

Don't Miss the Wedding

Matthew 25:1-13, Revelation 19:6-8, Romans 8:9-11, Luke 11:13

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Dave Best and his fiancée planned more than a year in advance their wedding in Wales on July 6, 2008.

They wanted to give their family and friends plenty of time to prepare, but they worried that even with all that lead time, some of them would not be able to attend.

They didn't need to worry about their friend Barclay, though. He was so excited about the wedding that he showed up a year early!

When Dave wrote to his friend about the July 6 wedding, Barclay assumed he meant July 6, 2007.

So, he bought a plane ticket from Toronto to Wales and when he arrived, he called his friend to get a few details about the location of the ceremony.

It was only then that Barclay discovered he was a bit ahead of schedule. A year later, Barclay gave it another try.

He said, *“At least it assured me a mention in the wedding speech.”* Dave Barclay was well prepared for that wedding.

2,000 years ago, Jesus planned for His wedding with the church, the body of believers who would trust Him with their lives.

At the time, He didn't have a specific date, but He paid the bridal price on a cross, rose from the dead, and returned to His Father's house to prepare a place for you and me.

But, before He left, He promised to return to get His bride and bring her to His Father's house, where they would enjoy their wedding festivities. Over the past 2000 years, we've had plenty of time to prepare.

The question is: Are you ready for the wedding? Turn to Matthew 25, where Jesus tells us how we're to get ready for the wedding.

Jesus' audience looked forward to a coming Kingdom, where the Messiah would rule over the whole world from Jerusalem.

A Messiah who would bring peace and prosperity for everyone in His Kingdom. It's here, in Matthew 25, where Jesus compares arriving in His Kingdom like a wedding.

Matthew 25:1, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

To understand the coming Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus describes it here in Matthew 25, you need to understand the wedding customs of the day.

Last week we learned that when the groom's father declared that the groom's home was ready for his bride, the groom returned to his bride's house to bring her to their new home in his father's house.

As he got close to the bride's home, the bridal party would come out to meet him on the way. Then together, in a grand procession with torch lights, they would accompany the groom back to his father's house.

There, a rabbi performed the wedding ceremony, which allowed the bride and groom to consummate their marriage. Typically, in Jesus' day, that ceremony was the start of a seven-day celebration.

In the same way, when Jesus returns for His bride, the church. All those in the bridal party will meet Him on the way and return with Him to His Father's house, where they'll celebrate for seven years (not seven days), while those on earth go through great tribulation.

In Revelation 19:6-9a, John describes that wedding celebration in heaven.

He writes, *"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.'" (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"*

That marriage supper happens in heaven while the earth is going through tribulation as described in Revelation 6-18.

Then, Jesus will return with His bride to rule and reign on this earth for a thousand years as described in Revelation 20.

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Do you want to participate in that great wedding feast? Then you must connect with the church, Christ's bride, a body of believers, as you wait for Jesus' return.

In her book *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott shares a story about the need for a church family.

When she was about seven, her best friend got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened.

Finally, a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church.

She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, *“You could let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.”*

Lamott further writes: *“And that is why I have stayed so close to my church—because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their voices, I can always find my way home.”*

Find your way to your earthly home by staying close to your church. More than that, find your way to your heavenly home when Jesus comes by connecting to His bride, the body of believers where you live.

Invite God’s Spirit to live within you so He can power your witness. Receive the Holy Spirit so your life shines brightly when Jesus comes again.

Therefore, if you want to participate in the great wedding feast to come, stay close to the bride, then bring some extra oil so it can fuel your light.

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Matthew 25:2-12, *“Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ““No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’”*

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’”

The foolish bridesmaids forgot their oil; therefore, they missed the wedding. The wise bridesmaids brought enough oil, so they were able to attend the wedding.

But what we fail to understand is why would forgetting some oil cause someone to miss the wedding.

Well, torches were an essential part of the wedding procession, which usually took place at night. These torches lit the way from the bride’s home to the groom’s house.

