
¹ “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise...

¹³ [Jesus said]: Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

From Matthew 25:1-13 (ESV)

Two boys stood behind the church door as a newly married couple was leaving the church. One boy said to the other, "Do you want to see me scare 'em real good?" The other boy replied, "Yea, do it!" The first boy emerged from behind the door, and ran to the groom with his arms outstretched. "Daddy!" he cried. "Daddy, it so good to see you!"

Most people love the idea of weddings – whether we ourselves are married or not. There is something about the union of a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage that has stood throughout time as the cornerstone of ‘family life’.

We could spend a long time reflecting on the theme of ‘marriage’ - what it is, and what God’s Word says in this regard (as well as various people’s ‘experience’ of it – from being married themselves, to experiencing their parents’ marriage, watching friends marry, etc). There is something about ‘marriage’ which involves a man and a woman that for most people catches the imagination.

And so, as Jesus after His entry into Jerusalem – at the beginning of what we now call ‘Holy Week’ (Matthew 21 – the Sunday before Passover, and the Sunday before Jesus’ death) – is speaking to people, who use the theme of ‘marriage’ many times. Matthew 22:1-4, the Parable of the wedding feast where people refuse the invitation; Matthew 22:23-33, the Sadducees ask about marriage at the resurrection, and our parable today. In this time of ‘Holy Week’ Jesus speaks about ‘end times’. And the parable of the ‘ten virgins’ (Matthew 25:1-13) sits in what is known as the ‘eschatological discourse’, that is, the section where Jesus uses the theme of ‘end times (and keeping in mind that one day we will stand before God to give an account of all we have done – all summed up in that word ‘eschatological’). Using the theme of an oriental wedding (which, by the way, is vastly differently from the way we experience ‘weddings’ today), Jesus wanted people to consider the joy we should have when our day comes, and we stand before the Lord.

Jesus is the greatest story-teller in history (after all, how many of His phrases have entered common usage – eg: ‘the good Samaritan’; using one’s talents, etc.). And usually Parables are told to make a point.

With Parables we usually do not dissect each point, but look to the overall thrust of the Parable. But throughout church history it has not been uncommon to look at the Parables allegorically – in other words, to look for possible

'meaning' to each part. And certainly the Parable of the Ten Virgins leans itself to be read allegorically. We can explore many themes of the faith in this way (although we always need to be careful we aren't trying to 'read into' the Bible what we want to hear, rather than letting the word stand as it is written). But allegorically the following verses can be applied this way...

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

We are to be 'pure' and 'spotless' before God – without sin. And this is God's gift to us in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:2: For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

Colossians 1:22: He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.

We are always to be ready to meet the Lord (either through death, or Christ's Second Coming).

Hebrews 9:28: Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

2 Timothy 4:8: Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

We are called to be wise in to whom we listen (God's Word), and our lives are to be built on His wisdom.

Matthew 7:24: Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

1 Corinthians 1:18-19: For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

The wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

Faith in God will have an effect on our lives. Our lives will be filled with His gladness – a gift from the Spirit.

Isaiah 61:1, 3: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me... to grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit...

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

We are to be alert in our Christian living, and hopeful even at the time of death.

Romans 13:11: Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

Our lives are not to be 'emptied' of God's presence and power through His Word. Instead, His light should shine in us through love and good works, and a trust in Jesus.

Psalms 119:105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Matthew 5:16: In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Revelation 21:23: And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

We are always to rejoice that we belong to God, are to always be ready to meet the Lord, and to be aware that we can 'lose faith'...

Revelation 19:9: And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Matthew 7:21: [Jesus said]: Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

In those times it may seem God 'is not there', He truly is...

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10: For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him.

(Note also the call of 'readiness' and 'warning' Matthew 25:13 compared to 25:30, 46).

So what does this mean for us...? There are indeed many themes that can be drawn from the Scriptures above...

We could speak of a life of love and forgiveness for those of our church (which is a particularly Matthean theme).

We could speak about how we are called to live God's love in the world, helping people who have great need (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).

We could speak further of the love we are to share with all people.

We could speak of how we are called to live a life of worship, being in God's presence with brothers and sisters in Christ, receiving Christ's Word.

And all this is important. But Jesus' call to "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" – whilst it has a theme of 'warning' – is really a call of love.

Are we to be 'afraid' of the Lord's coming for us? Or should we be excited, just as most people excitedly look forward to a wedding?

We rejoice in looking forward to being with the Lord for all eternity. We live our lives now in the presence of His holy *and* forgiving love.

God wants us to know for certain that we are saved. He wants us to be fully assured that our sins are forgiven and that we have a salvation that is certain. He wants us to be confident, because we are saved and we know it.

Salvation is the work of God. He accomplished it through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He makes this known through His Word. The Holy Spirit causes us to believe in Jesus, assuring us that we are saved forever, we are kept for the final day, and our salvation is kept for us. It is not any work of ours that saves us, but Jesus. And, indeed, we rejoice in our 'wedding feast' with Christ Jesus every time we come to His holy table of love.

The wise virgins kept their vision. To live in vigilance is to do those tasks the Lord calls us to – and above all this is simply to rejoicing in our place in God's family. What a glorious gift we have in Jesus. Amen.