

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

8. Waiting for the Wedding

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25v 1-13

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Waiting for the Wedding: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

The Parable of the ten virgins, or bridesmaids, as with so many other parables, draws us into a familiar scene: Here, a wedding banquet is being anticipated. Usually this was a scene of great joy and celebration, preceded by the recent wedding of two in marriage. However, Jesus again uses such a typical backdrop to introduce some sobering spiritual realities.

The parable here is addressed to the disciples and, in the context of Matthew 24-25, takes its place within Jesus' wider teaching on the end times, and the coming judgments and rewards God will preside over on that day. These end times were long looked for amongst Israel, as God would usher in His new kingdom order, and reign in power over the prized people of His choice. This prospect both delighted the Jews as well as comforted them throughout the many generations of hardship they had endured. However, as with all the parables, Jesus introduces a crucial lesson, that would alter their understanding of this much anticipated day.

One key point Jesus raises is the need to be ready. (v13) Despite the assurance that it would happen, the hour of this great event remained a mystery: The signs, some compelling, have often left people speculating over when such a day might occur. Scripture remains silent; the challenge being are you prepared for it? The shock in this particular story however, has to be the rather severe outcome: the festivities of the feast and the coming together of folk to celebrate is suddenly and starkly divided between those who are ultimately invited in and those who, in some respects rather harshly, are shut out and disowned. As one of God's chosen people, for the self-respecting Jew, to be considered in such a way would be unthinkable. But Jesus raises the question to them as to us: Just how ready are we to receive the Bridegroom and will He receive us?

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Read: Matthew 25v 1-13

Key words: Kingdom of heaven, virgins, bridegroom, lamps, oil, wedding banquet, watch

- **Kingdom Invitations: a privileged position – 25v 1-5**
The virgins have a role: To escort the bridegroom to his banquet: A role that required being ready to fulfil the task when the time came.
- **Kingdom Preparations: a precious possession -25v 6-10**
The tale twists when five of the ten are exposed as unprepared. The lack of oil leads to presumption, and then panic as their plight unfolds.
- **Kingdom Exhortations: a permanent partition – 25v11-13**
Thus the kingdom of heaven demands that those who wish to be present within it are equipped and alert for the day it comes to pass.

Ears to Hear?

- **Waiting, Watching and Working:**
What are your views on the second Coming of Christ? How often do you think it? How would you articulate these views to others?

The New Testament church expected this event to happen in their lifetime. Have we lost the sense of urgency/expectancy? Why?

Describe how/where we should display this expectancy/urgency.
- **The Point of the Parable:**
What is the main point of the parable? Explain it in your own words.

Who are the virgins in the parable? Also, what does the essential oil speak of? What are the implications/applications for us today?
- **Living for the Lord's return?**
Imagine Christ was coming within 24 hours: How would you spend your last day before His coming? How will the way you spend tomorrow differ from this?! (Should it?)

Instead of asking "how should this study and knowledge that Christ is coming affect your worship, witness and relationships from now on?" how actually will it? What does it say if nothing changes?