



The Sharon Star

God’s Kingdom & Spiritual Growth

David Gabruch

“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you!” (Luke 17: 20-21 NKJV).

God is establishing His kingdom on earth “within” those who believe and have accepted Christ as their Saviour.

For God to establish His kingdom “within” you means He is looking for your all; mind, heart, spirit, soul, and body. God will require your all in order that spiritual growth can happen in your life.

Spiritual growth, not unlike the growth of a plant, requires that a seed is planted. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the “Parable of the Sower.” Jesus often spoke in parables to illustrate how ordinary, down to earth examples, demonstrate a higher spiritual truth.

In verses 3-9, Jesus presents a simple example, but when He explains it to the disciples, He reveals a spiritual truth of what God intends for us, that is, ‘*To be part of His Kingdom.*’ Jesus reveals a mystery of God’s kingdom principle in this parable.

At the end of the parable, verse 23, Jesus clearly outlines that whoever receives “*seed on good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who, indeed, bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty.*” In other words, growth has taken place and spiritual fruit is produced.

God wants you to grow and mature, not only physically but spiritually; spiritually, so that the kingdom of God that has been planted “within you” produces fruit of the Spirit.

Spiritual growth is not automatic once we accept

salvation. It will require effort on our part. It takes an intentional commitment:

- *To decide to grow*
- *To put forth an effort to grow*
- *To persist in growing*

In Philippians 2:12-16, Paul encourages us to put an effort into working out our salvation with reverential fear and trembling. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God will work through you and do His good pleasure. The Holy Spirit wants to create growth through you.

Your spiritual growth involves a joint effort. How you live your life, the way you walk according to the instructions given to you, through the teachings of Christ, and combined with the indwelling Holy Spirit, to provide the guidance, direction and protection you need, is a sure formula to be blameless in the midst of a perverse generation.

As you work towards patterning your lives to reflect the nature of Christ, you enrich the soil of your heart with God’s word, which is the seed. From that, your spiritual lives grow and mature and bear fruit that is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Have you experienced times when it seemed your

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walk with God was going well and there was growth? Then all of a sudden, it falls off the rails. Most, if not all of us, have experienced that in varying degrees. What happened?

For spiritual growth to occur requires a continual flowing of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What things might I do, or have done, that would stagnate my growth in Christ? To stagnate growth would mean that somehow the Holy Spirit has stopped flowing in our lives. Sin will stifle the flow of the Holy Spirit. There are some everyday actions or activities we can get caught up in that will also stifle the flow of the Spirit.

All too often we see these behaviours in the world and, unfortunately, we also see them spring up in the church, from time to time. When they do, the Holy Spirit is displeased and will withhold His moving in us until we have corrected our attitude, repented and asked for God to forgive us. Then we, in turn, need to exercise forgiveness of those who demonstrate these behaviours, perhaps against us.

Below, is a listing of many of the common everyday things that we can be drawn into doing that will stagnate the moving of the Holy Spirit within us. This is only a partial list and you can add to the list the things that you may have experienced:

Sin - separating yourself from God.

Manipulation - getting others to do it the way you want it done.

Pride - I did it my way.

Self - being self focused, self indulgent and self centred is where we rely on our own strength as it relates to spiritual matters and ministry.

Our own ideas and plans - then asking God to bless them, rather than seeking God's will and plan for us.

Rebellion - a stubborn spirit - pushing against being in obedience to the Word of God.

Criticism - The Holy Spirit builds up, it does not destroy.

Holding a grudge - taking offence and harbouring a spirit of unforgiveness.

Bitterness - corrupts your thinking and can develop into evil thoughts.

Spending very little time in prayer, or in God's presence - only you and Him.

Letting dust gather on our Bibles - we tend to read books of the day that may or may not be spiritually enlightening.

Complaining - rather than being thankful for the state we find ourselves in, we complain about the state we are in.

Spreading rumours - which for most of the time is not based on factual information - but because it is "juicy" we have this human compulsion to tell someone.

