

jesus parables of the kingdom

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

1. ...these parables are about a judgment pronounced on a world from which God, through all its history, was effectively *absent* or to put it more carefully, was present in a way so mysterious as to constitute, for all practical purposes, an absence. And therefore, insofar as they address themselves to humanity's response to that hidden God - and to that God's judgment of the response - they are not about practical good works. They do not make moral behavior or spiritual achievement the matter of judgment; rather, they base the judgment solely on faith or unfaith in the mystery of the age-long presence-in-absence - the abiding *parousia* under history - of the divine redemption.
2. "If he has already done it all for me already, why shouldn't I live as if I trusted him?" If he has made me a member of the Wedding of the Lamb why shouldn't I act as if I am at the party?
3. Quietism, you see - do-nothingism - is not a viable option. And it is not viable for one simple reason: Jesus' reconciled version of all relationships is the only version that really counts - the only one that in the end will be real at all.
4. "Since he has already made me new - since there really isn't any of the old me around to get in my way any more - why should I be so stupid as to try to go on living in terms of something that isn't even there?" Faith, you see, is simply taking his word about what really is and trying our best to get all the unreal nonsense out of our lives.
5. Sin is not something the human race has any choice about. The occasional sin (small s), we might manage to stop: some of us might possibly avoid this lie or that adultery. But none of us will ever avoid that trust in ourselves - and that distrust of anyone else - that lies at the root of the world's problems. Those twin falsities of faith in self and unfaith in others are as irremovable by human effort as they are unpardonable by human good will. And therefore if they are ever to be removed or pardoned, it will only be by God's gift. But that gift, please note, stands in no *causal* relationship whatsoever to our responses. It will neither force us to be better nor enable us to go on being worse. It is simply a fact, to be trusted or not as we choose.

6. But the point of the story - the point that ultimately makes wisdom of their apparent folly - is that, in this world, something always does go wrong.
7. Why he [God] couldn't have figured out a way of getting rid of sin without creating more sinners in the process is a big question. And the big answer is that there is no answer. No answer except Job's, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." No answer except Jesus', "Take this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."
8. For that is the whole point of the parable: some day, late or soon, it will be too late even to believe. We become what we do. If we trust, we become trusters, and we enter into the sure possession of him whom we trust. If we distrust, we become distrusters and close out the only relationship with reality ever offered to us.
9. For the world God sees in his only begotten Son consists of all those who have accepted their visibility in Jesus by faith. But those who have not accepted it, those who have pretended to make themselves invisible by their rejection of his acceptance of them, have the sentence of their self-chosen invisibility ratified by God.
10. When all is said and done - when we have scared ourselves silly with the now-or-never urgency of faith and the once-and-always finality of judgment - we need to take a deep breath and let it out with a laugh. Because what we are watching for is a party. And that party is not just down the street making up its mind when to come to us. It is already hiding in our basement, banging on our steam pipes, and laughing its way up our cellar stairs. The unknown day and hour of its finally bursting into the kitchen and roistering its way through the whole house is not dreadful; it is all part of the divine lark of grace. God is not our mother-in-law, coming to see whether her wedding-present china has been chipped. He is a funny Old Uncle with a salami under one arm and a bottle of wine under the other. We do indeed need to watch for him; but only because it would be such a pity to miss all the fun.