thirst. For I AM the God that went to the gates of hell. There is no depth I have not known, there is no evil I have not conquered, there is no place I have not gone... to rescue you.

Can you hear me in the silent background?
 Can you feel me in your tears?
 Can you taste me in the food you eat?
 Can you see me in the sun, moon, and stars?
 Can you see me in the light of the fire?
 I AM in the middle of everything
 and I make all things new!!

Those were the prophetic words of my friend, Dale, at a recent Living Stones Service.

And so, do you long for Him? For He longs to enter you, His bride, and He longs for you to enter Him, like a big fish dropped in the ocean of His love. Even now, we can live in that ocean by faith, hope, and love. "In Him, we live and move and have our being."

Preaching often terrorizes me. Recently, just before a sermon, I was filled with fear, felt like I was drowning, and I'd lost control. Dale slipped me a card. It said, in quotes, "Stop struggling. You are *not* drowning. Take me in, and I will fill your lungs. Breathe deep, and I will take you to depths unimagined."

Then Dale wrote in parenthesis, "(Picture the Abyss.)" Now I know Dale meant the movie, The Abyss, but one day, I'll face the real Abyss, not the movie.

Maybe if I breathe Jesus now, in faith, I'll breathe Him then, in ecstasy, and find that all along, I was a big fish.

You're a big fish, about to be dropped into the river of love. You're a virgin bride about to receive her groom. Believe that, and it will change the way you live, and change the way you die.

As Ed Bloom lay dying, he asked Will Bloom to tell him the story of how he goes. Will Bloom says he doesn't know how that one goes. So he asks, "Can you tell me how it starts?" His dad says, "Like this..."

So as the flood comes, Will tells the story.

Will: "Okay, so it's in the morning. And you and I are in the hospital, and I'd fallen asleep in the chair, and I wake up, and I see you. Somehow you're better. [As Will begins to tell the story, the light changes in the room, and we see things as Will describes in the story.]

Will continues: 'Dad? Dad.'"

Ed: "Let's get outta here."

Will: "I say. 'Dad, you're in no condition...'"

Ed: "Get that wheel chair."

Ed: "Hurry up, we haven't got much time. Once we get up this floor, we're in the clear."

Will: "And, uh, we get in the wheelchair..."

Ed: "Faster!"

Will: "Like we're escaping from the hospital."

[Will and Ed are seen wheeling quickly down the halls of the hospital.]

Dr. Bennett: "Will, what are you doing?"

Will: "We pass Dr. Bennett, who tries to slow us down, and we come flyin' out the front, over the curb. And your old, red Charger is there, but it's new, brand new. And I pick you up, and somehow, you hardly weigh anything. I can't explain it."

Ed: [Referring to the wheelchair] "Leave it, we don't need it! Water, I need water."

Will: "Where we goin'?"

Ed: "The river."

[Will squeals out of the parking lot.]

Will: "And, uh, as we get close to the river..."

Crowd: "He's here!"

Will: "We see that everybody is already there."

[Will carries Ed toward the river, and all of the characters from Ed's stories are there, applauding and cheering.]

Will: "And I mean everyone. It's unbelievable."

Ed: "The story of my life."

Will: "And the strange thing is, there's not a sad face to be found. Everyone is just so glad to see you."

[Will carries Ed into the river. Will's mom, Ed's bride is waiting for them there.]

Ed: "My girl in the river..."

[Will drops Ed in the river. He changes into a big fish and swims away.]

Will: "You become what you always were, a very big fish, and that's how it happens."

Ed: "Exactly." [Now we're viewing them in the hospital room once again. Ed stops breathing air. He's gone.]

The next scene is the same scene. It's the church by the river. It's Ed Bloom's funeral. It's all those same people, except their clothes are more drab. The pastor tells the story, and they put Ed's old body in the ground.

Technically, I suppose that both scenes are true. It's just one is the view from Junction City, old Jerusalem, Flatland, and the inside of the womb. And one is the view from Kingdom Come.

Well, it's just a movie. I suppose it affected me so because my father told stories and was a story larger than life, this life. He told me stories of Jesus.

And not long after seeing that movie, I found myself sitting by my father's bed. Everyone had left the room. He could no longer speak. He could barely breathe. He was drowning in fluid, pneumonia. I whispered in his ear, "Dad, I want to pray for you."

