

The One Where Some Young Ladies are Smart, but Others Are Dumb

Parables #12 | Matthew 25:1-13

March 26, 2023

Introduction

- Wedding traditions are strange | **Ecuadorian lasso** in wedding I did, but then again...
 - USA: throwing rice, “unity sand,” even something Christian like *foot washing*
 - Italy: throw sugared almonds instead of rice
 - Kenya: maasai people, FotB spits on his daughter (respect?)
 - Korea: hitting the groom’s feet with sticks, or a dead fish
 - Sweden: everybody kissed the bride and groom after they kiss
- In the Bible, we don’t get much specific information about wedding customs
 - Typical things like dressing up, a procession, and a feast

A Royal Wedding

Psalm 45 ¹³In her chamber, the royal daughter is all glorious, her clothing embroidered with gold.

¹⁴In colorful garments she is led to the king; after her, the virgins, her companions, are brought to you. ¹⁵They are led in with gladness and rejoicing; they enter the king’s palace.

- This passage is likely “idealized,” but you can imagine that it works like today
- In the parable we’re looking at today, it raises a bunch of questions about wedding customs

Leon Morris We do not have complete information about wedding customs in first-century Palestine. Nobody seems to have thought it worthwhile to set down in detail what was normally done; after all, why should anyone do this? Everyone knew what happened in a wedding. So we are left with stories like the present one, which tell us some of things that were done and leave us to guess at others.

A Major Celebration

Matthew 25 ¹At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom.

- Big wedding party! Some sort of procession. Where are they waiting?

²Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

- Tradition of lady wisdom vs. lady folly like in Proverbs. But Jesus does 5/5!

³When the foolish took their lamps, they didn’t take oil with them; ⁴but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps.

- Some translation discussion that it should be “torches”

⁵When the groom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

- Why the delay? We don’t know.
- Also, note that everybody fell asleep. The problem isn’t getting tired at night.

⁶In the middle of the night there was a shout: 'Here's the groom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all the virgins got up and trimmed their lamps.

- Midnight wedding party! Some of you are like "I'm too old..."

⁸The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.'

⁹The wise ones answered, 'No, there won't be enough for us and for you. Go instead to those who sell oil, and buy some for yourselves.'

- One of those details: is there an oil shop open at midnight? Probably just for storytelling

¹⁰When they had gone to buy some, the groom arrived, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the rest of the virgins also came and said, 'Master, master, open up for us!' ¹²He replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you!'

- Does this remind you of another parable Jesus told?
 - *When were you in prison or hungry or naked?*

¹³Therefore be alert, because you don't know either the day or the hour.

(big idea) Be alert, we don't know the day or hour.

1. What is this day or hour? (understanding)
2. How do we get ready? (preparation)
3. How do we stay alert? (execution)

Q1. What is "that time"? What day or hour are we supposed to be ready for?

1. Context

- a. Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the temple | Matthew 21
- b. Interactions with leaders | 21:14-22:46 (Lots of parables throughout)
- c. Seven "woes" | Matthew 23 (Lament over Jerusalem)
 - i. Leaving the temple, the disciples ask him about the temple
- d. Primary: Olivet Discourse | Matthew 24
 - i. The end of the age, false messiahs, persecution, war, famine, disasters
 - ii. The ultimate return of Son of Man
- e. Finishes up with two parables and an analogy: this one, talents, sheep/goats
- f. All that to say: the context of this parable is very clearly about the end of the age

2. The Day of the Lord

Holman Bible Dictionary [The] time when God reveals His sovereignty over human powers and human existence.

- a. Both reckoning and reward
 - i. God's justice = reward and punishment
 - ii. But what about when this life seems unfair (like Job)?
 - iii. Don't worry about: there is a day coming | **THE** day
- b. Both sadness and solace | Isaiah 34, 35

- i. 34:8 “For the LORD has a day of vengeance...” but then immediately into beautiful restoration in ch. 35, “The wilderness and the dry land will be glad; the desert will rejoice and blossom like a wildflower.² It will blossom abundantly and will also rejoice with joy and singing.”
- c. Both immediate and ongoing | Matthew 24
 - i. Look at the context in Matt. 24. Scholars go back and forth between “this is all going to happen in the future” and “this happened back in Jesus’ day” (e.g. the destruction of Jerusalem). But both can actually be true.
 - ii. The word “day” is flexible. It can mean a day as in a 24 hour period. But in Hebrew, like in English, it can also be a period of time, as in “back in my day”
 - iii. This wedding has a start day, but it’s also an ongoing celebration
 - iv. This helps us understand the Kingdom coming as already but not yet
 - 1. Already: Jesus has come, he has inaugurated the kingdom | **GOSPEL**
 - 2. Not yet: we await his final return

We need to be ready for the day of the Lord, both now and in the future.

Q2: How do we get ready (preparation)? Know him and love him.

1. Know the groom personally
 - a. Let us borrow some of your oil! | Lots of interpretations, like faith or good works
 - i. Whatever the case may be, they hadn’t taken things *personally*
 - ii. “Those who were WITH HIM went into...”
 - b. **Craig Blomberg** Spiritual preparedness may not be transferred from one individual to another.
2. Grow in your love for him | Affection fuels preparedness
 - a. In the Bible, the word “know” is an intimate term. Sometimes it’s even a euphemism for the most intimate act.
 - b. To know this groom is to have relationship, to have love
 - i. Remember, this is a wedding: a celebration of love
 - c. Fear, duty, obligation...they will all run out

Q3: How do we stay alert?

1. Patience
 - a. Have you notice that so many parables have “a long delay”
 - i. Both groups fall asleep!
 - b. Some passages are “immediate” and others are “settle in”
 - i. What if both were true?
 - c. No fear tactics about the return of Jesus, just an honest call to get ready
 - d. No passivity about the return of Jesus, just the knowledge that it might be a while

2. Participation

- a. These women have a job to do: light the torches and herald the groom's arrival!
 - i. They can't make the groom arrive any sooner, but that doesn't mean their job isn't important
- b. We believe in God's sovereignty in salvation, but his sovereignty does not turn us into passive slugs, or pre-programmed robots with no agency.

3. Plenty

- a. Debates about the meaning/symbolism of the oil
 - i. Faith? Good works? Study of God's word? The Holy Spirit?
- b. Whatever it is, you need extra!

Ask Yourself

- Have I truly meditated on how joyful that final day will be?
- If I knew for certain that Jesus was returning tomorrow, what would I do?
- If I knew for certain that Jesus would *not* return in my lifetime, what would I do?
- Who do I need to share the good news of the wedding day with?

Charles Spurgeon It seems to me that it needs less faith to believe in the second Advent of Christ than in his first Advent. He has been here before, so he knows the way to come again. He has been here before, and wrought a wondrous work; surely, he will come back to receive the reward of his service. The Good Shepherd came to earth once to lay down his life for the sheep; he will surely come again as the Chief Shepherd to recompense the under-shepherds who have faithfully kept the night watches for him. Jesus will come again, as surely as the bridegroom came at the midnight hour.

Scripture Reading

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