

The Parables Sermon Series, 2016
Week 3: The Ten Virgins
Matthew 25:1-13

HOW 'BOUT THOSE CARDINALS!

We're going to play a "responsive" game today:

- **When I say, "BRIDE OF CHRIST..." you say, "Be ready for His return!"**
- Let's practice...

PRAY

Today begins a mini-series among the parables in Matthew 25:

- **Today: The Ten Virgins**
- **Next Sunday: The Talents**
- **January 31: The Sheep and the Goats**

Each of these parables are taught in the context of **God's people wondering about the end times**, specifically, Jesus' long answer to a question in the first part of Matthew 24, verse 3:

- **Matthew 24:3; As (Jesus) sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things (the destruction of the temple) be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"**
 - Jesus takes the rest of Matthew 24 and all of 25 to answer the question.
- **The overwhelming answer the disciples got was that Jesus' return is not a spectator sport.**
 - His return is something to be READY for, anticipating, actively involved with, so as to jump into the next phase (eternity) seamlessly.
 - **Like stepping onto an escalator...** you gotta be moving, not idle.
 - **You will find that "being ready" = being ACTIVE**
 - **Not just watching for signs of the end of the age.**
 - I encourage you to read Matthew 24 this week, in prep for the rest of this mini-series
 - For now...
- Jesus finishes Matthew 24's partial answer to the end times question with this:
 - **Mat 24:44-51 "...Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**
 - Remember, this is JESUS talking
 - Not so meek and mild here...
 - This is important – life and death – eternal consequences!
- And He then immediately teaches the 3 parables we'll study over these next 3 Sundays.
 - And He starts each parable with "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..."

Now, perhaps you've heard the phrase **"The Kingdom of God is here, but not yet."**

- That can be a bit confusing.
- Basically, Jesus and the New Testament teach that the Kingdom of Heaven/God (they mean the same thing) is the present HOME of all those who make up "the church," AND there is a future element to the Kingdom of Heaven that is yet to come.
 - **Col 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son**
 - **Rev. 1:5b-6, 9; To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen... I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos..."**

So, the Kingdom is HERE but "not yet" in that Christ's return is still ahead, ushering in the new heaven and new earth as spoken of in both the OT and the NT.

People have been asking these questions for well over 2000 years, and when Jesus answered, He intentionally allowed for MYSTERY.

- Nobody but God the Father knows when that last day will be.
- We are given clues and hints, but the mystery is thick!

With that, let's look at the first of 3 parables in Matthew 25...

The Ten Virgins:

Mat 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Mat 25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

Mat 25:3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

Mat 25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

Mat 25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

Mat 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

Mat 25:7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

Mat 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

Mat 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'

Mat 25:10 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.

Mat 25:11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

Mat 25:12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

Mat 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Before I get to some important terms and symbolism within this parable...

- The overall teaching is: **Bride of Christ... be ready for His return.**
 - All other interpretations of this parable need to stay within the overall meaning.
 - So, we know He is coming again, right?
 - Therefore, **The two major questions to address with this parable are:**
 - **Who is the Bride?**

- This one's easy: It' the church, you and me, the saints.
- I read a whacked out article recently – from a pastor – trying to teach that “the bride” wasn't people at all – it was the new Jerusalem.
 - Apparently he's not familiar with Ephesians 5
 - Isaiah 62:5, “as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”
 - What this pastor missed was that the New Jerusalem was filled with the saints of heaven!
- **What does it mean to be ready?**
 - THAT'S the big AHA in this parable – everything else is secondary.
 - And is a much longer answer...

Terms:

- **Virgins...**
 - Believe it or not, “virgins” is a term that didn't used to be mocked or questioned.
 - It wasn't met with disbelief or shock.
 - It simply meant to communicate “yet-married” women, because the act of love-making was still reserved in society's view for marriage.
 - Therefore, these are brides, awaiting their bridegroom.
- **Lamps...**
 - When you think “lamps” in Bible times, and especially young women carrying them, do you think a **candle, with a glass casing, and a little handle?**
 - Think again! **A lamp was a torch!**
 - The Greek word (lampas) is used 4 other times, each denoting a torch or a bright light.
 - Jesus was very clearly teaching what he often taught about ‘light’ - that HE is the light, and we are the light bearers.
- **Oil...**
 - **Fuel for the lamp**
 - As in many cases in scripture, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit
 - MUCH more on this later...
- **Bridegroom...**
 - I cannot assume that everyone here has heard about the Jewish traditions regarding engagements and wedding ceremonies, so...
 - Bridegroom woos the bride
 - He then negotiates with the bride's father for the price to purchase her
 - Once that is agreed upon, they have entered into the marriage covenant
 - They have a ceremony, which involves drinking wine from the same cup, among other things
 - But then the groom goes back to his father's house to prepare a room/house (depending on the wealth of the family) on the property.
 - This took anywhere between 3 and 12 months.
 - During this time, the bride is preparing herself for marriage as well.
 - Tradition says after the home was prepared, he would gather his family and at night – light torches and head for the bride's home.
 - A trumpet would ring out as he got very close, signaling his arrival
 - And the bride was expected to be ready to go into the wedding celebration – and from there, to her new home with her new husband.