These behaviours are in direct opposition to God's plan and purpose. If we become participants in these behaviours, we effectively separate ourselves from fellowship with God. It is critically important that these behaviours be kept in check. If not, they will cause our spiritual growth to stagnate because we have effectively stagnated the moving of the Holy Spirit, within us.

Nature itself also tells us that growth takes energy. When plants are seeded and start to grow they need energy. The sun provides a continual flow of that energy. Very much like the Holy Spirit. The energy of the Holy Spirit comes from God, and it flows in us. When energy is expended growth happens, provided our hearts are of fertile soil. As in the case of the sun, when energy is used up by the plants, the sun supplies more, similar to that of the Holy Spirit. He renews and recharges, because He will flow continually in you, if He is not quenched, or stagnated.

When we received Christ through salvation, we also received the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us. As we endeavour to live a life that is patterned after Christ, growth takes place. The energy and power of the Holy Spirit renews our spirits.

The parable in Matthew 25:14-30 makes it clear that God desires that we grow and increase, spiritually. He is looking for that fertile soil of our hearts to plant His Word and from there to grow in our physical and spiritual lives.

Let us keep our lives free of the tares: a critical spirit, judgment, rebellion, bitterness, complaining, pride, self, complacency, etc. Open your heart to the moving and energy of the Holy Spirit. A continuous flowing of the Holy Spirit is a sure sign that energy is being used. When energy is used, spiritual growth is happening and the fruit of the Spirit is being produced.

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:10 -11 NKJV).

Paradoxes Of The Christian Walk

PJ Mathew

It is an undeniable truth that Christian living is a walk of faith and not of sight (2 Corinthians 3:7). Along the way, we will come across many favourable and unfavourable surprises. Also, it is often an unpredictable journey with too many daunting, adventurous and hostile situations. However, the one who is faithful and confident to the call of God will be able to overcome any circumstance with the help of God. *“This priceless treasure we hold, so to speak, in a common earthenware jar - to show that the splendid power of it belongs to God and not to us. We are hard-pressed on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but are never deserted: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out! Every day we experience something of the death of Jesus, so that we may also show the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours”* (2 Corinthians 4:7-10 J.B. Phillips).

Apostle Paul is acknowledging the struggles that he had to endure in his own ministry. According to 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul was given a stabbing pain, which was one of Satan’s angels to plague him and effectually stop any conceit (J.B. Phillips). The NIV translation refers to it as a *“thorn in the flesh.”* Apostle Paul had suffered in his body a great deal as he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. We also read a vivid description of Paul’s trials and tribulations in 2 Corinthians 11:24-29. He was flogged severely. He was exposed to death again and again, beaten with rods, stoned to death, shipwrecked three times, on the sea night and day, exposed to dangers from the rivers, bandits, also from his own countrymen, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, country and at sea, false brethren, sleeplessness, hunger and thirst and cold and naked. *“Apart from all external trials I have the daily burden of responsibility for all the churches”* (2 Corinthians 11:28 J.B. Phillips). Apostle Paul writes that *“we are hard-pressed on all sides but not crushed”* (2 Corinthians 4:8 NIV). John Moffat translates this as “we are harried (attacked) but not hemmed in.” In other words, even though we are completely surrounded by the forces of the world we have a way out because we are not completely hemmed in. When the servant of Elisha saw an army with horses and chariots that surrounded the city, he was afraid and said *“Oh, my lord, what shall we do.”* (2 Kings 6:15)

Prophet Elisha told him not to be afraid. The prophet said, *“‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, ‘O Lord, open his eyes so he may see,’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”* (2 Kings 6:16-17). John in his first epistle writes, *“You dear children, are from God, and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4 NIV). “You, my children who belong to God, have already defeated them, because the one who lives in you is stronger than the anti-Christ in the world” (J.B. Phillips). Soon after Israelites left Egypt they were surrounded by the Egyptian army on one side and the Red Sea on the other side. From the natural point of view, they could not have escaped from the mighty Egyptians, but God had a way to take them through the Red Sea which they dreaded to cross. *“But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and left”* (Exodus 14:29 NIV). Daniel was confined to the lion’s den, but God had a plan to make the lions behave like lambs so that Daniel would be unharmed by the cruel animals in the den. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were surrounded by a huge inferno; yet God delivered them. We might be confined or restricted physically, but our spirits cannot be bound because there is always a way of escape to the spaciousness of God. Let’s be encouraged today that the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is still on the throne, and He has not changed. He has a way out for us from the attacks of the world.

