

The Parable of Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13 New American Standard Bible (NASB) (my emphasis in bold)

*“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they did not take extra oil with them; ⁴ but the prudent ones took oil in flasks with their lamps. ⁵ Now while the groom was delaying, they all became drowsy and began to sleep. ⁶ But at midnight there finally was a shout: ‘Behold, the groom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ But the foolish virgins said to the prudent ones, ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ However, the prudent ones answered, ‘No, there most certainly would not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the groom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Yet later, the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ **Be on the alert then, because you do not know the day nor the hour.***

Note:

Here’s a piece of information that will help us to understand today’s parable better. I am quoting an article entitled, “The Jewish Wedding in Jesus’ Time” (<https://evangelistjoe.wordpress.com/2016/04/08/the-jewish-wedding-in-jesus-time/>)

In Jesus’ time, “the Jews had no dating or courtship. Marriage to them was a practical legal matter, established by contract and carried through by exacting procedure.

When the young man saw the girl he wanted (or the girl his father said he wanted), he would approach her with a marriage contract. He would come to her house with a covenant — a true legal agreement — giving the terms by which he would propose marriage. The most important consideration in the contract was the price the bridegroom would be willing to pay to marry this particular bride.

The bridegroom would present himself to the bride with this agreement, offering to pay a suitable price for her, and she and her father would consider his contract. If the terms were suitable, the bride and groom would drink a cup of wine together and this would seal the bargain.

Then the groom would pay the price.

When that matter was settled the groom would depart. He would make a little speech to his bride, saying, “I go to prepare a place for you,” and he would return to his father’s house. Back at his father’s house, he would build her a bridal chamber, a little mansion, in which they would have their future honeymoon.

The bridegroom would actually build a separate building on his father’s property, or decorate a room in his father’s house. The bridal chamber had to be beautiful —and it had to be stocked with provisions since the bride and groom were going to remain inside for seven days. This construction project would take the better part of a year, ordinarily, and the father of the groom would be the judge of when it was finished.

The bride, for her part, was obliged to do a lot of waiting. She would take the time to gather her trousseau and be ready when her bridegroom came. She had to have an oil lamp ready in case he came late at night in the darkness, because she had to be ready to travel at a moment’s notice. During this long period of waiting, she was referred to as “consecrated”, “set apart”, “bought with a price”.

The bride would wear her veil whenever she stepped out of her house so that other young men would realize she was spoken for and would not try to approach her with another contract.

As the year went on, the bride would assemble her sisters and bridesmaids and whoever would go with her to the wedding when the bridegroom came, and they would each have their oil lamps ready. They would wait at her house every night on the chance that the groom would come, along with his groomsmen, and sweep them all away to a joyous and sudden wedding ceremony.

Meanwhile, the bridegroom would be building and decorating with all that he had. His father would inspect the chamber from time to time to see if it were ready. If we came along the road at this point and saw the young man working on his bridal chamber, we might well ask, “When’s the big day?” But the bridegroom would answer, “Only my father knows that.”

Finally, the chamber would be ready, and the bridegroom would assemble his young friends to accompany him on the exciting trip to claim his bride. He and his young men would set out in the night, making every attempt to completely surprise the bride.

And that’s the romantic part — all the Jewish brides were “stolen”. The Jews had a special understanding of a woman’s heart. What a thrill for her, to be “abducted” and

carried off into the night, not by a stranger but by one who loved her so much that he had paid a high price for her.

Over at the bride's house, things had better be ready! To be sure, the bride would be surprised since the groom would try to come at midnight while she was sleeping. But the oil lamps were ready, and the bride had her veil. And while she might be sleeping in her wedding dress, she was definitely surprised. It's a wonder she would sleep at all as the year went on!

Now there were rules to be observed in consideration of a woman's feelings. The groom couldn't just rush in on her. After all, her hair might be in rollers! Actually, as the excited party of young men would get close to her house, they were obliged to give her a warning. Someone in the wedding party would shout.

When the bride heard that shout, she knew her young man would be there momentarily. She had only time to light her lamp, grab her honeymoon clothing and go. Her sisters and bridesmaids who wanted to attend also had to have their lamps trimmed and ready, of course. No one would try to walk through ancient Israel, with its rocky terrain, in the dark of night without carrying a lamp.

And so the groom and his men would charge in, grab the girls and make off with them! The father of the bride and her brothers would look the other way — perhaps just making one quick check to see that this was the young man with the contract — and the wedding party would be off.

When the wedding party reached the house of the groom's father, the bride and groom would go into their chamber and shut the door. No one else would enter. The groom's father, meanwhile, would have assembled the wedding guests — his friends — and they would be ready to celebrate the new marriage. Since the wedding was actually going to take seven days (until the appearance of the bride and groom out of the chamber), it was hard to plan for. Occasionally, the host would run out of wine, as we can well imagine.