- They think Jesus might be onto something, but the “light” they carry is not Him. It is THEM.
 - **Waiting around for some religious figure to prove themselves. - coexist**
 - If it’s Jesus, cool, we can fake our way in.
 - **Wedding crashers.**
 - If it’s not Jesus – if the Bible is way off – if the church is a bunch of fools giving their entire lives to the cause of Christ, well, it’ll be something else, and we’ll wriggle our way in there as well.
 - Whatever the case, we can just be nice people, and surely, whomever it is that’s in charge will let us into heaven in the end.
- **2) The Bridegroom’s return had been announced – it was too late.**
 - V10 goes onto say “the door was shut”
 - Jesus said in Matthew 24 – in the non-parable answers – that His return would be like lightning.
 - **BRIDE OF CHRIST... BE READY for His return.**
 - Because when He comes, His announcement will be as quick as His departure with His bride.
 - This is why some – like Rob Bell – are so dangerous to the body of Christ in their teaching.
 - They have gained high standing, and from there have taught poorly, abandoning the teaching of the Bible for the feel-good false theology of “no such thing as hell,” and “everybody will get a second chance after they die.”
 - This feel-good theology is the very foolishness described in this parable – the foolish virgins thinking they had more time.
 - Therefore, regarding verses 8 and 9:
 - Symbolically, the ones who took no oil are **NOT the bride.**
 - And there is **nothing believers can do when Christ returns** to “force” or “help” unbelievers get into heaven.
 - PLENTY we can do until then, but at that moment, the door will be shut.

Three key words for the Bride (the Church) to focus on in this parable:

- **Oil**
 - **The symbol of the Holy Spirit within you**
 - Over 20 years ago now, I was challenged by a mentor to Jessica and I early on in our marriage to tell her everything I knew about the Holy Spirit.
 - A Christian for about 5 years, I shamefully knew very little.
 - I took a crash-course on the definition and theology of the Spirit, and have spent the last 20 years being dipped in the oil of gladness, the oil of joy, the anointing of God’s blessings poured out upon me, and subsequently poured out on others around me, as I minister in the Spirit’s power.
 - A lamp without oil is soon dimmed, faded, and dark.
 - A lamp with oil at the ready and poured onto, dipped in, etc. is an eternal light never diminished, because the oil of God never runs dry.
 - *I* do.
 - God by His Spirit in me, does not.
- **Ready**

- The main teaching of this parable is: BRIDE OF CHRIST... BE READY FOR HIS RETURN.
- Being ready = **Being empowered by the Holy Spirit in all you do as you await the return of the bridegroom.**
- We know from the Jewish tradition of the wedding ceremony that this symbolized that the bride had been **purchased** already, and belonged to the bridegroom.
 - Just like Jesus, purchasing US by His blood – all who believe in Him.
- The bridegroom had now gone –
 - just as Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven – and ascended into heaven.
 - His promised Holy Spirit followed days later, empowering Peter and the other believers to fulfill Jesus’ amazing statement:
 - ***Joh 14:12-18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.... And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."***
- If there are any believers here who know very little about the Holy Spirit, today is the day to change that.
 - 3 recommended books:
 - **Knowing God, JI Packer**
 - **Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit, Jack Deere**
 - **Discover Your Spiritual Gifts, C Peter Wagner**
- **Watch**
 - Key word: The bridegroom was “delayed”
 - chronizō = to take time, that is, linger: - delay, tarry.
 - It is used 4 other times in scripture, all relevant to the return of Christ.
 - It means “later than expected”
 - I think 2000 years qualifies as later than expected!
 - The Greek word for “watch” is used 23 times in the NT
 - Nearly all of them in context of watching for Christ’s return.
 - And many of them reference PRAYER
 - **Col 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.**
 - **1Th 5:6,17 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober... pray without ceasing.**
 - **Mark 14:37-38 (Jesus) "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."**
 - As I suggested earlier, I highly recommend you read Matthew 24.

3 Application questions as we close:

- **What will Jesus FIND YOU DOING when He comes?**
 - First, Do you know who the Holy Spirit is?
 - Do you know how the OIL functions in your life?
 - Get one of those books – read it!

- Second, what is your sense of urgency to speak Truth to your friends and family about the most important question they'll ever answer?
 - Before the door is shut, you indeed have a responsibility to preach this gospel of the kingdom to those around you.
- **How is your PRAYER life?**
 - In each of these books, one of the things you'll find throughout is the connection between prayer and the Holy Spirit.
 - IOW, you CANNOT know your spiritual gift, nor can you act on them if you are not actively in prayer with your God.
 - You can SAY you know Jesus – convince yourself you have faith in Him – but if you simply DON'T pray, that means you're not communicating. And if you're not communicating with God, with whom are you communicating?
 - How do you hear His voice if you don't get intentionally quiet?
 - How do you get encouraged by Him, if you're so busy DOING?
 - How do you get soaked in the love He wants to lavish on you if you don't spend time talking with Him?
 - How do you receive His marching orders if you don't ask?
 - How do you know what to do today if you don't ask?
 - How can you "be ready" if you keep the communication line closed?
- **Are you READY?**
 - BRIDE OF CHRIST, BE READY for His return!
 - As we close today, I'd like for you to turn in your seats to those sitting around you – groups of no more than 4.
 - Ask: What about your life might change today as a result of this parable?
 - **(next)** Take a few minutes, and we'll wrap it up.

Announcements...

- Wayne (or designated person) wait 3 minutes or so... then ask the church to wrap it up...
- Brief announcements.
- Close in prayer.