

- Watch

Sunday, November 12, 2017 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Matthew 25:13

Used again November 12, 2023

- Introduction: Vigilance, why gardening is a war of attrition.

Gardening is a war of attrition. Weeds have developed means of surviving almost anything, and if there is even one small tip of a root left in the ground, it will grow back. It is said that people who are retired make the best gardeners because they can go out there every day. It doesn't matter how often the weeds come back, they will be there ready to pull them out again. A weed can only grow back so many times before the season comes to an end and they run out of time. Vigilance, it is all about vigilance. Our Lord, near the end of His life in Matthew 25, gives a series of parables to emphasize the importance of vigilance in awaiting His return. It's been over 2,000 years, and vigilance is still what matters.

- Set the stage

Jesus tells a parable about a situation common in that day. A wedding is to take place, and the groom can come at any time to pick up the bride at the wedding. In this case there were ten attendants, five of whom brought extra oil for their lamps. When the five that did not bring extra oil ran out they had to go purchase more and missed the arrival of the groom, a social disaster. Then He warns His disciples, and He does this several times in several different settings, to "watch".

- Watch who?

That begs the question, "what or who?" The obvious answer is to watch for Jesus Himself to return. The early Christians of 1 and 2 Thessalonians had, in some cases, literally camped out in the hills waiting on Jesus. Jesus Himself told us that we should be able to "discern the times", (Matthew 16:3) and we are warned in 1 Peter 5:8 to be vigilant against the schemes of Satan, but there is a detail in this parable that changes our focus.

- The attendants watched the bride

In the days of Jesus events such as He described were part of the culture; they were accepted practice. It does not appear that the ten virgins were there to keep an eye out for the groom. The groom usually did not have any attendants. The attendants were there to make sure that the bride was ready when the groom came. The imagery commonly associated with this is that the bride is the church, and Jesus is the groom. That means that when He says "watch" here He is talking about keeping an eye on the church. That doesn't mean there are not other things to watch, but that one priority is to watch over the church.

- Learn to pray like George Muller

We need people to be praying for this church in order to fulfill this particular command of Jesus. People who pray like George Muller. Here's what I've read about him: "George Muller was a legendary prayer warrior - according to his autobiography, he had over 5000 requests answered on the day he prayed them. Muller started 117 schools and ran a group of orphanages in England that took care of over 10,000 boys. He "retired" at the age of 70 and became a traveling evangelist, logging over 200,000 miles before the days of planes.

Muller had five friends who were far from Christ, and he committed to prayer for them every day until they were part of God's family. After a few months, the first man came to Christ. Within 10 years, two more had come to faith. After 25 years, the fourth man was saved.

But the fifth man was a holdout, so Muller continued to prayer for him every single day... for *63 years and 8 months*. Muller eventually died, and before his coffin was placed in the soil, his fifth friend committed his life to Jesus."*

- Here's the application

Nothing takes the place of people who pray. I once heard an audiotape recording of a lecture given by C. Peter Wagner, an early expert on church growth. He said that he would love to do an experiment with two churches in very similar circumstances and challenges. With one he would form a prayer group and have them do every bit of research and advertising available. All the best marketing techniques. In the other church he would form a prayer group. He suspected that one would fare just as better as the other, because, he said, prayer works. I've suggested that people pray through the church membership roster and I bring it up again. Do so, and take notes as to what comes to mind when you pray for people. If you know prayer requests that they have offered, note that as well. You might be surprised how often they are answered. But pray over your church. Watch over your church.

- Conclude

Jesus repeatedly warned us to watch; to note the signs of the times and to know the prophecies of Scripture. Here, I think He tells us to watch each other, to watch our church. To obey this command we are to note each other's lives, not in an obtrusive manner, but as one who cares, and prays for our church. That is one important application of His command to watch.

*Jared Brock<http://www.flowingfaith.com/2015/06/10-prayer-warriors.html>