But the celebrating wouldn't start right away. First, the marriage had to actually be consummated. The Jews were a most law-abiding people and the law provided that the bride and groom become one before their marriage was recognized. Thus, the friend of the bridegroom — the individual we might refer to as “the best man” — would stand near the door of the bridal chamber, waiting to hear the bridegroom's voice. When the marriage was consummated, the bridegroom would tell his friend through the door and the friend would then go to the wedding guests and announce the good news. The celebration would then begin and it would continue for an entire week!

At the end of the week, the bride and groom would make their long awaited appearance to the cheers of the crowd. There would then be a joyous meal — a marriage supper, which we might refer to as the wedding reception — to honor the new couple. At this point, the bride would have discarded her veil, since she was now a married woman, and all would see exactly who it was the bridegroom had chosen. The new couple and the guests would enjoy a magnificent feast to conclude the entire matrimonial week.

After the marriage supper, the bride and groom would depart, not remaining any longer at the home of the groom's father. They would go instead to their own house, which had been prepared by the bridegroom. (The Bride of Christ will spend seven years in heaven at the home of the groom's Father, and then we shall return with our Bridegroom to occupy the Kingdom He has prepared for us.)

And that was a complete Jewish wedding in Jesus' time, in all its glory."

Introduction

Once again, this morning, Jesus teaches us about another important aspect of God's Kingdom: be on the alert in prayer while we await Christ's Second Coming. He begins His teaching saying, *"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins."* Ten bridesmaids in wedding party. The five wise enter the wedding feast. The other five do not. If you stay alert in prayer, you are the wise one. If you don't pray, you are the foolish one.

The wedding story refers to the marriage between Christ and His Church. It refers to the ultimate reunion of Christ and His followers whom we call the Church. Christ is the groom, and the Church is the bride. Like a Jewish groom goes back to his father's house to prepare a bridal chamber, Christ too has gone to His Father's House to prepare a place for us. Like the groom comes back to claim his bride, so will He. He talked about this to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion saying, *"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be"* (John 14:1-4). Sounds very familiar to us now, doesn't it?

As far as the bridal chamber prepared in Heaven, John the Apostle witnessed in Revelation as follows: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21:1-2). As for the wedding feast, the Scripture says, ***'Blessed are those***

who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9). To this wedding feast in Heaven, like the ten virgins, we all are invited. However, not everyone will make into the feast. Only those who are prepared. Only those who are spiritually alert. All await the groom—Christ’s Second Coming, but only those who are prepared with oil will enter. Oil here refers to the Holy Spirit.

A brief recap of the verses:

v. 5. The groom is delayed. They all fell asleep while they awaited the groom.

v. 6. At midnight, there is a shout. At an unexpected time. Jewish expression is: *Like a thief*. Christ repeatedly warns us how He is going to come again: like a thief in the night. So *remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you* (Revelation 3:3). **“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and people will not see his shame”** (Revelation 16:15).

Once again, about the day or hour of His coming, Christ says, **“But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone”** (Matthew 24:36).---Remember the article? *Only my father knows.*

Apostles Paul and Peter reiterate what Christ says: **“... the day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night”** (1 Thessalonians 5:2). **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered”** (2 Peter 3:10).

v.8. Please share your oil with us.

v. 9. Sorry, not enough oil for both of us. Go, get yours.

v. 10. The groom comes and they go in. The gate is closed.

v. 11. Lord, Lord, open the gate for us.

v. 12. Puzzling: **I do not know you.** This applies to the believers, not to non-believers. On that day, to some of us, the Lord will say, I do not know you.

v. 13. Christ commands: *Be on the alert then, because you do not know the day nor the hour.* Concerning His own coming, Jesus also says, **“Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this”** (Matthew 24:42-43).

Know that your spiritual alertness determines your eternal fate. Unless you are on the alert in prayer, you will be denied at heaven’s gate.

Are you awake in prayer? Or are you asleep? Do you have enough oil until Christ comes? Do not rely on someone else's oil. Nor your pastor's or spouse's. "You cannot borrow a relationship with God" (William Barclay, p. 354). You are on your own. Have your own ready. Be prepared. Stay alert in your prayer. Pray without ceasing. Don't wait until the last minute when you hear the shout, "Christ is here!" It may be too late.

Conclusion

Listen to Christ one more time. *"You are also to be like people who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door for him when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will prepare himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and he will come up and serve them. ³⁸ Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves"* (Luke 12:36-38). Be on the alert because you don't know the day or hour of His coming. Amen.