

Matthew 25-26

The Final Evening

March 24, 2024

HPC Trinity Class

Parable of the Ten Virgins (MT 25:1-13)

The scene Matthew gives us in this parable would fit a typical wedding in the Near East of Jesus' time:

1. Groom leaves home (his parents' home) along with some close friends and family.
2. They walk to the bride's family home, where a number of ceremonies are held.
 - One of these is the negotiation of the bride's dowery. The father of the groom haggles down the price, but the bride's father insists that he is losing an able-bodied worker from his family by allowing her to marry.
 - Finally, the marriage itself takes place.
3. The bridesmaids (the ten virgins in our case) are no longer needed in assisting the bride so they travel to the groom's house where the serious partying will soon begin. **[This is where Jesus' story picks up.]**
4. At nightfall the rest of the wedding party walks in a procession through the streets to the groom's home to celebrate. Everyone in this parade has his/her own torch or oil lamp, plus extra oil just in case of delays. It would be assumed that anyone without some kind of torch is a party crasher or a thief.

However, the groom's group is long in coming, and as a result the bridesmaids have all fallen asleep. Suddenly, "Here they come!"

[READ MT 25:6-13]

The foolish virgins had not prepared. All are presumed to now be outside running to meet the bride and groom with oil lamps held high in tribute. Yet those who did not prepare are not rejoicing and are left in the darkness when the door slams. They had assumed that if all went well they could skim by with just the oil in their lamps.

Matthew Henry, the British theologian of 300 years ago, gave an apt comparison in identifying the "oil" with "grace." The foolish virgins saw the need for "oil" only when it was too late. Now that the groom (Jesus) has arrived they are unprepared.

Do you know someone close to you who lives only for today and is unprepared?



The Kingdom of Heaven is often compared to the joy of a wedding feast. Scholars have long tried to allegorize this parable of Jesus' as follows:

- Bridegroom coming = Son of Man coming
- Ten virgins = the hopeful Christian community
- The delay = the delay of the Parousia
- Rejection of the foolish virgins = final judgement.

However, we need to grab the point of the story: Christians should stop trying to predict the return of Christ. Those who are not prepared will miss the glorious celebration that is planned. "The plot turns on the bridegroom's delay. The foolish virgins do not *forget* to bring oil; rather the delay of the bridegroom shows they did not bring enough."¹ The foolish virgins were unprepared and were therefore shut out in the end. It is the bridegroom's delay that distinguished the wise from the foolish.

Parable of the Talents [READ MT 25:14-19]. Similar to Luke's parable of the ten minas.

Slaves in ancient times often shared considerable responsibilities of their masters. In this case the three slaves were being treated like business partners for the master's good, though they would expect to share somewhat in any profits.

The point of this parable is that even though the date of Christ's return is not known, one's salvation hinges on more than simply "playing it safe," and doing little or nothing to further God's kingdom. Some people have few gifts, as in the third servant's case, but what few gifts one might have are lost if not used.

The "Parable" of the Sheep and Goats is unique to MT. [READ MT 25:31-33]

In the Middle East shepherds would mingle their sheep and goats together during the day but separate them at night. (Sheep can tolerate cooler climates but goats need to be herded together for warmth.)

Jesus does not explicitly say he is "the Son of Man" but it is strongly inferred. Here this title is also used synonymously with God's Jewish name, Yahweh.

vs. 32—"he (God) will separate them." The word "them" is masculine and therefore refers to individuals, not to nations which is neuter.

- The "sheep" seem surprised when being praised for looking out for the needy.



¹ Carson citing J.M. Sherriff, pg. 512.

- After accepting Christ and his love of all people, the “sheep” had ingrained it within themselves to unconsciously serve others.
- The “goats” are cursed and damned by Jesus because they behaved the opposite way of the “sheep.”
 - Though the “goats” give the same reply as the “sheep,” God views their indifference to the helpless and poor as a personal affront.
 - As one commentator puts it, “The judgement is an indictment of the church for its lack of social involvement as Kingdom members.”² The blind church-going “goats” were unable to comprehend.

The goats were doomed –not because they prayed less fervently or because they were not kind to one another. Theirs was a sin of omission. With one hand they praised God but with the other they ignored Him. “All that needs to happen for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing!”³

(Remember the legend of Martin of Tours)



The Plot Against Jesus (MT 26:1-2) Jesus gathers his disciples on the Mount of Olives late Tuesday before Passover began, which by Jewish reckoning was early Wednesday.⁴

v. 3---this meeting of “chief priests and the elders of the people” probably consisted of the clerical and lay leaders of the Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas was the high priest at this time according to MT and JN. **BUT** Luke’s gospel says that the high priest was Annas. And yet Annas had been deposed by the Roman government in 15 A.D. and was replaced by Caiaphas, his son in law. **So, which is true?**

Jesus is Anointed at Bethany

(Note: from this point onward the Book of MT follows that of MK quite closely.)

