

Parable Of The Ten Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:1-13

Some Thoughts About This Parable

1. This parable is found only in Matthew's gospel, and it was uttered in the last week of Jesus' ministry..
 - a. It is part of a section of Matthew that scholars label "The Eschatological Discourse" because these teachings of Jesus deal with events that will occur at the return of Christ.
 - b. It is followed by "The Parable of the Talents" and "The Parable of the Sheep and Goats."
 - c. These parables all teach us to be prepared for the final judgment.
2. They are addressed to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. Jesus is still on the Mount of Olives on the way to Bethany. (Lk. 19:29).
3. They have asked him to explain when Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-3).

MAT 24:1 And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

MAT 24:2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

MAT 24:3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

4. Some of His response relates to the destruction of Jerusalem and some to His coming and final judgment.

Israel The Wife Of God

1. At that time the Jews would have been accustomed to hearing a story in which God is portrayed as Israel's husband.
2. In several Old Testament passages the imagery of marriage to God is utilized to characterize the personal relationship between God and his people. (Isa. 54:5-8; 62:5b; Jere. 31:32; Ezek. 16:8-14; and Hos. 2:1-23).
3. In the New Testament the bridegroom is Christ. (Matt. 9:14, 15; 22:2; Jn, 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:25,26; Rev. 19:7).
4. The bride is Israel in the Old Testament, but it is the church in the New Testament.
5. When Jesus told this parable, the Bridegroom most naturally would have symbolized God.
6. He can be viewed as Christ in light of New Testament revelation.

Marriage Customs

1. It is important that we seek to understand the marriage customs at that time.

- a. We learn the marriage customs of the time by studying the Old Testament and by studying the later rabbinic sources written in the the 2nd century A.D..
 - b. These sources will help us better understand the marriage custom and this parable, but they may not be complete. It had been 400 years since the last Old Testament book had been written and 2nd century writings may not reflect the exact custom a the time Jesus spoke this parable. Nevertheless, they will give us a better understanding.
 - c. According to ancient sources couples got married when they were quite young. Generally the bride would be about 12-13 years old and the groom was 18.
 - d. The couple getting married would go through two stages. The first stage was known as the *kiddushin* or *erusin*. This stage is equivalent to a betrothal in which the parents (and possibly with the consent of the couple) made a contract for the marriage.
2. It is important to remember that during this period the woman was legally the man’s wife and that this contract could not be broken except through the legal proceedings of a divorce
- a. This fact helps us better understand Matthew 1:19. There we learn that Joseph upon learning that Mary was pregnant was considering divorcing Mary who was his betrothed wife.
 - b. Usually about a year after the betrothal the marriage occurred.
 - c. It was not until this marriage took place that the couple actually lived together.
 - d. When the husband had his home ready for his bride, he would go to join his bride and her attendants at his parent’s home. It is at his parent’s home that the marriage festival took place. This festival usually lasted for seven days.

MAT 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. RSV has “maidens”

- “then” continues the theme began in the previous chapter concerning the unexpectedness of the coming of the Son of man.
- “virgin” is from the Greek “parthenos” [pahr **theh** nahs] - “virgin, maiden.”
- It was used of Mary. (Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:26-35). These passages make it clear that Mary was a chaste maiden. Joseph kept her a virgin until after the birth of Jesus.. (Matt. 1:25).
- It is used here of a group of ten maidens.
- These “ten virgins” represent the church as a mixed company of good and evil.
- “lamps” is from “lampas” [lahm **pahs**] - “torch, lamp.”
- “went out” - The newly married couple went from the house of the bride in procession accompanied by attendants bearing torches to light the way. This was done at night.
 - 1) Another group or party went forth to meet them with torches and went with them to the home of the parents of the bridegroom where a feast had been prepared.
 - 2) In this parade it was the custom for the bridegroom along with “the sons of the bridechamber went out at

night to the home of his bride and brought her with joy and gladness to his own home.

3) She was accompanied by her companions.

4) At some point on the way another group of maidens were waiting to join the procession and to share the joyous festivities of the marriage celebration. They went out and waited for the procession from the brides' house.

1. Jesus here speaks of "the kingdom of heaven."
2. "The kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God" are used interchangeably.
 - a. "Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 7:21).
 - b. "Kingdom of God" (Matt. 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43).

MAT 25:2 "And five of them were foolish [without forethought], and five were prudent [sensible,wise]."

1. "moros" [moh rahs] - "foolish, not giving forethought."
2. "phronimos" [frah nee mahs] - "sensible, prudent, wise."

MAT 25:3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no [extra] oil with them,

1. The oil symbolizes a lack of preparedness. They were not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom.
2. It is probably best to interpret the symbolism of the oil (and the talent) with the clearer description of the foolish actions of the slave (Matt. 24:48, 49) and those who on the day of judgment will be condemned by the King (Matt. 25:41-45).

MAT 25:4 but the prudent [those using forethought] took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

- "flasks" is from "aggeion" [an gay ahn] - "vessel, flask, container."
1. Some of the maidens are called "wise" [prudent] and some are called "foolish."
 2. The maidens called "foolish" are called such because they did not take extra oil for their lamps.
 3. The Greek word for lamp was "lampadas" [lahm pah dahs] and could be used for two different kinds of devices.
 - a. It could mean "torches." Jews often took wooden poles, wrapped the top ends with cloths, drenched the cloths with olive oil, and then lit them. These kinds of lamps were typically used for outdoor purposes. The women would then have trimmed these burning lamps that were getting ready to go out by removing the outer layers of cloths and applying more olive oil.
 - b. The other possibility is that these lamps were fashioned out of metal or clay and came with a wick. These were primarily used indoors. With these lamps the women would simply have to add oil and adjust the wicks.
 - c. Between these two possibilities, the second is more likely. Since it appears that the women are inside and are called to come out (v. 6) to meet the bridegroom, it is less likely, though still conceivable, that they would have used torches.

