

August 3rd 2014 :3 Parables in Matt 25: Ready & Waiting For Jesus: 25:1-13

As we commenced our study of Matthew chapter 25 we need to realize that this whole chapter is part of a massive slab of teaching that Jesus gave about the end of this age and His second coming. This becomes most apparent if you have a Bible like this one where the words of Jesus are in red ink. You turn back to chapter 23, and then into chapter 24, and right through chapter 25, and it's all red.

However the audience and the location change at the end of chapter 23. From preaching at the temple to the crowds and His disciples, Jesus moves **to** the Mount of Olives and there He answers a question that a bunch of His disciples asked Him in private.

And that question is found in 24:3

*As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. **"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"***

And in chapter 24 and up to v41 Jesus responds to that question.

But in 24:42 he turns them away from thinking about the 'when' of His second coming, to a contemplation of their personal responsibility to be alert and ready when He does come back.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

So He tells a story to show how they must be Alert about a wise servant who is conscious that His Master is coming back, and therefore not only watches for His coming but acts in a way that will always please his master, whenever the Master turns up.

(Matthew 24:45-46

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.)

Then He follows this in chapter 25 with a story about ten virgins to show how vital it was for them to be ready when He returned.

You see the ten virgins did not have to be encouraged to watch for the bridegroom. They were already doing that with some excitement for they knew that he was definitely coming, and would be there as soon as he could. But they had to be encouraged to be ready for that moment when he did come and, unfortunately, it was in their readiness that half of them were found wanting.

Now at the beginning of this story Jesus makes it very clear that He is talking about that particular time that the disciples had questioned Him about. The end of this present age when He will return as Lord and Judge. And that the story is just an illustration of that.

The kingdom of heaven on that day, He begins, will be like ten virgins who took their lamps Mtt 25:1

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

So the kingdom of heaven here stands for all people who will on that day claim to be Christians. Who will see Jesus coming and think that they will be OK. However as the story shows, that group will include those who are wise and those who are foolish. And the foolish will see on that day that they have no connection with the bridegroom and they won't be able to do a thing about it.

So this story is both a happy and a sad story. And it is also a story that all Jesus' listeners would have recognized. For most of those disciples would have witnessed a wedding such as this in real life, for it would have been a regular occurrence in Israel.

The bride would have been a young girl in her mid teens. On her wedding day she would wait at her home for her bridegroom to come and collect her and take her back to his own home where a celebration would take place.

The bridegroom would be busy during the day working out with the bride's parents and the Elders the final dowry price before he could receive the certificate of marriage. Then in the evening he would come for his bride. But whether that would be in the early or late evening depended on the time spent negotiating the marriage terms.

During those waiting hours the young bride would have ten friends of her own age who would spend the day and evening with her. They would help her prepare for the bridegroom, just like bridesmaids do today. Later when the bridegroom arrived they would escort the couple in a procession to the Bridegroom's house, lighting the way with their lamps and performing a special dance with their lamps when they got to his house.

So it was vital that each bridesmaid had with them their outside lamp. This was a dome like container on top of a pole. In it were thruts rags and the container was filled with oil. When the rags were lit the flame would burn fiercely even in windy conditions, but would soon consume the oil....So after about 15 minutes you knew that the container had to be refilled. So not only did they need a lamp but also a container of oil to fill it and to refill it as required.

Now these bridesmaid were all very similar to one another, and that is exactly the point Jesus is making. They were all involved with the bride and when it became rather late at night, they all dosed off. And there was nothing wrong with that. They needed the break.

They all had lamps. The outward sign of being a bridesmaid in those days. But the five foolish ones had no oil. Verses 6-8 says

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

The Greek for going out used here means ..**our lamps are extinguishing themselves.** They lit the rags that burned for a moment but with no oil to draw from they went out. And the suggestion is that not only was their oil container empty but there was no oil in their lamps either!

How foolish to expect to do the job of a bridesmaid lighting the way when you have no means of doing so.

Maybe in our culture we could think of a really fancy wedding where the bridesmaids have been with the bride all day getting the bride ready. And then the car arrives and the bride realizes that one of the bridesmaids is still in her casual clothes. Where's your dress, she asks. We've got to go. I didn't bring one she replies, perhaps I could borrow one of the other girls dresses? Can you imagine the reaction.

And in the story Jesus told the door was eventually shut on those bridesmaids who had no oil and even worse than that, the bridegroom who shut the door on them said to them in v12

"But he replied, '**Truly I tell you, I don't know you.**'

I can imagine Jesus telling this parable with tears in His eyes for as He looked upon that fairly large bunch of disciples, for this group was several more than just the 12, He knew that there were some there who were not fully committed to Him as their Messiah and Lord.. They looked similar to the rest and they tagged along with them but He knew that they had not opened their hearts to Him

And it's worth noting here that in the parable the one thing the bridesmaids lacked was the oil. And in the Bible the Holy Spirit is connected with both oil and fire. The two things that the foolish bridesmaids did not have.

And the promise of Jesus to all who would seek Him is that when we commit ourselves to following Him we are born again of the Spirit. The Spirit enters into our lives bearing witness with our spirit that we are indeed children of God. We receive within us both the oil and the fire.

This is the new birth that is ours as a gift of God's Grace when we receive Him into our hearts as our Saviour.

So this first parable is the simple one of the three in the chapter. It is not about what we do as a Christian but who we are in Christ. If you have, in the words of Romans 10:9, "**CONFESSED WITH YOUR MOUTH "JESUS IS LORD" AND BELIEVED IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. YOU WILL BE SAVED.**"

So this parable is a real encouragement for all who have trusted in Jesus as their Saviour and received Him into their hearts. We are ready for His coming whenever that may be, because we belong to Him. He knows us and His Spirit dwells within us. We may still need to be concerned about how we are using the talents He has given us in His service, but that is the subject of the next parable in Matthew 25 which we will look at next week.

But first we can know that, as John 1:12 says

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

By simply receiving Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. By accepting the forgiveness of sins He offers and making Him our King we become those wise servants those wise bridesmaids.

But for those whose meager attachment to Jesus is based on the belief that they must be Christians because they were brought up that way, or because they lived in a supposedly Christian nation. Or even on doing Christians things without truly surrendering to the Saviour, the future is uncertain and dangerous.

For when the Lord returns the day of grace ...of salvation will be over. And if you are concerned that such may be your position this morning then I beg you to sit down after this service and speak with me about it.

But if you know in your heart today that you do belong to Jesus then this morning give thanks to God, because by His Grace and His Grace alone you are assured of salvation.

But don't stop there. Plead this morning with God to give you the chance to share with those who believe themselves to be Christians but do not seem to walk with Jesus. That in this age when His coming seems so near, they too may pray the prayer that opens their heart to Him. May know with assurance their security in Him.

And ask God also to fuel today in your heart the desire to pray for and be passionate in prayer for their salvation while there is still time.