- v. 6---Jerusalem was very crowded now because of the Passover celebration. Bethany offered Jesus a chance to avoid this hubbub, being a short five miles away. Simon must have already been cured of leprosy by now, otherwise all present would have been considered unclean.
- v. 7---Anointing the head of a distinguished guest, especially a rabbi, was not uncommon. The purpose here, though, was to “prepare me for burial.” (v.12)
- v. 8---It’s the cost of the perfume that irked the disciples...including Judas, per John’s gospel (12:4-5).

What are your thoughts: Sell it and give money to the poor.....

OR.....

pour it onto Jesus’ head??

² Augsburg, pg. 283.

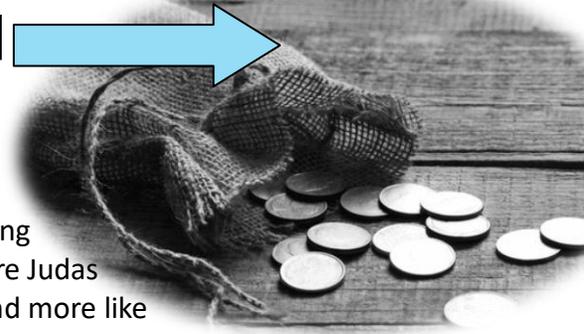
³ Ibid., pg. 284.

⁴ Remember, a day on the Jewish calendar ends at sunset.

So our Tuesday early evening would have been a Jew’s Wednesday morning.



Alabaster perfume jar from Middle East, 800 B.C.-550 B.C.



Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

[READ MT 26:14-16]

None of the Gospels tell us of Judas' motives in betraying his leader. It may have been scenes like we just read, where Judas feels that "Jesus was acting less and less regal and more and more like a defeatist on his way to death."⁵

The Temple's chief priests "counted out for him thirty pieces of silver." The literal Greek translation is "they weighed out" (*estēsan*) the silver.

What did we recently learn about ancient silver coins?

The Lord's Supper [READ MT 26:17-19]

This final meal together was probably eaten Thursday evening⁶ because that year's Passover feast fell on a Sabbath (Saturday). Thus, to avoid working in the kitchen on the Sabbath the celebratory meal was held Thursday.⁷

v. 22—all of the disciples around the table said, "Surely, not I Lord?" But Judas' question ended with "rabbi," not "Lord."



v. 23—"The one who has dipped his hand" is a bit misleading. The Greek verb tense used here implies that one person is being singled out, while in fact, all present probably used the same bowl.

- Mark's version in MK 14:20—"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me," is better because it implies that the guilty party is simply one of many in the group. (In English-language Bibles the distinction between the two is not evident.)

vs. 23-25—The betrayal topic must have been somewhat hushed and private between Judas and Jesus. Otherwise, one must wonder why the other eleven disciples didn't immediately dispose of the traitor in their midst.

[READ MT 26:26-29] This is known as the Words of Institution or the Words of Consecration. Take note: this sacrament was done during the meal, as they ate.

⁵ Carson, pg. 528.

⁶ Traditionally, the Sedar meal of Passover was/is eaten on as the evening meal on either Nisan 14 or 15. (In 2024 that's April 22 and 23 on our Gregorian calendar.) A number of calendars were in use at that time (lunar, solar, Pharisaic, Galilean, et. al.) making it difficult to pinpoint days and dates precisely.

⁷ Augsburgers citing Joachim Jeremias' *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 1964.

Hear now the words of the Apostle Paul as he corrects the church in Corinth:

[READ 1 COR. 11:23-26]

At these early communions the wealthy of Corinth were hogging the banquet food and drink which was meant to be shared by all, rich and poor. Thus, Paul emphasized the true meaning of the Last Supper of our Lord: one loaf and one cup is to be shared by all who believe.



vs. 29-30--Traditional Passover dinner ceremonies included four cups of wine, which were spaced throughout the meal. Jesus almost certainly spoke the words in v. 29 as the fourth cup was served. This would be followed by the singing of the last part of the *Hallel*, which put various parts of the Psalms to music. It would have been sung antiphonally with Jesus, as the person of honor, leading the singing.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial [READ MT 26:31-35]

v. 34-35---The Roman soldiers stationed here gave the slang term “cock-crow” to the watch from midnight until 3:00 a.m. Apparently, it was usual for roosters in Palestine to consistently crow between those hours.⁸

Peter, always wanting to please, puts on a heroic face. Not wanting to be left out, the other disciple echo their firm pledge to Jesus.



