

Keeping It Fresh

by Richard E. Bieber

To keep our faith fresh, we must turn our ear toward God daily, wash each other's feet, break bread together, and go forth in His name to feed His sheep.

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4, Matthew 25:1, John 13:12, John 21:15, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Faith Renewal", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the parable of the ten maidens, emphasizing the importance of keeping our faith fresh like the wise maidens who had enough oil for their lamps. He highlights the need to overcome staleness, weariness, lukewarmness, apathy, and boredom by staying connected to God and fellow believers. Bieber encourages believers to draw fresh life from God by turning their ear toward Him daily, washing each other's feet, breaking bread in communion, and going forth in His name to touch the world's pain and sin.

Transcript

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens 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. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those maidens 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 replied, 'perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go, rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they went 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 maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:1-13

If the bridegroom had come quickly they all would have gone in. But the bridegroom delayed, and with the passing of time five of the maidens ran out of oil.

One way to describe this running out of oil is to say they became stale,

weary,

lukewarm,

apathetic,

bored.

Every spiritual awakening that has visited this earth since the day of Pentecost has begun with multitudes taking their lamps and going out to meet the bridegroom with

singing,

dancing,

joy, and great hope.

But then comes the delay during which their faith is tested ... during which many lamps go out ... then the bridegroom comes. Those whose lamps are still burning go in with him to a foretaste of the marriage feast. In other words, their ministries begin for real.

Our Lord, the bridegroom himself, received the Spirit at his baptism ... oil ... but he was not yet ready to begin his ministry. First he had to spend a season in the wilderness of temptation where he learned how to stay fresh ... where he beat back and crushed under his feet every temptation which would have compromised his ministry and made him half-baked ... then his ministry began.

Praise God for the outpourings of the Holy Spirit which we have had in our individual and corporate life... for the flame that now burns in our lamps. But if we're honest, we have to admit that we've all had problems keeping our lamps from flickering out. They burn ... then they sputter ... then they die. They are re-lighted...flare up beautifully for a month or two and sputter again.

But, there is oil which will keep those lamps burning with a steady flame. There is a way through that wilderness marked by the feet of our Lord himself which will bring us out on the other side with a fresh,

steady, uncompromised faith, so that we won't have to forever be fussing with our lamps, but can let our light shine and get on with our ministry.

The book of Hebrews is a message on how to keep our faith fresh. It was written to people just like we are ... who were spending so much time and energy trying to keep their faith from sputtering out. The message is:

Let's get through the wilderness and walk the way of faith that others walked before us.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

We don't keep our faith fresh. Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith keeps it fresh. He will keep it fresh if we run the race with him. You will have oil in your vessel with your lamp ... you won't burn out, or stagnate, or fade....

- you will mount upon wings,

- you will go from strength to strength,

- you will burn with a steady flame,

if you will lay aside every weight and every sin and run with your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter.... if you'll draw your life from Jesus. He never runs out of life to give us. There's plenty there ... always more than enough. But we have to learn to draw that life (continually) just as we did when we first started walking with the Lord.

In the kingdom there are four essential places where the Lord himself will give us oil and keep our faith fresh. The Lord will give us oil for our lamps and keep us fresh:

1. as we turn our ear toward him, daily,
2. as we wash feet,
3. as we break bread,
4. as we go forth in his name.

The first place where we receive fresh life from God, just like manna from heaven, is when we turn our ear toward him at the beginning of each day.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. Isaiah 50:4-5

Most of us wake up physically to an alarm clock or a clock radio. We hear the ring or the buzz or the music and we return to consciousness. But with that we're still only half awake. We're awake really, only when we begin hearing a word from God that raises us from the dead.

Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught....

and he absolutely will do that for every single one of us if we will give him a chance. Take some time at the very beginning of your return to consciousness each day to turn your mind toward God and he will open your ear. Turn your mind toward God with a psalm,

or some scripture,

or a hymn,

or a word of praise, and then hold still for a few minutes and listen. Your physical ear won't hear anything but the birds singing or the rain falling, but your inner ear will hear the Spirit of God and your lamp will burn with a fresh flame.

The second place where we receive fresh life from God is in the Body when we begin washing each others' feet.

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things,

blessed are you if you do them."

John 13:12-17

So, how do we wash feet? ... by touching base with some sisters and brothers

a phone call,

a visit,

a small group meeting where we share what's on our hearts. We need some personal, direct contact with other believers, where we wash one another's feet, serve each other, encourage each other. Believers who fail to do this always become stale.

"But I don't know many believers nobody has invited me to a small group."

Then pick up the phone and call someone. Ask them how they're doing. Invite them to meet you at McDonald's for a cup of coffee. The Spirit of God will help you wash their feet in conversation..

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Most of us know. Most of us have plenty of contacts. But it's not enough to know, "we are blessed in the doing," We're blessed when we stay in touch with people, wash their feet. Then our lamps burn with fresh, clean, heavenly oil.

The third place where we receive fresh life from God also in the Body is when we come together to break bread.

There hasn't been a week since the Lord Jesus first instituted this meal where believers haven't gathered at his command to meet him, to commune with him in the bread and wine.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. I Corinthians 11:23-26

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

I Corinthians 10:16

The apostolic believers knew that this was the high point of their life together. It was the renewal of their covenant with him and with each other. For them it was not an option, an extra, it was an essential. And it's an essential for us too.

- We meet Jesus in this meal.
- We commune with him.
- We draw life from him.

- We touch glory.

- We taste the marriage feast.

This is where we get oil in our vessels. This is where our lamps are renewed and cleaned.

The final place where we receive fresh life from God is out there in the world as we go forth and touch the sin and the pain in his name.

We hear Jesus say,

"Go, make disciples of all nations baptize.... teach. Go proclaim the good news."

And with that "Go," is a promise I am with you."

There is a quickening which comes to us when we go out looking for those sheep ... when we touch the pain,

the death,

the anguish,

the guilt, with the hand of the Lord ... which comes to us at no other time and in no other way. In fact, without this touching of the anguish of the world in Jesus' name, we dry up.

"Do you love me? Feed my sheep! there they are, where you are living your life and conducting your business. When you're doing your work.... go feed them, go speak to them, show them my love. And as you do my Spirit will empower you, your vessel will fill with oil, your lamp will shine like a beacon."

But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those maidens 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 replied, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.

There is plenty of oil.... God will give us all the oil we need so our lamps will stay fresh, no matter how long the night drags on.

There is fresh oil,

as we turn our ear toward him at the beginning of each day.

There is fresh oil,

as we wash each other's feet.

There is fresh oil,

as we meet him in the Body and commune with him in this wonderful feast.

There is fresh oil,
as we go forth in his name to feed his sheep.
"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."
The blessing comes not in the knowing, but in the doing.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/keeping-it-fresh/>

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