One commentor said, “It is unlikely that ‘lamps’ refers to the small Herodian oil lamps, which could be carried in the hand; all the evidence points to real torches... which may have burned for only fifteen minutes. Then the burnt rags would have to be removed and new oil-soaked rags would need to be wrapped on the sticks for which they were made.”

That’s why the bridesmaids needed a reserve of oil. They needed the oil to keep their “lamps” burning should the bridegroom delay his coming.

D. A. Carson, an evangelical biblical scholar, said, “Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch would be assumed to be party crashers or even thieves.”

That’s why the groom locked the foolish bridesmaids out of the wedding festivities. They lacked the oil to keep their lamps burning, so the groom considered them imposters.

You see, it's not enough just to join the bridal party, you must have an oil-soaked lamp to prove you genuinely belong. You may ask, *"What does an oil-soaked lamp have to do with me today?"*

What you must understand is that oil is used, throughout all the Bible, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So, if you lack the Holy Spirit, "oil," you don't genuinely belong to Christ's bridal party.

That's why it's not enough to just belong to a local church, you must also belong to Jesus Christ Himself.

Romans 8:9-11, "You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."

The Holy Spirit is what energizes our mortal bodies. Or, to use Jesus' metaphor here in Matthew 25, the Holy Spirit is the oil which lights our life, so it shines brightly as a genuine testimony that we belong to Him.

So, how do we get the Holy Spirit? It's very simple. Just invite Jesus to live within you, so He can begin to change you from the inside out.

Ask God to give you His Holy Spirit, so you can genuinely shine with His righteousness, not your own.

Jesus Himself said in Luke 11:13, *"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* Just ask God to give you His Spirit, and He will!

Francis Chan, an American author, teacher, and preacher, talks about the time his teenage daughter *“was not in love with Jesus.”* He spent nights crying and praying to God.

He said, *“Here I am, known for my ability to communicate, but there was nothing I could do for my own daughter that would make her fall in love with Jesus.”*

He prayed, *“God, either your Spirit comes into her or your Spirit doesn't. It doesn't matter how great a father I am. I cannot bring her to life.”*

One day she came to her father and said, *“You were right, Dad. The Holy Spirit was not in me. But now He is.”* She talked about how near she was to God and how everything had changed.

Francis Chan and his wife were skeptical. They wanted to see evidence of change, and they did. Francis Chan said, *“I didn't do that. It was the Holy Spirit.”*

Even if your father is a well-known, effective communicator, you still need the Holy Spirit within you to make a difference.

No number of sermons can change your life; only God's Spirit can. So, go beyond just listening to sermons in church, invite God's Spirit to dwell within you.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”*

When the Holy Spirit lies within you, your past doesn't have to define you anymore, and your challenges are easily overcome.

The Holy Spirit changes you from the inside out, so the light of your life shines brightly in a dark world.

In that way, you'll be ready to meet Jesus, your Bridegroom, when He comes.

If you want to participate in the great wedding feast to come, stay close to the bride, bring your lamp and some oil, then watch and wait for your Bridegroom.

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Conclusion

Anticipate Jesus' coming at any time. Look forward to Christ's return at a day or hour you don't know.

Matthew 25:13, *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."*

We are waiting for Jesus, Who has delayed His coming now for over 2,000 years. But there's coming a day when our waiting will pay off and we'll see Him! Perhaps the party starts today!

When America went to war after Pearl Harbor, many couples married rapidly as men were drafted into the armed services.

During this time, a young man proposed to a young woman, but he shipped out with the Navy before they could have a wedding.

They had to wait until he had enough leave to come home. In the meantime, she and her mother planned the wedding down to the last detail. They even printed the wedding invitations but left the date off.

Finally, after eighteen long months, they received a telegram which said, *"You should get the white dress you've been wanting."*

The groom was on his way home on leave, so the mother and daughter added the wedding date on the invitations by hand and sent them off.

We don't know the day, but we do know Jesus is coming any day now. Are you ready? Whatever you do, don't miss the wedding!