

A PARTY THAT IS WORTH IT **(Matthew 25:1-13)**

Has anybody been to a good party lately? There are all kinds of parties. There are birthday parties, class parties, office parties, block parties, Christmas parties, Super Bowl parties, costume parties, graduation parties, pool parties, dinner parties, retirement parties, and anniversary parties among others.

Sometimes, a party goes by a different name. It might be called a reception, a celebration, a social, a get-together, a shindig, a bash, a festival, a feast, a ball or a gala.

What do you need to throw a good party? You need food and drinks. You might want music, decorations, games, a venue, and people. Another thing that is helpful to have is an occasion—a reason to get together and celebrate.

In the Bible, there is a lot of partying that goes on. Jesus talked about parties, went to parties, and sometimes, parties or dinners were held in Jesus' honor.

In the OT, Jewish law stipulated that certain feasts, holidays, and celebrations were to be observed by the people at certain times, in certain ways, and for certain reasons. For instance, Passover celebrated the deliverance of the people from their captivity in Egypt while other holidays celebrated harvest or the New Year.

The last book of the Bible tells us that a huge celebration is coming. It is a feast, a dinner. We read in Revelation 19:9 where John wrote, "And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"

The Lamb is Jesus, and His bride is the Church. Someday, Jesus is coming back for His bride. After He does so, there will be a great wedding feast.

In the Jewish culture, weddings were large, raucous affairs. It was not uncommon that the party celebrating a wedding might last seven days, or even longer, at which time the wine flowed freely.

Jesus invoked marriage language and used the marriage metaphor to describe His relationship with His followers. In the Jewish culture, a marriage between two people was arranged. A father would choose someone He deemed to be suitable for His son. A bride price would be decided upon, and that price was paid to the father of the bride. The two would be betrothed to one another.

During the engagement period, the groom would build on to his father's house, and when the residence was ready, he would go get his wife. He would be accompanied by his groomsmen.

The bride would have only a general idea of when her groom would come. She would be attended by her girlfriends, the bridesmaids. They would watch with her for the coming of the groom. She had to be ready for his coming. When he came, there would be a dinner. Sometimes it was at the home of the bride, but more often it was at the house of the groom's father. After the wedding, a great party would ensue.

The Bible teaches that if you are a believer, it is because you have been chosen by the Father. Jesus paid the Bride price. Paul wrote, "You are bought with a price." That price was the shed blood of Jesus. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." He is preparing that place in His Father's house. He

promised that He would come back for them so that they could be where He is. He was using marriage language.

Today, we are going to look at the Matthew 25:1-13. As Jesus tells of His coming, He again uses marriage language. He portrays His return as a party.

Have you ever attended a party that wasn't nearly as fun or as exciting as you thought it would be? Maybe you were invited by a friend, but the friend ditched you, and you didn't know anybody or have anything in common with the people who were there. Maybe as you were going through the food line you had your eyes on the friend chicken. You notice there are just two pieces left, and the man in front of you took takes both of them. All that is left is some cold pasta salad. For whatever the reason, the party was a bust. You didn't enjoy it at all. It was a waste of time.

I have entitled today's message, "A Party That Is Worth It." Let's read our text.

I. THE RETURN OF JESUS IS A PARTY WORTH WAITING FOR.

In the story Jesus tells, there is a delay. The groom does not arrive when expected. The bride and her attendants have to wait for his arrival. Look at v. 5. We are not told the cause of the delay, but the delay was long enough that the bride and her friends got tired and fell asleep.

What we have here is a slumber party. Back then, most girls got married in their middle teen years. The bride might have been 14 or 15, and her maids would have been about the same age. Normally, if you get 11 girls together in a room at night, there is not going to be a lot of sleeping that goes on. There will be a lot of giggling and a lot of talking but not much sleeping until they tire themselves out.

By midnight, however, these girls are fast asleep, and at midnight, the call goes out, "He's here. He's coming. Get up! Get up!" Instantly, they rouse themselves. The one they have been waiting for has finally arrived. Moments later, everyone will gather, and the party will begin, and the wait will have been entirely worth it.