Secondly, We Are Puzzled But Not In Despair.

Many a time in our lives, we have come to our wit’s end; but as children of God, never at our hope’s end. There are times when we do not know what should be done, but even then we should never doubt that something can be done. Many times we do not see our pilgrim way clearly, but we should never doubt that we are going or moving on in the direction destined by God. We read in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *“At present, we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror. The time will come when we shall see reality whole and face to face! At present all I know is little fraction of the truth, but the time will come when I shall know it as fully as God has known me!”* (J.B. Phillips). A great

train of thought flows here through Apostle Paul that we shall all come to the full knowledge of God as God knows us. It is a poignant concept here that we may one day know God as God knows us. It speaks of the intimate, abiding presence of God in our earthen jars of clay and of our possessing the very mind of God. Therefore, we are not puzzled, because of the hope that we have in Christ. Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:27 reveals that Christ in you is the hope of glory.

Thirdly, We Are Persecuted But Never Deserted.

To be persecuted means to be singled out for one's faith or opinion. It is a lonely form of suffering for it generally involves social ostracism. Apostle Paul had this experience in his ministry frequently. He knew what it meant to be persecuted for Christ. He himself was a persecutor of the church before he found Jesus Christ in his life. Now when he became a Christian he knew the emotional and physical suffering that is caused by persecution. He also encourages us that even though we are persecuted, we are never deserted. Christ will never abandon us. He has promised that he will not leave us orphans, and will be with us till the end of the ages. In Matthew 5:10 (NIV), *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God."* One can ask how anyone is blessed or happy when one is persecuted. We are being persecuted because of our faith in Christ. When people have to suffer something for their faith, it results in the closest possible companionship with Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 4: 12-16 (NIV), *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler (interfere officiously and unwontedly). However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."* Apostle Peter suffered for Christ, and he is encouraging us not to be ashamed if we suffer for Christ. In addition he is admonishing us to praise God and anticipate the glory to be revealed.

Suffering persecution is an opportunity to show one's loyalty to Jesus Christ. One of the most famous of all the martyrs was Polycarp, the aged Bishop of Smyrna. The mob dragged him to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate. He was given the inevitable choice- sacrifice

to the godhead of Caesar or die. *"Eighty and six years" came the immortal reply, 'have I served Christ, and he has done no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?' So they brought him to the stake, and he prayed his last prayer: 'O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever blessed Son, by whom we have received knowledge of thee... I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour.' This was a supreme opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Jesus Christ"* (The New Daily Study Bible, William Barclay, Volume 1, P. 133).

Fourthly, We Are Knocked Down But Not Knocked Out.

Quite often, we feel that we are in a wrestling match as being punched, beaten and knocked down. Ironically, we are never destroyed or knocked out of the wrestling match. A significant characteristic of a Christian is not that they do not fall, but every time they fall they rise up again stronger than ever before and more prepared to fight in the arena of faith. It is not that they are never beaten, but they are never ultimately defeated. They may lose a battle, but they can never lose a campaign. In Proverbs 24:16, we read *"For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again."* *"A righteous man may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them all"* (Psalms 34: 19, NIV). For example, Peter, the Apostle, denied Christ three times at a crucial hour of the trial of our Lord. Peter repented, and God raised him up; and he spoke at the feast of Pentecost revealing the plan of God in the end times. At the end of his message three thousand people were added to the church (Acts 2: 41). King David sinned against God; but he cried out to God, and God restored him. Samson, a Nazarite, (set apart to God) repudiated his vow by sharing the secret of his strength to Delilah. However, when Samson prayed to the almighty God his strength returned, and he killed more Philistines when he died than while he lived (Judges 16: 30).

