

Palm Sunday

March 24, 2018

Reading: Matthew 25:1:13

Betrothal and Marriage

King and Bridegroom

It would be appropriate to begin preaching about Jesus' last week here on earth out of the Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 21. I could begin with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and Jesus cleansing the Temple, for these are pointed events. Also there are the chief priests questioning His authority. The Pharisees work hard trying to trap Jesus with questions designed to create problems with the Roman and Jewish leaders. Jesus places the guilt back on them by His skillful and honest answers. Jesus also makes predictions, including the coming destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. However, His triumphant entry into Jerusalem begins to sour as people realize this is not the political king they had hoped for. A king to displace the corrupt Jewish leadership, a king to remove the Romans from Palestine and return Israel to power and glory among nations. In the middle of this fast moving week Jesus is accused being a criminal, he is tried and in the end he is crucified. All these events of Jesus' last week are worthy of spending time on.

Palm Sunday is usually a time for marking the kingly entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. He fulfills prophecy by coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The Gospel according to Matthew says, [“This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵“Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”](#)” (Matthew 21:4-5) Here Matthew quotes the prophets Zechariah (9:9) and Isaiah (62:11). On that Palm Sunday the people spread their cloaks on the

road and cut Palm fronds and spread them on the road and they went before Jesus and shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9) **Hosanna** is an Aramaic expression meaning, “Help, I pray” or “Save, I pray.” By Jesus’ time “**Hosanna**” had become a shout of praise or adoration with the general meaning of salvation or deliverance. So they were saying, “Here comes our Deliverer, our Savior! Salvation belongs to the Son of David, the Messiah! Here he is. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The king they expected would take hold of Israel and turn it into a mighty kingdom again. Instead the people received a different king - they got God in the form of the man Jesus who came from heaven to live among the people and offer them salvation. This was not the king they had expected.

On Palm Sunday the focus is usually on Jesus the King. Today I want to say this, but also I want to say something more. I want to focus on this truth; Jesus is not just a King, but he is a betrothed King. Soon, upon His return, He will be a married King. His betrothed bride are the people of God, the people who trust Him for their salvation, the “elect” from every race and nation, the Church universal. Jesus came the first time 2,000 years ago to die for His bride and to pay a dowry with His own blood. He will come a second time to marry his bride and take us, meaning His church, into the gardens and the chambers of heaven and into His love and joy forever.

The Bridegroom and His Betrothed

The Apostle Paul said it this way in Ephesians 5:31, “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**” This mystery is profound and I believe it also refers to Christ and the

church, as well as a husband and wife. I believe we can make this connection by what Paul wrote a few verses earlier, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) King Jesus came into the world to take a wife. Not a harem as many religions and their false gods of the ancient world did. But Jesus gave His betrothed the greatest gift of salvation, peace and joy. He paid for His betrothed with His very life. Jesus is now at work by His Spirit and by His Word purifying and beautifying His betrothed, the Church, for Himself and who will be His bride’s joy.

This is why Paul saw his ministry, his calling, as a kind of go-between for Jesus Christ, who is the groom and the church as the one Christ is wooing to Himself. Paul said to the Christians living in Corinth, a city of corruption that was compared to Sodom, “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, so present you as a pure virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2) One way to describe Paul’s ministry and the ministry of all pastors is - they are ministers of the Word and as such they are matchmakers of God in betrothing the church to Christ. It is a pastor’s job to help people live as spiritual virgins in a corrupt world. As a pastor I seek to awaken people’s faith in Christ, which creates Jesus’ bride, the Church, and I seek to deepen people’s love for Christ. It is one’s love for Christ that purifies them as individuals and makes them an integral part of the church - His bride. This calling sobers and humbles me. The church is not ours, not yours, not mine, you as the church belong to Jesus, you are His betrothed who will be his bride and you do not belong to me as your pastor, I am only the shepherd leading you - you belong to Christ and Christ alone.

John the Baptist understood the role of the one who points the way to Christ and dared not lay any claim to Jesus' bride. Someone asked him how he felt about the fact that his ministry was waning and Jesus' ministry was coming into focus and into power. I can just hear John's strong voice as he answered,²⁸ "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete." (John 3:28-29) John was the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus, the betrothed King and bridegroom spoke of Himself in this way also, when the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" (Matthew 9:14-15)

One of the functions of fasting is to say with our hunger that we miss the Bridegroom and want Him to come back and take us into His gardens and chambers forever. How anxiously we await the return of Jesus our King and our Husband. I cannot say it as well as the Apostle whom Jesus loved said in the last book of the Bible, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, reading from chapter 19, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'" (Revelation 19:6-9) I say from the depths of my heart as does all of heaven, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our

God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.” I am ready Lord, come Jesus come! How about you? Are you prepared for Jesus’ return?