The Church has been waiting for her Groom. It seems that His coming has been delayed. It appears that the disciples and their converts expected Jesus to come back in their lifetime. In the latter part of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the beginning of the 5th chapter, Paul addresses the return of Jesus. Some of the believing community had died, and some of those who were left thought their family members who had passed had missed out. Paul is saying, "Don't worry. When Jesus comes back, He is coming with your dearly departed, and we will join them." He tells them to spread that word and to encourage one another with those words.

Look with me at what Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-10.

This past Friday was 9/11, the 19th anniversary of the terrorist attack upon American in which four planes were hijacked and used to target important sites on the east coast. Two planes were flown into the two towers of the World Trade Center. On that day, 2753 people died in the NYC attack. In all the attacks, 2997 people perished.

Jim Cymbala is the pastor of The Brooklyn Tabernacle. He said that four of their people died that tragic morning. One of those who perished was a police officer. His

funeral was held at the church building, and the Mayor of NYC, Rudy Giuliani attended the funeral. He asked if her could share a few thoughts, and he was permitted to do so. According to Pastor Cymbala, here is what the mayor said:

You know people, I've learned something through all this. Let me see if I can express it to you. When everybody was fleeing that building, and the cops and the firefighters and the EMS people were heading up into it, do you think any of them said, "I wonder how many blacks are up there for us to save? I wonder what percentage are whites up here? How many Jews are there? Let's see—are these people making \$400,000 a year, or \$24,000, or—?"

No, when you're saving lives, they're all precious. And that's how we're supposed to live all the time. How would you want the cops to treat you if you were on the seventy-fifth floor that day? Would you want them to say, "Excuse me, but I've got to get the bosses out first"? Not exactly.

I confess I haven't always lived this way. But I'm convinced that God wants us to do it. He wants us to value every human life the way he does."

To use today's language, in the eyes of God, black lives matter. Now what I am about to say is not politically correct, but my job is to be biblically correct. In the eyes of God, all lives matter—black ones, and brown ones, and white ones, and red ones, and yellow ones. Didn't we learn that back in Sunday School when we were kids?

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red, brown, yellow
Black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children
Of the world

Because God loves us, all of us, he has delayed the return of His Son. He is giving all people more time to repent and to come to Him. Aren't you glad that Jesus did not come back before you believed in Him?

The return of Jesus has been delayed, but don't you delay. Come now while you still can. We will see later in this message that there is coming a time when the door will be shut, and no more will be allowed into the party. Come while you still can.

II. THE RETURNING JESUS IS A PERSON WORTH LOOKING FOR.

Oddly, the bride is never mentioned in this story. Still, yet, you know that she and her bridesmaids were awaiting the coming of her groom. I wonder how many times they stepped outside the house, looked down the road, craned their necks and looked for His appearing.

We, too, are to look for the appearing of our Savior. In Luke 21, Jesus was talking to His disciples about His own coming. Jesus commanded in v. 28, ". . . straighten up and

raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Robby Robins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war. After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given orders to immediately pull his crew together and fly his plane home. He and his crew flew from the Middle East all the way to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania. They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—“Welcome Home Dad!”

How did they know? He hadn’t spoken to anyone, and the crew themselves hadn’t expected to leave so quickly. Robins said, “When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, “Daddy!” Susan [his wife] came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, and a crisp yellow dress. ‘How did you know?’ I asked.

“‘I didn’t,’ she answered through tears of joy. ‘Once we knew the war was over, we knew you’d be home one of these days. We knew you’d try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.’”

In the story Jesus told, all ten of the young ladies were looking for the Groom, but only half of them were ready. It is one thing to look. It is another to be ready. That brings us to the next point.

III. JESUS AND HIS RETURN IS A PARTY WORTH PREPARING FOR.

Jesus said that ten young ladies took lamps to meet the bridegroom. It was likely daytime when they left home, but they all had the foresight to take an oil lamp with them. What they took with them was not a large torch. It was a little clay jar. The jar held a bit of oil. Protruding from the jar would have been a wick. The wick would soak up the oil, and the burning oil would provide a measure of light.