Now I realize I was telling him the story of how he'd go. I prayed, "God, it must be really frightening not knowing if you can catch your next breath. Please help my dad to know deep down inside that he no longer needs to breathe air because he can breathe your Spirit. God, help my dad to relax and breathe you, in Jesus' name."

See, I was telling him, "Dad, all you've told me, all you've longed for, and all that gave your life meaning—truth, beauty, justice, mercy, love, and life, Jesus... Dad, you can exhale this world, and breath Him in." I kissed Dad

on the head and went home to get my stuff to come back and spend the night. I returned as he breathed his last.

My sister said he started to slide as soon as I left. She said he's inspire and expire and stop. Inspire and expire, then stop longer. She said it was like he was testing the water, testing the atmosphere in another world.

So the flood came. He expired this world and inspired God. He was home. He was a big fish made for another world. Many of you came to church. I told the story (that he told me), and we dropped him in the river.

And so, Sons of God, how did your Father die? Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the father."

How does your Father die? Watch, look, be careful. It's a flood of fire. It's the judgment.

How does your Father die? I mean, what was that? Just one more naked, Jewish peasant nailed to a tree? One more wretch, swept away by the flood? One more of the last and the least of these that inhabit this world of darkness? Or something more? What's the story?

On the night He was betrayed, He took bread, and having given thanks, He broke it saying, "This is my body, given to you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, after supper, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you. As often as you do it, do it in remembrance of me. I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." He came preaching the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

So if you want Him, if you long for Him (I think that's what faith means, if you want Him), we invite you to come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup. The black cups are wine. The purple cups are juice, but they're both fire.

If you don't want Him, you can just walk by, or stay in your seat, but He wants you.

The last meal my father ate was a little communion bread and a spot of wine which I gave him.

It was appropriate, for it was dinner in two worlds, a goodbye dinner in one world, but breakfast in another.

Come to the table, and breathe God in, by faith, so you'll know Him when He comes on "that day."

[The worship band plays Breathe...]

Breathe

Words and Music by Marie Barnett c. 1995
Mercy/Vineyard Publishing/Music Services. CCLI #
62700

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me

This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me

And I, I'm desperate for You

And I, I'm lost without You

[The worship band plays O, The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus...]

O, The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

Samuel Trevor Francis, Thomas J. Williams, CCLI
#62700

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of Thy love;
Leading onward, leading homeward
To Thy glorious rest above!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Spread His praise from shore to shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth,
Changeth never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones,
Died to call them all His own;
How for them He intercedeth,
Watcheth o'er them from the throne.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean vast of blessing,
'Tis a haven sweet of rest!
O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
'Tis a heaven of heavens to me;

And it lifts me up to glory,
For it lifts me up to Thee.

Therefore, watch for you know not the hour, and you know not the day in which He comes. You do not know *when*. However, you do know *who* it is that's coming. So watch.

How do I watch? Well, you came to the table, right? You took a piece of that bread, a little bit of the wine. If you took that with just a little bit of faith, you know what you swallowed? Oil and fire, the light! So turn on your heart light and watch. Watch for Him in creation. Watch for Him in scripture. Watch for Him in worship. Watch for Him in your friends and your neighbors. Watch for Him in your tears. Watch for Him in your longings. Watch for Him in your laughter. Watch for Him even in the last and the least of these. (Oh, that story's coming up real soon.) Watch for Him there. For when you touch them, you touch far more than you know.

Watch for Him so that on that day, when He appears on the clouds of heaven, shining like the Son, you'll say, "I know that guy! I know Him, that's my husband!" And with the Spirit and the bride, you will say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come." In His name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. . . . Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Matthew 23:37-24:5, 24:34-47 (ESV)

For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

John 6:55-56 (RSV)

But if that wicked servant says to himself, “My master is delayed,” and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:48-51 (ESV)

Blessed (makdrios, happy) is that servant. . . . Salvation is not a matter of getting a reward that will make up for a rotten deal; it is a matter of entering by faith into the happiness—the hilarity beyond all liking and happening—that has been pounding on our door all along. . . . But what of the unfaithful servant, the bad church? . . . What of the church that begins to beat its fellow servants’ knuckles with the carving knife of ethical requirements and to get drunk on the cheap wine of successful living or the rotgut booze of spiritual achievement? Well, Jesus tells us what, “The Lord of that servant will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.” There is indeed a judgment on such a church. But it is precisely a condemnation for its having made a serious business—a tissue of works—out of the divine lark of grace. The wickedness of the church can be one thing and one only: Turning the Good News of Jesus into the bad news of religion.