On this Palm Sunday our focus is not simply on the fact that Jesus came 2,000 years ago as King on a donkey entering Jerusalem with people shouting, “Hosanna to the son of David” (Matthew 21:9 & 15) and a few days later they shouted, “Crucify Him ... His blood be on us and on our children.” (Matthew 27:25) The separation came quickly between Jesus’ small band of believers and the rest of the world. My dear beloved, time will tell if we are the true and faithful betrothed of Christ or the unfaithful bride like Gomer and Israel. May we prove to be the faithful betrothed for our King and who will be our Husband when he comes again! Remember this week that begins with Palm Sunday, this fact, that the King of the universe came into the world to betroth Himself to a bride at the price of His own blood and that He will come a second time to marry His bride and take us into the infinitely beautiful chambers and gardens of His love and joy forever.

The Approaching Marriage

Everyone who trusts in and believes in Jesus as his or her betrothed is anxiously awaiting the wedding. Not every person will be a part of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Some will be outside wishing they could get in. So I urge you, trust Christ, believe in Christ, love Christ and be His betrothed in waiting. The joys Christ gives us here and now as we live life, and the joys to come are beyond anything experienced or imagined. Until Jesus’ return He tells us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27) The world is a

place of unrest and violence, but we, my beloved, have the gift of Christ's peace! We can shout as the crowds did upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, "[Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!](#)" (Matthew 21:9) The question is will we be the faithful betrothed and continue to sing "Hosannas" throughout our lives and upon Jesus' return?

Now I ask, "What does Jesus want to say to us this morning about our position between the betrothal and the coming marriage?" What does He have to say to us who are the blood-bought bride of Christ? One answer is given in today's text in Matthew 25:1-13. This is Jesus' words to us about how the time between when He came to betroth us, and His second coming to marry us. Let's walk through this passage together verse by verse.

Beginning in verse 1 of Matthew 25, we read, "[Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.](#)" Notice 3 things in this verse. First, it is about a Kingdom and a Bridegroom. Palm Sunday is really about a *betrothed* King who is coming to be married. The King is betrothed, but he has gone away on a journey and he is going to return to be married. Second, notice that this is a parable about the time between the first and second coming of Christ. Third, notice that the virgins represent the visible Church, that is, they represent those who profess to be Christians. It is the church that is going out to meet the Bridegroom. They are not those people who want nothing to do with the Bridegroom. But, they are those who claim Christ, the question is, are they those who are truly Christian or those who appear Christian – we will see.

Do not stumble over the fact that in this parable of the 10 virgins they are not the bride. The bride makes no appearance in this parable. The details of the parable

should not be pressed too far, but let us look for the larger theme. In some texts the church is pictured as the bride. Here the church is pictured as the ones who go to meet the Bridegroom and bring him into the marriage. Jesus does not want us to stumble over that difference. The parable is about how we, the bride of Christ, should prepare to meet Him.

We now move on to verses 2 to 4, “Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.” I don’t think the percentages here are intended to say that 50% of the church is foolish. The numbers 10 and 5 is incidental. What is crucial is how some were foolish and others were wise. It is the remnant church, those who are wise who is the betrothed church that prepares for Christ’s return and it is small number.

All 10 virgins had a job appointed for them to do. They were to be ready to welcome the Bridegroom with shining lights when he comes. That was their job or you might say their calling; their calling was to be ready as we see in verse 10. The instrument appointed for that calling was oil and lamps. It was their responsibility to use these gifts of spiritual oil and the foundation of God’s Word or the lamp, to perform the work they had been given to do. They were to give light from the lamp when the Bridegroom came.

However, 5 of them did not take seriously their calling to give light and they neglected the only means by which they could do what they were called to do. It is only the Holy Spirit that gives light to God’s Word. But 5 took no oil. They only had lamps. Their job was to provide light and they had lamps without oil. In a later time of history, one would say they had candles without wicks or torches without fire or light bulbs without electricity, in others words, they had the outward

form of religion but no internal spiritual power. They liked their position as part of the bridal party or otherwise they would have left. But, they did not have a passion to use the necessary means to fulfill the job of their position. Their job was to give light! Their foolishness was to think that the mere form of a religious lamp would be sufficient without the oil of the Holy Spirit. Or, perhaps, they thought the power to light their lamp could simply be borrowed at the last minute. However, the fact is, it cannot be borrowed at all.

Please notice two things in verse 5, **“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.”** First, Jesus gave us advance warning that His coming would be delayed. This has been a stumbling block for two thousand years. The Apostle Peter dealt with this in his second letter, writing, ³ **“Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. ⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”** (2 Peter 3:3-9) Jesus told us that he would be delayed. Yet, man’s sin nature leads him to lack faith, just like those who took no oil for their lamps. The devil has been at work since the “Fall of Man” using our sin nature and he will continue until the return of our King

when he comes for his bride and he will deal with Satan permanently.