- d. Palestinian oil lamps could be as small as two to three inches in diameter and were incapable of holding any sizable supply of oil. Extra oil was needed to burn the lamps very long.
- e. On the day of judgment, some disciples will call out “Lord, Lord” but because they have been morally disobedient, the Lord Jesus will not welcome them (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:37-40).

MAT 25:5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying [slow in coming], they all got drowsy and began to sleep.

1. All the maidens [girls] became drowsy because of the late hour and “began to sleep.”
2. The bridegroom does not find fault with this, but the point of criticism was that five of the girls had not carried an extra supply of oil.

“Behold, The Bridegroom”

MAT 25:6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

- Lit. “and of (in) (the) middle of (the) night.”
1. We do not know who did the shouting.
 2. Some were watching for the coming of the bridegroom.

MAT 25:7 "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps [put them in order].

1. “trimmed” is from “kosmeo” [kah smeth oh] - “to put in order, trim, adorn, decorate.”
2. This means they added oil to their lamps.

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

1. “oil” is from “elaion” [el i ahn] - “olive oil, oil.”
2. They wanted the others to give or loan them their oil.

MAT 25:9 "But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

MAT 25:10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready [prepared] went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.

1. This would take a while to purchase the oil.
2. No place would be open “at midnight.” (Matt. 25:6).
3. The marriage feast is an analogy for the joys of salvation. (Rev. 3:20).

MAT 25:11 "And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up [the door] for us.'

1. They called the bridegroom “Lord, lord.”

2. They recognized him as Lord, but they were not ready for his coming.

3. They were too late.

MAT 25:12 "But he [the bridegroom] answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'

1. What heartbreaking words to these “bridemaids.”

2. They wanted to be a part of wedding festivities, but they were not allowed to enter the marriage feast because foolishly they had not given enough forethought to the needed preparation.

3. Jesus had earlier pointed out that obedience makes the distinction between wise and foolish disciples. (Matt. 7:24, 26).

MAT 25:13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour [when the Son of man will come].

• “gregoreo” [gray gah reh oh] - “to be alert, watchful”

1. Jesus insists we must be ready for His coming.

2. We do not know the time of His coming. (Matt. 24:36).

a. This is a good thing.

b. This motivates us to keep ready every day - not just make preparation at the last minute.

3. We are not to be sky watchers, but we are to live a life of obedience.

a. We prepare by becoming God’s children. (Jn. 3:3,5; Gal. 3:26, 27).

b. We prepare by walking in the light. (1 Jn. 1:7).

c. We prepare by confessing our sins. (1 Jn. 1:9).

d. We prepare by practicing “the fruit of the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

e. We prepare by adding the Christian graces. (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

f. We prepare by not having an active faith. (Jas. 2:14-26).

g. We prepare by always trusting in the grace of God. (Eph. 2:8-10).

4. The admonition to “be on the alert” repeats previous alerts. (Matt. 24:36, 42, 44, 50).

MAT 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

MAT 24:42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

MAT 24:44 "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

MAT 24:50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,

Some Lessons And Observations From Parable

1. God's day of judgment (or Jesus' return) may not come as quickly as some disciples anticipate. (2 Pet. 3:8).
 - a. Peter insisted the passing of time means nothing to the eternal God.
 - b. A thousand years is as a day to God.
2. Wise disciples must be ready to show Jesus their good deeds when the time comes to enter into the final kingdom of God.
3. Those who have no good deeds to show when Jesus comes will find they have no time to get prepared and still enter the final kingdom.
4. In what ways might a Christian run out of "oil" before Jesus returns?
 - a. One example would be that they start off strong in acts of kindness and patience but soon lose interest because they get tired or burned out.
 - b. Also they may lose their focus on righteousness because they are resentful that their righteousness is not appreciated.
5. This parable seems to suggest that when Jesus returns those who are saved have enough righteousness. Does this lesson contradict the popular theology that says we are saved by grace through faith alone?
 - a. Jesus is not teaching through this parable that one merits salvation through righteousness but rather warning those who think they will be saved even though they have not behaved righteously.
 - b. Salvation cannot be bought or earned, but neither will it be mocked or obtained without preparation.
 - c. One must do the will God to be saved. (Matt. 7:21; 12:46-50; 1 Jn. 2:17).
6. It does not teach or condone polygamy.
 - a. Some have tried to argue Jesus was condoning polygamy.
 - 1) They argue the "ten maidens" were all scheduled to be the brides of the bridegroom.
 - 2) They contend the bridegroom married the five maidens who were ready, but he rejected and refused to marry the others.
 - 3) There is absolutely no evidence for this conclusion.
 - 4) Actually the bride is not mentioned in this parable.
 - b. This passage nor any other New Testament scripture condones polygamy. (Matt. 19:4-9; 1 Cor. 7:1-5; Eph. 5:22-32).
 - c. The New Testament does not sanction polygamy.

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