After Apostle Paul states these great paradoxes of the Christian life, he goes on to reveal the secret of his own enduring life for Christ. He knew it very well that he was willing to die for the life of Jesus Christ to be revealed in him. One other thought here is that Paul knew that without the cross there would be no crown. Paul was never afraid of speaking of death because he knew that even if he died ministering, the Spirit that raised Christ from death would be able to raise his mortal body. He was certain that he would draw on a power which was sufficient for life and greater than death.

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15: 54, NIV).

Our walk with the Lord Jesus is not a royal highway of comforts and luxuries. It is a road with many up-hills, valleys and wildernesses. The Psalmist David says, *“They go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion”* (Psalms 84: 7). The more they travelled, the more distance they covered. They had come a long way towards Jerusalem, and it was not worth it to return to the point where they had started since it was much further than from their destination. Isn't the same thing true in our own lives? Since our spiritual journey began a long time ago, we have trodden the path for a long distance now. For a true believer, it is not worth looking back. Rather, we look ahead, and march forward in this path boldly and confidently. *“Not that I claim to have achieved all this, nor to have reached perfection already. But I keep going on, trying to grasp that purpose for which Christ Jesus grasped me. My brothers, I do not consider myself to have grasped it fully even now. But I do concentrate on this: I forget all that lies behind me and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight to the goal-my reward the honour of my high calling by God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:12-14 J.B. Phillips).

Let's grow stronger so that we will not become feeble in as we press on forward and upward in this pilgrim way.

Finally, *“When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But the process goes on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character, and men of integrity with no weak spots”* (James 1:2-4 J.B. Phillips). According to James, the purpose of these trials is to make us men and women of character with integrity. All kinds of tests and trials will come to us. The J.B. Phillips translation speaks of not resenting trials and temptations as intruders but rather welcoming them as friends. That sounds rather difficult to do. There will be the tests of sorrows and disappointments which will test our faith. There will be the test of seductions which seek to lure us from the right way of life. We should remember that they are not meant to make us fall; they are meant to make us soar. They are not meant to defeat us, but they are meant to be defeated. Christians are like athletes. The tougher the course of training they undergo, the stronger they become. Consequently, they know that it is a preparation for a successful endeavour.

Oil In Our Lamps

Andy Snoke

Anointing oil and trimmed lamps; the importance of these two items in Matthew 25 is indescribable. These items are mentioned in this mysterious parable, and we would do well to take heed to what Jesus meant.

This parable has always been a mystery to me. There are object lessons that immediately jump out such as **watchfulness, preparation, readiness** and others but the full meaning of this chapter still remains somewhat hidden, at least to me.

It is easy to misunderstand this chapter. Some would say that the ten virgins of which five are foolish and five are wise, is a story of the “lost and the saved,” but it cannot be that alone.

In fact, all ten are called virgins and all ten are looking for the return of the Lord. In simple terms we could say that all ten are Christians. The only difference between

the five foolish and the five wise is that the wise *“took flasks of oil with their lamps.”* They were prepared. Their anointing oil was full.

This parable is not so much an object lesson regarding the lost and the saved or the contrast of five going to heaven and five going to hell. But it is more of a contrast of five wise prepared virgins entering not just heaven, but the Kingdom of God with all of its privileges and responsibilities.

It is the grand marriage ceremony of the church to Christ *“And while they (five foolish unprepared virgins) were going to buy, the bridegroom came and those (five wise prepared virgins) who were ready went in with Him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut”* (Matthew 25:10).

Permit me to first record the parable. Keep in mind,

Jesus had just finished his famous sermon in Matthew 24, which provides detail to the answer of the disciple's question, *"And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age"* (Matthew 24:3 NKJV). Interestingly, Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 parallel each other very closely.

Jesus then continues with our passage of study as follows:

"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 bride-groom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:1-13 NKJV).

As we study this passage, we discover that there is something very important about this anointing oil in the lamps. It made the difference between joining the bridegroom (Jesus) at the marriage, or being shut out by a great door.