Jesus said in v. 2 that five of those young ladies were foolish, and five were wise. In v. 3, He tells us why five of those girls were foolish. Although they had the wisdom to take a lamp with them, they did not think to take extra oil along. It wouldn’t take long for the oil in that small clay jar to be completely consumed.

In v. 4 He informs us why five of those girls were wise. They were wise because they took extra oil with them.

We might think of it in this way. Ten young ladies each took a flashlight, but only five had the foresight to take spare batteries for their flashlights.

Nowhere in the story are we told what the oil represents if anything in particular. Joel Gregory wrote, “Oil represents everything required in a lifetime of preparation to meet Christ. Be supplied for the long wait.

“The wise make preparation for life’s decisive, spiritual moment.” He goes on to say:

There is a suggestion here about a container, contents, and conflagration. The container is the believer, the content is the inner resources of the spiritual life, and the conflagration is the shining testimony that results. The implication is that

people will act in their spiritual life with a lack of preparation that would never characterize their material life.

If you go on a road trip, before you leave, you make sure that you have fuel in the tank, money in your wallet, and a credit card just in case the money runs out. You make sure you have the clothes and the shoes you will need, and that you packed your toothbrush. We used to take a map with us, and we made sure we knew the way. Now, we just use our smart phones and type in the final destination to Google maps. Regardless, when you are taking a trip, you know to think ahead.

But have you thought ahead concerning your spiritual journey? Do you know the way? Do you know how to get there? Do you have what you need for the journey ahead?

Some commentators are more specific. They say that the oil represents the Holy Spirit. I don't know if that is what Jesus intended, but it makes perfect sense. Oil is often used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Oil was used to anoint people for special places of service. In Luke 4, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor" (4:18).

If you want to become what God wants you to become, if you want to shine as Jesus wants you to shine, you must have the Spirit of God at work in your life. It is only through the Spirit of God that we can have a relationship with God, and if we are going to be prepared for the coming of the Lord, we must be in right relationship with Him.

Notice that the girls couldn't borrow oil for their lamps. In the same way, you can't borrow a relationship with Christ. Your mama may have been a saint, but that doesn't make you one. Your grandfather may have been a preacher, but that is not going to help you.

You must establish your own relationship with the Lord, and that requires the help and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He is your oil. You can't shine without Him.

IV. FAILURE TO PREPARE FOR THE PARTY MEANS YOU WON'T BE THERE.

The five foolish girls learned they couldn't borrow oil from the five wise girls; so, they set out to go buy some. Where are you going to buy oil at midnight? There was no 24-hour Super Walmart.

Look at vv. 10-13. What we find in this passage closely mirrors another passage in Matthew that we looked at many months ago. Look back at Matthew 7:21-23. These words are among the scariest words in the Bible. Can you imagine the horror of thinking that you are saved only to discover when it is too late that you don't really have a relationship with Jesus?

Twenty-one years ago, I preached from this same text. This sermon and that sermon are very different, but I did use an illustration in that message that I want to repeat here, and with it, I will close this message.

There is an old story of a king who sent his court jester to make a search throughout his kingdom for the most foolish man in the entire kingdom. The servant was gone for

many months. During his travels he received word that the king had fallen ill and was near death. He returned at once. He went to see the king, and when the king saw him, the king announced, "I am about to go on a long journey from which I will not return."

The servant asked, "O king, are you ready for your journey?"

The king answered sadly, "No, I'm not ready."

The servant asked a second question, "Could you have gotten ready had you wished?"

The king replied, "Yes, I suppose I could have."

The servant said, "You mean, you are going on a journey from which you will not return; you could have made preparations for your journey but you simply failed to do so?"

The king admitted, "Yes, that is true."

The servant announced, "O king, at last, I have found the greatest fool in your kingdom."

Don't be foolish with your eternal soul. Make preparation now. It will be too late to get ready when Jesus returns. If you are going to decide for Christ you must decide now. You have no guarantee of tomorrow.