

The stories Jesus told.



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 25.1-13 | July 9, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue engaging the parables in our summer series The Stories Jesus Told.

The story under our purview this week is often called the Parable of Ten Virgins, though some translations have "maidens," "girls," or "bridesmaids." It is found within the Eschatological Discourse devoted to the events of the end of the world in Matthew 24.1-25.46.

II. Connecting with One Another

Have you heard the phrase, "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable"? What do you think of it?

Are you usually early, on time, or late?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read the story immediately preceding the Parable of Ten Virgins, in Matthew 24.36-51.

Why do you think Jesus compares his returning with "the days of Noah"? Who was "taken" and who was "left" in that story?

Why do you think Jesus compares himself with a "thief in the night"? What does he mean to communicate?

What do you make of the "faithful" and "wise" servants in verses 45-51? Why does the wicked servant misbehave?

- b. Commenting on verses 45-51, N.T. Wright states, "The warnings here are held within the larger picture of the gospel, in which Jesus embodies the love of God which goes out freely to all. Of course we shall fail. Of course there will be times when we go to sleep on the job. Part of being a follower of Jesus is not that we always get everything right but that... we quickly discover where we are going wrong and take steps to put it right. But we can't use God's grace as an excuse for going slack."

What do you think he means by "use God's grace as an excuse for going slack"?

- c. The Apostle Paul engages similar territory in Romans 6.1: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"

How are you tempted to “use God’s grace as an excuse for going slack”?

Are you tempted by sins of commission (doing something you shouldn’t) or omission (not doing something you should)?

- d. Turning to chapter 25, Jesus offers a different story to communicate a similar truth. Read Matthew 25.1-13.

Recall from our Advent studies that first century marriage typically involved two stages: betrothal and marriage. First century betrothal was much more significant than modern-day engagement – in fact, though husband and wife were not officially married and did not yet live together, breaking off the betrothal was considered divorce (see, for instance, Matthew 1.18-19). After about a year of betrothal, husband and wife were officially married, then celebrated with family and friends in a weeklong “marriage feast.” (This is referred to in Matthew 22.1-14 and Luke 14.16-24)

The scene of this parable, then, implies the groom travelling to his parents’ home for the wedding festivities. Upon his arrival, some of the bridesmaids are troubled by their lack of oil and, thus, ill preparation. After going to retrieve more oil, they are too late to attend the wedding.

How does this parable clarify 1st Thessalonians 4.13-18 (often referred to as the “rapture”)?

- e. The “marriage union” of God with His people is a common theme throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. See, for instance, Jeremiah 31.31-34, Ezekiel 16.8-14, Hosea 1.2-2.23, and Isaiah 54.5-8 and 62.5.

What do these passages teach you about God’s love for His people?

Why do you think God uses this marriage metaphor so much throughout His Word?

- f. Some scholars even believe John 14.1-4 an update of this marriage metaphor for Jesus’ first century hearers. What do you think?
- g. In some ways, this parable recalls the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders in Matthew 7.24-27. What similarities do you see? What differences?
- h. In some ways, this parable points ahead to Jesus’ own disciples wearily sleeping on the night He is betrayed and arrested. See Mark 14.32-42.

Metaphorically speaking, what makes your eyes heavy?

How might God be calling you to “rise up”?

- i. N.T. Wright concludes, “Even more obviously than the previous parable, this story is rooted in the Jewish tradition of contrasting wisdom and folly – being sensible or silly. Obviously wisdom in this case means being ready with the oil for the lamp, and folly means not thinking about it until it’s too late. What matters is being ready, being prepared, being wise, thinking ahead, realizing that a crisis is coming sooner or later and that if you don’t make preparations now and keep them in good shape in the meantime, you’ll wish you had.”

How do you stay ready, making wise preparations in your journey of faith?

- j. Arland Hultgren writes, "It can be seen that the parable can strike the hearer in two ways. On the one hand, it provides a warning. Be wise and prepared for the long haul. On the other hand, what wondrous good news it is to know that the Bridegroom will come and gather in all those who are his."

How do you initially hear it? As a warning or a challenge?

How is God calling you to "increase in wisdom" to prepare for Christ's return?

- k. Laurentius Laurentii (1660-1722) set this parable to music in the hymn "Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers":

The watchers on the mountain,
Proclaim the bridegroom near;
Go forth as he approaches
With alleluias clear.
The marriage feast is waiting;
The gates wide open stand.
Arise, O heirs of glory;
The bridegroom is at hand.

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to reveal the ways in which you aren't yet ready for Jesus' return – and the courage to follow Him into a deeper discipleship,
- b. Lift up those you know who haven't yet accepted God's gift of salvation, and ask Him to equip you to share your faith openly and authentically,
- c. Pray for the children who will be on our campus in a couple short weeks for Vacation Bible School, that they will be invited into a Christ-centered life in God's family.