

PREPARATION

FOR

MEETING THE BRIDEGROOM

HOW DOES ONE PREPARE FOR CHRIST'S RETURN?

By Arlen L. Chitwood

All Christians will one day go forth to meet the Bridegroom, subsequently appearing before Christ at His judgment seat (*cf.* Matt. 25:1ff). And prior preparation will be required if the ones appearing are to hear the Lord, in that day, say, “Well done, good and faithful servant...” (*cf.* Matt. 25:19-23; Luke 19:15-19).

John the Baptist, during the course of his ministry, referred to Christ's future dealings with Christians, at His judgment seat; and, in so doing, he drew from events occurring on a threshing floor at the end of the harvest:

“I indeed baptize you with [‘in’] water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with [‘in’] the Holy Spirit, and with [‘in’] fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:11, 12).

The threshing floor was the place where the sheaves of grain were brought to be threshed, followed by winnowing to separate the grain from the chaff. That is, the sheaves of grain were brought to this place and beaten to loosen the grain. The mixture of grain, straw, and chaff was then thrown against the wind to separate the grain from the chaff and stubble. And the grain was then stored on the threshing floor and normally guarded during the ensuing night by someone sleeping at the site.

On the threshing floor, *that of value* (the grain) was separated from *that of no value* (the chaff), which is exactly what will occur at Christ's judgment seat. The Christians' works will be tried “in fire,” and a separation will occur. Works comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones” will *endure* the fire; but works comparable to “wood, hay, stubble” will be *burned* by the fire (I Cor. 3:11-15).

This is what was foreshadowed by John's reference to a separation of the wheat from the chaff, *with the wheat being gathered into the granary and the chaff being burned*.

The whole of the matter — *preparation, events on the threshing floor, and that which follows* — is seen outlined in a typical manner in the Book of Ruth. Ruth prepared herself in a *threefold manner* for meeting Boaz on his threshing floor at the end of the harvest. Ruth *washed herself, anointed herself, and clothed herself with proper garments* before going forth to meet Boaz (Ruth 3:3). And meeting Boaz in this manner, on his threshing floor, was with a view to two things: *the redemption of an inheritance, and Ruth becoming Boaz's wife* (vv. 9ff).

This meeting also occurred at “midnight” (v. 8), foreshadowing, typically, a time of *judgment* (in complete keeping with both the first mention of “midnight” in Scripture [used in connection with *judgment* — Ex. 11:4] and with the overall type in the light of Matt. 3:11, 12).

Ruth's preparation in the type is the same preparation which Christian's must make in the antitype. Ruth prepared herself, after a certain fashion, to meet Boaz on his threshing floor, at midnight, *with a view to a redeemed inheritance and becoming his wife*; and Christians must likewise prepare themselves, after the same fashion, to meet Christ on His threshing floor, at midnight, *with a view to a redeemed inheritance and becoming His wife*.

“WASH THYSELF”

“Washing” has to do with a *cleansing from present defilement*. Within the scope of the ministry of priests in the Old Testament, a complete washing of the body occurred at the point one entered into the priesthood, never to be repeated (Ex. 29:4; 40:12-15). Subsequent washings of parts of the body then occurred at the brazen laver in the courtyard of the tabernacle as the priests ministered between the brazen altar and the Holy Place (Ex. 30:19-21). Their hands and feet became soiled as they carried

out their ministry, and the brazen laver had upper and lower basins for washing these soiled parts of the body.

Washings in the Old Testament were thus looked upon in two senses — a washing of *the complete body* (a one-time initial cleansing), followed by washings of *parts of the body* (numerous subsequent cleansings). It was these two types of cleansings which Jesus referred to when speaking to Peter in John 13:8, 10:

“If I wash [Gk. *nipito*, referring to a part of the body (the Septuagint uses this same word in Ex. 30:19, 21)] thee not, thou hast no part with me [note: ‘with me,’ not ‘in me’]...He that is washed [Gk. *louo*, referring to the entire body (the Septuagint uses this word in Ex. 29:4; 40:12)] needeth not save to wash [*nipito*] his feet...”

Peter had been washed once (described by the word *louo* [his complete body]); now he needed continued washings (described by the word *nipito* [parts of the body]). And, apart from these continued washings, he could have no part “with” Christ (contextually, the *kingdom* and *positions with Christ therein* were in view).

Bringing the typological teachings of the Old Testament and Christ's statement to Peter over into the lives of Christians today, the matter would be thus:

Christians, part of a New Testament priesthood (I Peter 2:5), received a complete washing (*louo*, the entire body) at the time they entered this priesthood, at the time they were saved. Now, as priests ministering for their Lord, because of defilement through contact with the world, they need continued partial washings (*nipito*, parts of the body). And, apart from these continued washings, Christians can have no part *with Christ* in His future kingdom.

All cleansing is accomplished on the basis of Christ's past and present work in relation to His shed blood.

Christ died at Calvary, shedding His blood, to effect our redemption. Those appropriating the blood have been washed (*louo*) and have entered into the priesthood (corresponding in the parallel type to the death of the paschal lambs and the application of the blood in Ex. 12:1ff).

And Christ's blood is today on the mercy seat of the heavenly tabernacle, with Christ ministering, on the basis of His shed blood, on our behalf, in the Holy of Holies, to effect a continued cleansing (*nipito*) for the “kings and priests” (Rev. 1:6; 5:10) which He is about to bring forth.

