

6. The Wedding Feast (Mt 22:1-14) and the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt 25:1-13)

In these two parables, the Lord uses the experiences—common to all men—of weddings to illuminate the spiritual concept of the kingdom of heaven. The first parable uses the state of preparedness for the feast; the second, the suddenness with which the bridegroom will come. This symbolic use of weddings to describe the aspects of the kingdom runs throughout the New Testament. The central metaphor in all of these figures is that Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride.

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

In John 3:29-30, John spoke clearly that Christ was the bridegroom and the coming kingdom would be his bride: “The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. The apostle Paul also taught that the church was a pure virgin promised to Christ in 2 Cor 11:2, “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” In Eph 5:25-33, Paul extends this metaphor in order to explain Christ’s love of the church and the church’s obligation to Christ:

. . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. . . . He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. . . . 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

The revelation concludes with this same strong figure concerning Christ and the church. In Rev 21:1-2, the church is the Holy City and the New Jerusalem: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” The writer of Hebrews related these figures directly to the church in Heb 12:22-23: “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the **church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven** [Emphasis added].

Rev 21:9-10 is even more direct in using the words *wife* and *bride*: “‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” All of heaven celebrates this marvelous union of Christ and his bride in Rev 19:6-8:

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

These scriptures illuminate the truth of Christ and the church for us. Those listening to the Lord’s parables could draw from these everyday stories some of the same truths that are now so evident.

The Wedding Feast

Matt 22:1-14. 1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

5 "But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

The Lord came to the entire world. The commission that he gave said the gospel was to go to the whole creation. The Lord invites many who refuse to come. Worse than this is that God, the king, has prepared everything. God's invitation is still before those who leave for the sake of their own property and business. Some even kill the servants of God. On this group, God will have no mercy, for he will destroy the murders and burn their city. Rev 21:8 describes their fate, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God, the king, now invites those people rejected by high society. One would not expect that God should invite such people as these. They are both good and bad. Once they are at the feast, one is improperly dressed. The clothes of the man should be the righteous acts of Rev 19:8. Those in the kingdom without righteous acts receive the same fate as those who never come in to begin with. They are thrown into outer darkness where their will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord supplies the over-arching meaning to this parable: "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

Matt 25:1-13: 1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins teaches the over-arching principle: keep watch, because

you do not know the day or hour. The coming of the Lord, the bridegroom, is always eminent in the lives of all Christians for all time. It is note worthy that the prepared virgins could not help those unprepared. Those sad words, "I don't know you." will be heard by many. Paul wrote in 2 Thess 1:7-10:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The suddenness of the Lord's coming is a central theme of the Revelation. In Rev 1:3 teaches that the time is near for each of us, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." The coming will not only be sudden to each of us but it will also be universally apparent in Rev 1:7:

7 Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

In other words, the foolish virgins were clear on what they needed to do but it was too late. The Revelation concludes with the same urgency in Rev 22:18-20:

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The overarching truth of the parable is true for all people for all time: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Conclusion

These two parables have in common the need for all men to be ready for the Lord's coming. Some will refuse to come to the kingdom. Some will come to the kingdom but not be dressed in righteous acts. Some will be planning to be there but out doing something else when the Lord comes. Christians are to be prepared at all times and everywhere for the Lord's coming.

Study Questions

1. What will be the fate of those who do not attend the feast? _____

2. What will happen to those who attend but do not wear the proper clothes? _____

3. What will happen to those who run out of oil? _____

4. What is the day and the hour of the coming of the Lord? _____

5. Describe the church as the bride of Christ. _____