Gethsemane (Hebrew/Aramaic combo: “oil press”) **[READ MT 26:36-39]**

Previously, Jesus and his followers often came to this olive garden (JN 18:1-2). It was on the western slope of Mount Olivet. Directly across from it was Jerusalem, but the nasty Kidron Valley lay in-between.

Jesus was now in spiritual and mental anguish. Faced with certain death he prays three separate times. Peter, James, and John accompany him, leaving the other disciples, but they are of little use, constantly falling asleep---(We probably would, too, after a full meal and four cups of wine!). Jesus could no doubt see the party of Roman guards, Temple police, and Jewish religious leaders crossing the Kidron Valley with torches.⁹

Jesus Arrested [READ MT 26:47-51]

Judas, the betrayer, arrived with armed men by his side¹⁰. It was now dark, and the officials needed to make sure they had the right man, so they arranged a signal.

- Judas followed the plan and gave the signal as to whom they were to arrest: “Greetings (or “hail”) Rabbi” was spoken loudly, followed by a kiss.¹¹
(A common greeting among men was a kiss on the cheek.)

⁸ Carson citing Hans Kosmala in *Annual of Swedish Institute (1963)*,pg. 542.

⁹ Some scholars claim there is no evidence of Roman soldiers being present, but John 18:3 and 12 suggest otherwise.

¹⁰ Roman troops would have swords; Jewish police would have wooden clubs.

¹¹ “Friend” is an open-hearted greeting but is not intimate. Notice that “Rabbi” is still Judas’ greeting—not “Lord.” This is an insult.

- v. 51---“one of Jesus’ companions” is not revealed here or in any Gospel until John’s, which was written at least a decade after Matthew’s version.
- v. 53—“more than twelve legions of angels” would be 72,000 angels.
- v. 55—One can almost picture Jesus throwing up his hands in mockery when he says this. After all, he had been in plain sight for at least the last week and no authority had even questioned him.

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin [READ MT 26:57-64]

- The Roman government, not the Sanhedrin alone, could impose the death penalty (JN 18:31). “On the face of it, John’s account is more historically reliable, whereas the Synoptics are more seriously tainted by later church-synagogue tensions. In short, anti-Semitism has colored their narratives.”¹²
 - Two witnesses were required before evidence could be admitted (v.60b-61).
- v. 59---Based on the imperfect tense of speech, the Sanhedrin had been trying to gain evidence against Jesus for some time.
 - “the whole Sanhedrin” does not mean all seventy members; it took a mere twenty-three to make a quorum, which would have been enough to convict.
 - “...the Sanhedrin, already convinced of Jesus’ guilt, went through the motions of securing evidence against him.”¹³
- v. 60---at least two witnesses were necessary to convict in capital (death penalty) cases.
- v. 63---Caiaphas, the high priest, orders Jesus to respond to questions “by the living God.” According to the Mishna (the written collection of oral tradition of the Jewish civil and ceremonial Law) all are bound to answer this famous Oath of Testimony of the Hebrew Constitution.¹⁴

[READ MT 26:65-68]

- v. 65---“the high priest tore his clothes.” Rending (ripping) garments was a required act for any judge who found someone guilty of blasphemy. (The definition of “blasphemy” differed over the years.)
- v. 66---The verdict of death was not unexpected; blasphemy was a capital offense in ancient Judaism.
- vs. 67-68---“Prophecy” as used here does not mean simply fortune telling. Rather, it implies someone who can reveal hidden knowledge—“Tell us who hit you!” In Mark’s version we are told that Jesus was blindfolded (MK 14:65), and a tormentor with this demand makes more sense.

Peter Disowns Jesus three times.

[READ MT 26:69-75]

¹² Carson, pg. 549.

¹³ Ibid., pg. 553.

¹⁴ Augsburg, pg. 301.

Peter denied Jesus in all three modes that Jews used when giving solemn statements, each more affirming than the last:

1. To the servant girl he simply **denies** being with Jesus;
2. When he tried slipping out the gateway he **denied with an oath** with several people present;
3. Finally, others approached and questioned Peter knowing that he was from elsewhere (Galilee), and they suspected his acquaintance with Jesus. Now Peter **invokes curses and swears** that he did not know him.....

then he remembers.....



"And he went outside and wept bitterly."

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