



THE 10 GIRLFRIENDS

Well, as we've already said (and you should already know!), it's Mother's Day today. And I'm sure you've picked up on the fact that this is also Women's History Month: a celebration of the importance of women to our society, both today, and down through the ages. So, it seems kind of appropriate that the parable we're going to look at today is a story in which women play a pretty important role.

What's the story? It's the Parable of the 10 Bridesmaids.

Or alternatively, the Mysterious Story of the 10 Girlfriends.

Matthew 25:1-13

In the Judaism of Jesus' day, almost everything was about men. It took 10 Jewish men to make up a quorum, the minimum number for a synagogue service to take place. It took 10 Jewish men to make it possible for the community to celebrate Passover. It took 10 Jewish men to be present at a wedding for a marriage to be legal. And yet here we're told, "The Kingdom of Heaven will be like . . . 10 women."

I bet the disciples' jaws were on the floor!

What is Jesus doing here? In part, He's redressing a male-dominated imbalance that was rife in His day. Throughout His life, He did what no other Rabbi would have dreamed of doing: He talked with women, hung around with women, chose women to be disciples (to the point where Mary

Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection). And here He uses 10 women as a picture of the church.

However, important though that is, it's not what the parable is actually about. It's about the need to be ready – for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

And we're told 3 things about this Kingdom:

1) There's A Groom To Greet (vs1-5). Jesus uses a wedding as an illustration of what the Kingdom of God is like - which kind of makes sense, as a wedding is a celebration of love, of unity, of new beginnings.

So, what's going on in this story? Well, back in ancient Israel, wedding preparations would begin with the boy visiting the home of his sweetheart, asking for her hand in marriage, and paying a *mohar* or dowry to her father. Then the boy would head off to build a house for his bride, while the girl got ready to leave her family and start a new life with her husband. But (and this is very important): she had no idea when he was coming back! So, every night she would get together with her bridesmaids, just in case.

Now obviously, the whole thing is a picture:

- **The bridegroom** = the Messiah, Jesus Himself.
- **The bride and bridesmaids** = the Church, and us.
- **The betrothal** = the 1st coming of Jesus.
- **The wedding** = the 2nd coming of Jesus.

And where are we? Somewhere between the betrothal and the wedding, and wondering where the Groom has got to!

But the main point is: that Groom is coming!

2) There's A Lamp To Light (vs6-9). Each of these bridesmaids has a lamp in their possession. And when the bridegroom shows up, they rush to light their lamps so that they can lead the way to the wedding ceremony.

Only, 5 of them are a little less prepared than the others.

Now, every one of us is born into this world with a lamp, i.e. every one of us is born with a job to do, and the potential to do it. The potential to produce warmth and light and comfort to a cold, dark, and harsh world. And, of course, one lamp can be used to light another, which is an interesting thought. But a lamp is useless without one crucial and critical element: oil. Every lamp needs oil, the same as every candle needs wax and every lightbulb needs electricity. We might have the most beautiful, ornate lamp in the world, but without oil, it's useless.

In the same way, we all need the Spirit, the holy presence of God, in our lives. Because without Him, we cannot be the people we have the potential to be. Now some people will reject that, end of, but others will think to themselves, "I'll leave it 'til later. No rush." Which according to Jesus is actually just as foolish.

Because we need Him. Need Him here. Need Him *now*.

3) There's A Gate To Go Through (vs10-12). In the story, the 5 wise girlfriends start to light their lamps, and the 5 foolish ones head off into the night to find some oil. And while they're gone, the bridegroom arrives, with all his friends! And the wise girlfriends escort the bride and groom to their home. The *chuppah* or canopy is set up; the ceremony takes place; the couple go into the bedroom and 'make things legal' (and by that I don't mean sign the books!); and then everyone begins to party!

With the exception of the 5 foolish girlfriends.

Because by the time they get there, the door ... is ... shut.

And this is the shock-ending to the parable of the 10 bridesmaids: not everyone will be attending that wedding. We can have a lamp, we can be a friend of the Bride, we can even be a part of the bridal party, and still miss out on the wedding. Because we need to be friends with the Groom! And unless we put our trust in Jesus – unless we know Him and He knows us – we will miss out on this incredible eternity that Jesus offers to every single one of us.

Because the door is open to everyone.

But not forever.

The Moral Of The Story ...

"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" Jesus says (vs13). And by that He doesn't mean spend all your time watching for signs – He means get out there and live for Him. Make a difference!

Now Jesus told this parable while sitting on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. And His audience – His *only* audience – was? His disciples. So why did He tell them this story? Because one of them was not what he appeared to be. Judas was *not* going to the wedding. And Jesus, in this parable, is pleading with Judas not to do what he is about to do. He's saying, "Judas, I still love you. Don't do this!"

In fact, this parable may be a 'heads-up' to all of us:

- Are we wise or foolish? Are we focused on the things of God, or are we distracted by other priorities?
- Are we stocked up on oil? Are we filled with the reality and vitality of the Spirit, and shining for Him?
- Are we ready for the Groom? Not just ready for Jesus to return, but to live for Him in the meantime?

That is the Mysterious Story of the 10 Girlfriends. Are you wise? Stocked up? Are you ready?