Thus, the Lord has set apart *a cleansed (louo)* people through whom He is accomplishing His plans and purposes. And He has provided a means whereby He can keep those whom He has set apart *clean (nipto)*.

Cleansing through the work of Christ as High Priest though is not something which occurs automatically. Ruth had to act herself. She had to prepare herself for the impending meeting with Boaz on his threshing floor. And Christians must likewise prepare themselves for an impending meeting with Christ on His threshing floor.

In Ruth's case, she washed herself. Today, Christ does the washing, but Christians, as Ruth, must act. It is only as we "confess our sins," judging ourselves (I Cor. 11:31, 32), that Christ effects cleansing on our behalf.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

"ANOINT THEE"

"Oil" was used in the Old Testament Scriptures to anoint prophets, priests, and kings; and there was a connection between the use of oil after this fashion and the Holy Spirit coming upon an individual to empower him for duties in the office to which he was being consecrated.

For example, Saul was anointed the first king over Israel (I Sam. 10:1, 6); and, following Saul's refusal to do that which God had commanded concerning Amalek, David was anointed king in Saul's stead (I Sam. 16:13). And, as clearly shown, "oil" is used in both these passages to symbolize *God's Spirit*. The Spirit came upon both Saul and David following their anointing, and the Spirit empowered both for the tasks which they were to perform.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matt. 25:1-13 deals centrally with this same overall issue, with "oil" used symbolically in the parable in exactly the same manner as it is used in the Old Testament. All of the virgins possessed oil, but only the five wise virgins possessed an extra supply of oil. And when they were called to an accounting — at "midnight," — only the five wise virgins were allowed to enter into the marriage festivities with the Bridegroom (vv. 6ff).

That would be to say, in the antitype, all Christians possess the Holy Spirit. He *indwells* every Christian. But

not every Christian has the extra supply of Oil. Not every Christian is *filled* with the Holy Spirit. And when Christians are called to an accounting — at "midnight" — only those filled with the Spirit will be allowed to enter into the marriage festivities with the Bridegroom.

This is what is involved within the symbolism of the second part of Ruth's preparation for meeting Boaz on his threshing floor at midnight. Ruth could not have been properly prepared for meeting Boaz apart from anointing herself; the ten virgins, in like fashion, could not have been properly prepared for meeting the Bridegroom at midnight apart from each possessing an extra supply of oil; and Christians today cannot be properly prepared for meeting their Lord at midnight apart from being filled with the Spirit.

And this will all become evident when the third and last part of Ruth's preparation is viewed, for *an inseparable connection* exists between all three parts.

"PUT THY RAIMENT UPON THEE"

Not only was Ruth to be clean and to be anointed with oil but she was also to be properly arrayed. *Ruth was going forth to meet the bridegroom*. Naomi's words, "put thy raiment upon thee," in the light of that which was involved (events expected to culminate in Ruth's marriage to Boaz), can only refer to *special apparel* for the occasion. Ruth's apparel, in which she was to clothe herself, would reflect the occasion at hand.

This facet of Ruth's preparation, pointing to present preparation which Christians are to make, is seen in the parable of the marriage feast in Matt. 22:1-14. In this parable, a man appeared, improperly clothed, at the festivities surrounding the marriage of "a certain" King's Son. This man appeared *without a wedding garment*; and he was not only denied entrance into the festivities but he was cast into the darkness outside.

(A reference to the darkness outside [*the outer darkness*] also appears in the parable of the talents [Matt. 25:30]. And this parable deals with exactly the same thing as the previous parable [the ten virgins (vv. 1-13)], though from a different perspective.)

The "certain king" and "his son" in Matt. 22:2 can refer to none other than *God the Father* and *His Son*, with

the festivities surrounding the "marriage of the Lamb" in view. In Rev. 19:7, 8, the bride is said to *have made herself ready by having arrayed herself* ("array herself" rather than "be arrayed" is the correct rendering in v. 8) in "fine linen"; and this "fine linen" is specifically said to be "the righteousness [*lit. 'righteous acts'*] of the saints."

Christians, as Ruth, must *array themselves* in the proper apparel for their future meeting with the Bridegroom. Righteous acts, forming the wedding garment, emanate out of faithfulness to one's calling. Works emanate out of faithfulness; and works, in turn, bring faith to its proper goal, while the wedding garment is being formed (cf. Heb. 11:17-19, 31; James 2:14-26; I Peter 1:9).

And it is evident that a Christian not filled with the Spirit — typified by the second part of Ruth's preparation, anointing herself — is in no position to perform righteous acts (works) which make up the wedding garment.

Scripture clearly reveals that Christians will appear in the presence of Christ in *one of two ways*. Some will possess wedding garments, and others will not. The words "clothed" and "naked" are used in Scripture to distinguish between the appearance of individuals in these two different manners (Rev. 3:17, 18; cf. Rom. 8:35); and Christians within both groups will be dealt with in accordance with Matt. 22:10-13.

Those Christians properly clothed (possessing wedding garments) will be dealt with after one fashion, and those improperly clothed (lacking wedding garments, naked) will be dealt with after an entirely different fashion.

Those in the former group will have previously become the wife of the Lamb and be allowed to enter into the marriage festivities, with a view to their subsequently occupying positions as co-heirs with Christ in His kingdom, forming His consort queen.

Those in the latter group though will be denied entrance into the marriage festivities and will consequently not be among those forming the wife of the Lamb, His consort queen, and all that appertains therein. Accordingly, they will have no part with Christ in His reign over the earth.

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