Then notice secondly that it is not foolish to sleep. All 10 slept, not just the foolish. This is not sleeping on the job of life. Sleeping is part of the job. What sleeping signifies in this parable is, simply the ordinary activities of life. We are not called to go up on a mountain and gaze idly into the sky as we wait for Jesus. We are called to do our work and then rest. Life's normal cycle is work and rest. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 24 saying, ⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions." (Matthew 24:45-47) So, all 10 slept because sleep is part of the normal rhythm of life that we should follow - we work and rest and wait for Jesus.

Now the action in our parable picks up in verse 6, "But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'" We know from our study of Scripture that Jesus does not return quietly. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16) Upon Jesus' return there will be a cry of, "He's here! Go meet him! Let your lamps burn brightly as you go!" Now we need to listen carefully for in the rest of this parable is a very sober warning to be ready for the return of Christ the Bridegroom.

We read in verses 7 to 9 the following, "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'" You

see a life of foolishness deepens one's foolishness in an ever downward movement. When the shout goes out that the bridegroom is here, they trim the wicks of their empty lamps. They have no oil; they are among us today, they are those with just the outward form of worship of Christ. They trim their empty lamps when the cry rings out! This is deep folly. They have neglected the means appointed for doing their duty and not even the shout wakens them to fact that their lamps are empty, at least not at first. They trim their empty and useless lamps, for when Christ returns it will be too late for them. In desperation they ask the impossible. Give us from your oil. The fact that the 5 wise virgins won't give them any oil is not meant to teach selfishness. It is meant to teach the impossibility of borrowing faith. It is meant to teach the impossibility of borrowing the power of the Holy Spirit. It teaches the impossibility of borrowing obedience and faithfulness. It is too late. That is what we will see at His return, those who are prepared and those for whom it is too late.

The Marriage Feast – Ready or Not?

What the wise virgins mean when they say in verse 9, "...there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves" is this - we cannot have faith for both you and for us. We cannot have inner spiritual life for you and for us – it does not work that way. We cannot give you obedience and faith – you must have this for yourselves. The faithful use of God-appointed means – in this parable it is "oil", the oil of faith and obedience. They are telling the foolish that if you neglect the oil in your lamps – the saving faith, the indwelling of the Spirit and obedience to Christ in this life, we cannot create faith and obedience for you. Each person bears his own load and is responsible. So in desperation the foolish virgins, who wasted their lives, ran for the impossible, they wanted instant end-time obedience and instant end-time faith. But, it is too late.

The fact that it is too late is clear as we read verses 10 to 12, “**And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.**” ¹¹ **Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’** ¹² **But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’**” These are absolutely terrifying words at the end of the age when Jesus comes back and says, “**I do not know you.**” For everyone had the opportunity. Jesus is saying, you were part of the church. You were one of the 10 virgins. You were told to be ready and to not be of the world. You had lamps and I gave freely the spiritual oil to burn in your lives. A life that lives and shines spiritually does not burn out. But, you took the spiritual oil and turned it into a man-made religion. You turned to the world and you looked religious, but you did not understand a relationship with Christ is not religion, but a relationship with Christ is a life living in faith and brings a relationship with God. You took no care for the precious spiritual oil given to you by God. You carried the lamp and you polished it and kept it shiny. Others looked at you and assumed you had life, faith and eternal hope. However, the truth was that all you had was an empty lamp. Christ returns and now, you are about to face the One who sees right through your lamp, and says, “**Truly I say to you, I do not know you.**” Let me tell you, my beloved, you don’t want to hear those words. Many will, but no one has to. God has made Himself evident to every person. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “**For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**” (Romans 1:20) We are to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus with the world around us. We cannot force anyone to believe what God has so clearly demonstrated and they disbelieve at their own peril. Our job is to shine the light of God into the world, whether they believe or not is God’s business.

We close out our study this morning with verse 13, “**Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Be on the alert**” Watch does not mean look out the window at night. It does not mean go up on a mountain and wait. Even the wise virgins slept when it was time to sleep. “**Be on the alert**” means – to be spiritually awake! Be alive and alert to the Word of God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that He gives now, to each believer. Use all the means God has given you to know Him and love Him and trust Him. Be filled with the oil of faith, oil of the Spirit and know joy and hope. Live for Christ and strive to live a Christ-like life now, each day! My beloved, you are betrothed to the King – live worthy!

Let this thought govern your life - Jesus Christ came to betroth a people to Himself and the price was his own blood and He will return for the wedding of eternal honor. If I am a part of that betrothed people by faith in Jesus, He will come to me and all who believe in him and Jesus will say to all believers, “Come, O faithful bride, enter into my gardens and into my chambers and learn now for eternity what the dim shadows of earthly pleasures were all about.” Our response is now and will always be, “Come, Jesus, Come!”

Amen!