

Matthew 25:1-13 - “Who Were You Expecting”?

- Pastor Ken Nelson

Historically, the Christian church has interpreted this parable as being about “the end times”. It comes on the heels of some pretty vivid language about the end of the world. Matthew 24 is end times prophecy, “2012, *Nostradamus*” stuff if you will. Moreover, there is a sense of finality in this parable...a bridegroom shows up (gee, who could that be?), and those “ready” enter with him to a great banquet. Those unprepared are sent away...the final curtain has fallen. But this parable can also be interpreted as being about participation in the kingdom of God right now.

In the gospel of Matthew, the phrase “*kingdom of God*” or “*kingdom of heaven*” is understood as being the reign of God among his people. It’s not a place so much as a perspective. It’s a point in time as much as the peculiarity of how time is spent. The “kingdom” to Matthew is located wherever Jesus the king reigns. That is what Matthew concludes. It happens now, as well as some day; here, as well as in heaven. Because of that, we can, and indeed ought to, interpret this parable as a call to live expectantly, anticipating the in-breaking of the kingdom right here, right now. Martin Luther, in his explanation to the Lord’s Prayer regarding the petition “*thy kingdom come*” said God’s kingdom comes when we believe God’s word and live godly lives “*right here...right now*”.

So, we do well to think about “living expectantly” in both of the ways this parable affords us to do. Think of it this way, you can prepare yourself for a disaster to strike, and try to ward off or diminish its consequences. And you can prepare to take advantage of an opportunity to enjoy some future benefit. Most of us are “preparing” for winter to come, much as we would just as soon it delay as long as possible. Nothing wrong with that, but it’s mostly “defensive” preparation. Be ready in case the big one comes...the major snowfall...the howling winds...the icy roads, and so on.

Just this past week in the Minot Daily News, there was an article about how to put together a “winter survival kit” for your car, so that if you’re caught in a big one, you are less likely to suffer in it. Such preparation is wise. I have a kit I prepared several years ago when we lived in Nebraska...though it might be a good thing for me to see about the viability of the Hershey chocolate bars I put in there. They might not have survived the last 7 summers in the trunk of my car all that well. But the truth is, I don’t want to have to use that kit. I don’t want to have to try to light a candle and melt some snow to stay alive for a few days while I wait to be rescued from a 7-foot snowdrift. That is what this parable is about - “living expectantly.” If the end comes near, you’ll be ready for it. I do not advocate being lazy or unconcerned about one’s personal salvation, but because of its “end times” imagery, this wonderful story from Matthew is seen only as a warning to not be caught “*without the oil of faith*” in your personal lamps.

But, there is another form of preparation to take into account out of this great parable, the preparation to seize opportunities for future blessing and benefit. Let me give an illustration. In our Thursday morning men’s group, we’re studying a book by Tony Dungy called “*Quiet Strength*”. Mr. Dungy took over as head football coach of the Tampa Bay Bucs in 1996, and inherited a legacy of losing in that organization. Like any new coach, he immediately set in place a series of principles of how that would change, hired assistants he thought could help him

bring that about, and laid down the mantra that his players would strive for certain team benchmarks. The phrase he adopted for those was “*do what we do*” in anticipation of one day being champions. By the end of the 1999 season, his team was playing for the conference championship, and by 2002 they had become Super Bowl Champions. Most any athlete will tell you that championships are not won the day of the final competition, but months, even years before in practice, in the training room, in the team meetings that create cohesion and unified purpose among players and coaches.

That is the type of “expectation” Jesus calls us to in our lesson today. All ten of the bridesmaids were invited. The “wise” were distinguished from the foolish only because they made provision that a celebration could be a long time in coming, and they invested for that wait. Part of our preparation as Christians for the coming of the Lord is expressed through our giving, which we are rightfully celebrating today. Giving is an expression that the bridegroom is coming, and that we intend to be ready when the kingdom, that is to say, when opportunities to express faith, come to us. Giving bespeaks present faith in future realities. It supports not only present things, but future possibilities as well.

So, our prayers to the Lord include time to discern if significant additional space or significantly renovated space would make us ready for future celebrations of Christ among us. Regardless of that discerning, your commitments today are vital. They express your faith. They reveal our hope for the future. They are evidence of your love of Jesus, and those he has called, you and this congregation, to be ready for when they come to us; the young, the weary, the grieving, the anxious, the doubting. They are coming. They are Christ. Blessed are you and we, who could on that day say “Come Lord Jesus...we’ve been expecting you”. AMEN