

PARABLE: TEN BRIDESMAIDS

Matthew 25:1-13

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jesus; in the parable: bridesmaids

Key-repetitions:

- Bridesmaids: ten/all (Mat 25:1, 5, 7); wise (Mat 25:2, 4, 9, 10); foolish (Mat 25:2, 3, 8, 10, 11).
- Oil: (Mat 25:3, 4, 8, 9, 10).
- Bridegroom: (Mat 25:1, 5, 6, 10, 12).

Key-attitudes:

- Excitement of a wedding.
- Five foolish bridesmaids' carelessness.
- Five bridesmaids' alertness.
- Bridegroom's firmness in keeping door closed to foolish bridesmaids.

Initial-situation:

Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. On Sunday before Passover, Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. On Monday, Jesus expelled those who were buying and selling in the temple. Religious leaders began looking for a way to kill him. Tuesday morning was filled with confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Tuesday afternoon Jesus was alone with his disciples. They wanted to know what would be the sign that Jesus was coming again, and when would the world come to an end (Mat 24:3). Jesus spoke to them about the last days. He made it clear that the end would not come immediately, but only after considerable time and troubles. (Mat 24:4-31). Jesus warned that during troubled times many would seek to turn the people's attention and affections away from Jesus, the true Messiah (Mat 24:4-5, 10-11, 23-28).

Initial-problem:

Jesus told the parable, "The Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their oil lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish and five were wise.

Final-situation:

Jesus stated the point of the parable, "Therefore, keep watch. Stay alert! You don't know the day or the hour when he might arrive."

BIBLE STORY

During the time of Jesus, it was common for the following to happen at Jewish weddings. In the afternoon, the bridegroom with some close friends would leave his home to go to the bride's home, where there would be various ceremonies. After nightfall, the bridegroom with his bride, would lead a procession through the streets to his home. Bridesmaids would meet the bridegroom and his bride as they came from the bride's house, and they would assist the bride. Everyone in the procession carried his or her own oil lamp. Those without an oil lamp would be assumed to be party crashers or even thieves. The wedding festivities would formally get under way at the bridegroom's house and might last for several days.

Jesus told the parable, "The Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their oil lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but took no extra oil with them. The wise; however, took extra oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was late in coming, and all the bridesmaids fell asleep.

"At midnight someone shouted, 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

"All the bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out.'

"The wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, there isn't enough for us and all of you. Instead, go buy some for yourselves.'

"As the foolish bridesmaids were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The bridesmaids who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. The door was shut.

"Later, the foolish bridesmaids came and called out, 'Sir! Sir! Open the door for us!'

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

"Therefore, keep watch. Stay alert! You don't know the day or the hour when he might arrive" (Mat 25:1-13).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. | What catches your attention in the story? | 5. | How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. | Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. | How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. | Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. | Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. | What problems did the characters face? | 8. | What does the story tell about God? |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What future event does the parable illustrate?
2. How were the ten bridesmaids alike and how were they different?
3. What unexpected event took place?
4. Why did the wise bridesmaids refuse to share oil with the unwise?
5. What were the embarrassing consequences for those who had no oil?

6. What is the point of this parable?
7. Why is it so important to be ready for the second coming?
8. Today, what preparation does each person need to make to be ready for Jesus' return?
9. In which group will you find yourself included when Jesus returns?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Storytelling is an effective means of communicating God's word.** Jesus used storytelling as the primary means of teaching (Mat 13:1-3). Jesus was never without a story when he spoke. He would not say a thing to the crowd without telling a parable (Mat 13:33-35). Parables made up the major part of Jesus' prophetic sermon (Mat 24 - 25).
2. **The main lesson of the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is that each person is responsible for his own spiritual condition; each one should watch, be ready, and be prepared for the coming of the Lord** (Mat 25:1-13). The parable contrasts between watchful preparation and careless security.
3. **Christ will return at an unknown hour and people must be ready.** All the bridesmaids were sleeping when the call came. Five had oil for their lamps (Mat 25:3-6). The bridesmaids expected the bridegroom to come shortly after nightfall. They least expected him to arrive in the middle of the night. No one can know the day or the hour that Jesus will come. People must be constantly in a state of alertness. No matter what people are doing when Christ returns, they must be doing it in such a way that they don't have to "make things right" (get more oil) when he comes.
4. **Jesus' return will distinguish one group of people from another.** For a period of time, the foolish bridesmaids looked just like the wise bridesmaids. All were invited to the wedding celebration. All came expecting to participate in the wedding. The only difference between the foolish bridesmaids and the wise bridesmaids was the wise had oil for their lamps, while the foolish did not. The wise took the opportunity to obtain oil early. The foolish had the opportunity to procure oil early, but did not (Mat 25:1-13). This parable, like others in this section (Mat 24:37-41, 45-51; 25:1-12, 31-46), indicates that the distinction between those who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven and those who will be confined in hell, may not be apparent until the coming of Christ.
5. **Once Jesus returns, there is neither the time nor the opportunity to get ready.** The five foolish bridesmaids were not given time to reverse their folly, once the bridegroom came (Mat 25:10). They had their opportunity, and they lost it. There is a "point of no return," after which, one's rejection of Christ cannot be reversed. For some, this "point of no return" is death (Heb 9:27-28). For those who are alive, the second coming of Christ will be the point of no return (2 Thes 2:8-12).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Chant:

- Tell the story one time.
- Teach listeners the chant: "Keep watch! Stay alert! You don't know when Jesus might arrive."
- Give listeners a hand signal that is a sign for them to repeat the chant as the story is retold.
- Retell the story, giving listeners the signal to chant at the appropriate places.

Teller:

Jesus told the parable, "The Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their oil lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but took no extra oil with them. The wise, however, took extra oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was late in coming, and all the bridesmaids fell asleep."

Listeners chant: Keep watch! Stay alert! You don't know when Jesus might arrive.

Teller:

"At midnight, someone shouted, 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'
"All the bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out.'
"The wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, there isn't enough for us and all of you. Instead, go buy some for yourselves.'"

Listeners chant: Keep watch! Stay alert! You don't know when Jesus might arrive.

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"As the foolish bridesmaids were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The bridesmaids who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. The door was shut.

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