

File No. 154

MATTHEW 25:1–13

PARABLE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS

(SBS Bk 5 Story No 46)

Story Notes

In the previous chapter, Christ's coming was always in view, and with reference to those who 'jumped the gun' by pretending they were the returned Messiah. Jesus said the kingdom would not come until the gospel had been proclaimed everywhere (24:14). We should not be deceived, no matter how difficult events may prove to be. How then should we wait? These parables are addressed to those who share, not only the kingdom, but also the patient endurance of proclaiming it (Rev. 1:9).

God's reign is likened to young women waiting with lamps to accompany a bridegroom to his wedding. If some did not come prepared for a long wait by bringing extra oil, others could not provide for them without missing out themselves.

We do not know enough about weddings at this time to be sure of why the bridegroom in this story is delayed. A bridegroom left his home for his brides' home. After certain ceremonies there, the party processed through the streets to his home for lengthy celebrations. The story may envisage them waiting at the bride's home for them both to emerge. Jeremiah suggests that the delay could have been caused by negotiations over the wedding price (France on Matthew, p. 351).

Jesus has suggested his relationship to Israel on several occasions by telling stories about or alluding to a bridegroom (Matt.9:15; Matt. 22:1–14; Mark 2:19–20). John the Baptist also saw this connection (John 3:27–30). God had described himself as Husband to Israel (Isa.54:4–6; 62:4–5; Ezek.16:7–34; Hos. 2:19) and Jesus had come to bring that relationship into fullness.

Given what Christ said about what must happen in the world, being prepared and alert must involve moral seriousness, and not just expecting a 'quick fix' provided by Christ's immanent arrival in splendour.

Whatever the reason for the bridegroom's delay, it is this delay that exposes the foolish from the wise. Those who are wise have listened to the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom (7:21-29). They continue to serve patiently even when others think they are free to serve themselves (24:45). In particular, they have learned to love, which, as Paul tells us, begins with patience (I Cor. 13:4).

Paul also tells us that waiting for Christ's coming is a work of love for him (Eph. 6:24; cf. I Cor. 6:22) and his appearing (II Tim. 4:8). Without love for Christ and all his people, there could be no enjoyment of the kingdom of God, either now or then.

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