

Earthly Stories, Heavenly Meanings: The Wedding

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, February 1, 2009

We're continuing this week in our series, "Earthly Stories, Heavenly Meanings" with a look at a parable in the book of Luke. Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 12, verses 35-40, please?

Luke is the third book in the New Testament, so the order goes Matthew, Mark, **Luke**, and then John. Luke was a doctor who wrote his Gospel based on conversations and 'interviews' he had with the disciples, family and friends of Jesus. Luke was not a disciple, but talked to them: "Hey, Peter, tell me again about that time you walked on water to meet Jesus." "Mary, tell me about the angel coming to you and telling you that you were going to have a baby." "Matthew, what were your thoughts about Judas the first time you met him?" After doing extensive research and pulling together all his information, he wrote this Gospel and followed it up with the book of Acts.

Again, we are going to Luke 12: 35-40. Jesus is speaking and He says, "*Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.*"

First, let's follow our pattern with this series and look at the 'earthly story' part of it.

The servants needed to be ready for the groom and his new bride to come, so they wouldn't keep them waiting at the door! *So that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.*

This is the first earthly part of the story that all the hearers of the time would understand and 'get.' Maybe there would even come to mind for some of the people a couple of times when they were at a party where the servants had not been ready when the party had started. Can you imagine a few chuckles here and there among the crowd, maybe an elbow or wink at someone who was the guest of honor at a party and had that happen to him, or was one of the servants in a wedding party that wasn't ready? You can almost see Jesus turning to look at someone with a smile on His face as He told this part of the parable, as if to say, "You know what it's like to be locked out of your own party because your friends weren't ready for you and your bride!"

But there's more. We've been saying that as an earthly story, a parable has something people can relate to and understand – like what we've seen so far – but often has a 'twist' that takes the hearer off-guard and makes sure the parable will really stick with him or her. There is a twist in this parable, too. The twist is that after the groom came, he served the servants! *He will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.* In Jewish weddings, the bride was treated like a queen and the groom like a king; so you would not expect the "king" to serve his staff, but that's what happened here, and that's something that would have stuck in the minds of the people – the 'king' served the servants.

So that's the earthly story. What's the heavenly meaning and the application?

In the margins of your Bibles you can write, "Jesus = Bridegroom." Jesus is the bridegroom who is coming. You can also write, "servant = me", and "coming = 2nd coming."

Jesus is coming back, but no one knows when. In fact, I did a quick search on-line, and found one site that documents over 200 second coming or end of the world predictions, most of them already in the past, but there are a few that remain predicted for the future. Some dates include May 21, 2011, December 12, 2012 and at some unknown date in 2016. If those dates are a little too soon for you, there are others that are farther out. One group has determined that the end of the world will take place sometime during the year 2034, while another has determined it will take place at 3:28am, Great Britain time, on September 14, 2047.

Here's the first point, the first "Heavenly Meaning" of what Jesus said in the parable we're looking at today – we don't know when He's coming back. In fact, you can write Matthew 24:36, 42 in the margins of your Bible, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...*" and "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*" It's not a question of whether or not He's coming – that's a given, He's coming back. The question is when is He coming, and we *are* given the answer to that – we don't know!

So what are we to do in the meantime? Keep watch, be ready. *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.* The second watch was from 9pm to midnight, and the third watch was from midnight to 3am. The point is that no matter what happens or when, we need to be ready for the Kingdom of God to come crashing into our world a second, unmistakable time.

To "watch" means to be alert, to be ready, not to be caught by surprise. That is the attitude we must have toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will be like that of a thief in the night: unannounced and unexpected. It's not something we have to fear though. You can write 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 in the margins of your Bible: *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains*

come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why don't we have to fear it? Because those who believe in Jesus as their only Lord and Savior are going to be in Heaven on the last day. This 'thief' that will come in the night will be coming to steal us away, and take us Home with Him.

Let's go back to our parable and take a look at the second point, the second "Heavenly Meaning." In the parable the bridegroom came to the party, and started serving those who had been waiting and watching. If Jesus is the bridegroom, and we are the ones waiting and watching, then how did and does He serve us? And what's the party that's being talked about?

Mark 10:45: *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

He served us by giving His life on the cross for us.

Luke 24:7 *'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*

He served us by rising to life to show God's approval of His sacrifice on our behalf.

John 14:1-2, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."*

He serves us by going to heaven ahead of us to prepare our eternal homes.

John 14:3, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

He serves us by coming back for us; by being our bridegroom to come and get us and take us to the 'party.'

Will we be ready?

Will we be ready when He comes?

If we knew Jesus was coming in an hour, what would we do? What would we quickly clean out of our homes? Who would we call and what would we say? What would we start praying?

Why aren't we doing those things now? *You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.*

Would we be ecstatic, happy, jumping up and down in expectation, or would we be fearful, wondering if we're going to 'make it' into Heaven, hoping against hope that we are one of the ones Jesus takes with Him?

I have a sneaking suspicion that most of the world would fall into four categories:

1. Those who think they will get into Heaven because they've 'been good.' God says "No" to this idea. Isaiah 64:6 says all our good deeds are like a filthy, bloody rag used by a lady each month of her cycle.
2. Those who think they will not get into Heaven because they've not been good enough. To this God says in Ephesians 2:8-9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.*
3. Those who know they will not get into Heaven because they did not believe Jesus was the only hope of Salvation, and ignored His words in John 14:6, *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father {that is, no one gets to Heaven} except through Me."*
4. Those who understand all the above three points, and simply believe that because they cannot earn Heaven on their own, Jesus earned it for them. They have submitted themselves to the Lordship and authority of Jesus.

The earthly story is a wedding, and the Heavenly Meaning is an eternal life in Heaven with Jesus. Heaven is a party? You bet. Let's be ready to go at a moment's notice.

Amen.