It is interesting to see all of the things the five foolish and the five wise virgins had in common:

- All ten went to meet the bridegroom (Lord).
- All ten took their lamps with them.
- All ten became drowsy and slept while waiting.
- All ten were virgins (spiritually pure).

There was only one thing that made the difference between the foolish and the wise, the oil. The Holy anointing oil made all of the difference.

"For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps" (Matthew 25:3-4).

So what does this very important anointing oil mean or represent? It seems that the anointing oil is made of

many spiritual components.

In Exodus 30, the Lord gave to Moses a formula for the anointing oil that Moses was to follow closely. He was commanded *"It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, accord-ing to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you"* (Exodus 30:32).

I do not believe that the precise physical ingredients and composition of the anointing oil is what is re-quired today. The anointing oil described in Exodus 30 was a type or a shadow of the real.

Here are a few lessons that can be extracted from Exodus 30:22-33:

- We must use the anointing oil provided by the Lord. Today that is a spiritual anointing.
- We cannot fabricate a "true" anointing.
- There is only one real anointing from God.
- We are not to anoint the "flesh" or the fleshly spirit of man.
- We cannot copy or produce a substitute for the true anointing that comes from God.
- We cannot introduce "programs," Christian rock, or the tools of the world in an effort to produce the anointing.
- All of our worship must be under His anointing.

Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: *"Also take for yourself quality spices—five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctu-ary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. With it you shall anoint the tabernac-le of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests.*

"And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people'"

(Exodus 30:22-33, NKJV).

The First and Second coming of Jesus was by that “anointing oil” from God. His First advent:

*“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has ANOINTED Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”* (Isaiah

61:1-2a NKJV).

His Second advent:

*“And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The OIL of JOY for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified”*

(Isaiah 61:2b-3 NKJV).

Psalms 133 speaks of the unity that is in the anointing oil.

*“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious OIL upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments* (author’s

note: the oil once again was not allowed to touch the flesh).

*It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.”*

David spoke of this important anointing from heaven once again upon his head, but not upon his flesh.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over” (Psalms 23:5 NKJV).

James speaks of the healing power that is contained in this spiritual anointing oil:

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-

15 NKJV).

It appears from Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25, that this anointing oil in our lamps is not something that we can give to others. It needs to cost us something. It takes a certain amount of consistent effort to keep the lamp full of heavenly oil.

The foolish virgins did not have an adequate supply of oil and asked the five wise virgins for some of their oil. It became clear that you cannot give your oil to others, they must “buy” for themselves.

“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: 6-10 NKJV).

To avert the plague, King David was instructed to erect an altar on a threshing floor owned by Aranunah the Jebusite. Aranunah was very pleased to offer it to King David free of charge but David knew that true worship should be an “investment.” It should cost him something.

Just as the foolish virgins wanted to receive oil by the wise giving them of their own oil, David knew that he could not just be given the threshing floor. He needed to invest of himself and “buy” it.

“Then the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel” (2 Samuel 24: 24-25).

I was pondering, how do we keep our lamps full of oil? What does the Lord require of us for this to happen? What is the cost? Here are a few disciplines that we can do to keep our lamps burning:

- Reading your Bible.
- Reading the Sharon Star.
- Attend weekly worship.
- Attend at least one regional camp annually.
- Tithe faithfully.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Allow prophecy to flow through us during worship.

- Be submissive to those the Lord has placed over us.
- Be submissive to one another.
- Obey His commandments.
- Forgive one another.
- Bear with one another.
- Love one another.
- Partake of the communion service.
- Pray with words.
- Pray with tongues.
- Worship the Lord often throughout the day.
- Remember the poor and needy.

This list is by no means all-inclusive. All of these disciplines require effort. It costs us something. It is similar to “buying” that oil for our lamps.

At the end of this present age, there will come a separation of believers and unbelievers on the earth. There are degrees of rewards for the faithful. There will be a “first fruits” company, and there will be a harvest company. A harvest is always just behind the first fruits.

The Lord’s encouragement for the last hour was for His followers to be watchful, waiting, ready, with lamps burning and constantly replenished with His oil.

“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 bride-groom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (Matthew 25: 6-10).

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