

Study following Sunday November 8th

Prepare: Think about a wedding party that you have attended and the different people you encountered.

Praise: Spend some time giving thanks to God that he blesses us with practical wisdom and common sense to make good choices everyday.

Passage: Read Matthew 25.1-13

Ponder: As we read more of Jesus teaching his disciples during that week leading up to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. In Chapter 24 verse 3 the disciples ask Jesus for some insight into what the future may hold, our passage today is still part of his explanation. Jesus tells a simple story which has some familiar and some unfamiliar elements. Bailey explains that it is told as a parable to illustrate his point rather than an allegory where everything in it has a specific meaning. It begins with a familiar phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven' but then puts the description in the future with 'will be like' rather than 'is like'

- What is your understanding of the 'Kingdom of Heaven'?

Bailey explains that it was common, in those days, for the Groom to ride out from his family home, where the banquet would take place, to collect his bride. The Groom would then parade around the whole village or town, showing off his bride to as much of the neighbourhood as possible. This can help explain the unknown hour which he would arrive. Weddings generally took place in the hot and cloudless summer, so the party would take place in cool of the evening and into the night.

- Have you every been caught out, unprepared for something? Perhaps a visitor or on a visit somewhere? How did you solve the problem.

It is good to see the place of wise young women in this story of Jesus, an important example of equality. The lamp that the women had was likely to be a bundle of sticks to hold as a torch, the same word is used in Revelation 4 verse 5 signifying the Sprit within the churches. This torch would need dipping into a jar of oil regularly. Each one needed their own jar to ensure they could light the the groom and bride home.

- There is something here to show the need for each person to make their own preparations for the Kingdom, whilst we can stand together as the people of God, He will look at each individual heart for its response to him.

- Read Matthew 7 verse 24 and notice another use of the wise and foolish comparison Jesus ignores the fact that local friends and neighbours would have lent the girls some oil to make his point. The focus event of the whole parable is the arrival of the bridegroom and in this we can see Jesus showing the disciples that he will return but that his return will be surprising and without warning. We also see the Jesus/Bridegroom idea that reoccurs in the final chapters of Revelation (see Rev 21.2, 9, 22.17). The girls did not have to stay awake but they did need to be prepared so that the groom might say to them - 'Truly, I **do** know you'. (See Matt. 7.22 for another use of 'Lord, Lord')

- How do you think we can ensure that the Bridegroom truly knows us?

- What do you understand by the need to keep our oil jars full?

Perhaps there is a link to being filled with the Holy Spirit in order to keep our torches burning, linking to Revelation. If the wise and foolish builders have a well known song, the foolish bridesmaids might also plead a link with one too: 'Give me oil in my lamp keep me burning!'

Pray: Pray for practical wisdom in the church, that we may find ways of maintaining our relationship with Jesus and filling ourselves with his Holy Spirit.

Stephen Partridge 2020 with reference to ideas from 'Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes' Bailey 2008, and Ian Paul's 'Psephizo' Blog.