Robert Capon, Kingdom, Grace, Judgment

And you shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may be set up to burn continually. In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute for ever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel.

Exodus 27:20-21 (RSV)

The seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 1:20b (RSV)

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

Matthew 25:1-4 (ESV)

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2 (ESV)

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those virgins rose 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, "Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he answered, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Matthew 25:5-13 (ESV)

But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 (RSV)

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

And this vision instructed my understanding that it pleases God a great deal if the soul never ceases to search: for the soul can do no more than seek, suffer and trust, and souls that do this are moved by the Holy Ghost; and the splendour of having found God comes by his special grace when it is his will. Seeking with faith, hope and love pleases our Lord, and finding pleases the soul and fills it with joy. And thus my understanding was taught that seeking is as good as finding for the time that our soul is allowed to labour. It is God's wish that we seek to behold him, for then he will graciously show himself to us when he wills.

Julian of Norwich

To be human is to be poor . . . Should you ask the biblically poor woman to describe her prayer life, she might answer: "Most of my time, my prayer consists in experiencing the absence of God in the hope of communion." She is not richly endowed with mystical experiences. That is fine because it reflects the truth of her impoverished humanity. Yet the experience of absence does not mean the absence of experience. For example, the soldier in combat who, during a lull in the battle, steals a glance at his wife's picture tucked in his helmet, is more present to her at that moment in her absence than he is to the rifle that is present in his hands. Likewise, the poor in spirit perceive that religious experience and mystical " highs" are not the goal of authentic prayer, rather the goal is communion with God.

Brennan Manning The Ragamuffin Gospel

Augustine declared, "The whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing. What you desire ardently, as yet you do not see. . . . By withholding of the vision, God extends the longing; through longing he extends the soul, by extending he makes room in it. . . . Let us long because we are to be filled."

St. Augustine from The Journey of Desire by John Eldridge

Your body is crying at 3 a.m...
Your teen screams, "I hate you"...
Can you hear Him?
Evil steals your marriage...
Your job is ripped away...
Can you feel Him?
You feel sick with anxiety...
Loneliness is all you know...
Can you taste Him?
The darkness hangs thick around you...
You have no place to call home...
Can you see Him?
Death surrounds you and invades you...
Your life seems to go up in smoke...

He says to you, "I AM the Light that shines in the darkness. I AM the River that quenches all thirst. For I AM the God that went to the gates of hell. There is no depth I have not known, there is no evil I have not conquered, there is no place I have not gone... to rescue you.

Can you hear me in the silent background?
Can you feel me in your tears?
Can you taste me in the food you eat?
Can you see me in the sun, moon, and stars?
Can you see me in the light of the fire?
I AM in the middle of everything and I make all things new!!
Dale Eben, Living Stones Service

“There is a way into my country from all the worlds,” said the Lamb: but as he spoke his snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane. “Oh, Aslan,” said Lucy. “Will you tell us how to get into your country from our world?” “I shall be telling you all the time,” said Aslan.

C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

We are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it, "How he's grown!" we exclaim, "How time flies!" as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were repeatedly surprised at the wetness of water.

And that would be strange indeed; unless of course the fish were destined to become, one day, a land animal.

C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms

These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a county we have never yet visited. . . . That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that "beauty born of murmuring sound: will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. . . . At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind and still more, the body receives life from Him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasure; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountainhead that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy.

C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

People are prepared for everything except for the fact that beyond the darkness of their blindness there is a great light. They are prepared to go on breaking their backs plowing the same old field until the cows come home without seeing, until they stub their toes on it, that there is a treasure buried in that field rich enough to buy Texas. They are prepared for a God who strikes hard bargains but not for a God who gives as much for an hour's work as for a day's. They are prepared for a mustard-seed kingdom of God no bigger than the eye of a newt but not the great banyan it becomes with birds in its branches singing

Mozart. They are prepared for the potluck supper at First Presbyterian but not for the marriage supper of the lamb.

Frederick Buechner
from What's So Amazing About Grace by Philip Yancey

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Matthew 25:1 (ESV)

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

Revelation 21:2, 21:22-24 (RSV)

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