

**Group Notes 6 November 2011**  
***Keep me burning (from services at 8am and 6.30pm)***

**Welcome - Ice Breaker**

Have you been to any weddings? Is there one that stands out in your memory?

**Word – Matthew 25:1-13**

My daughter Saara just got married to Tom. A huge amount of planning went into it – the dress, shoes, hair, flowers, cake, car, church, photos, invitation list, reception... Saara and Tom wanted it to be a really special so that's why they put over a year of preparation into it. But imagine if any of it had not been ready! If the dress wasn't ready... or the food hadn't been cooked... or the church was closed for maintenance... Sometimes the more you put into something the harder it is if everything doesn't go right (fortunately Saara's wedding went very smoothly and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves).

The bridesmaids in our story had a very important job – to light the place up. After all, there was no electricity, so their lamps were vital, especially with the bridegroom arriving at midnight. There could be no excuses for the foolish ones messing about and not being ready. We are all individually responsible as disciples to be ready.

**Question 1:**

- **Were the wise bridesmaids being cruel not to share their oil?**

Jesus loves weddings! He performed his first miracle at one when He turned water into wine and he often referred to them in his parables. But more than that, Jesus is engaged to his bride the church and it's been a very long engagement, two thousand years so far. He refers to Himself in the Scriptures as "the Bridegroom", eg Matthew 9:15. He can't wait for the day to arrive, for love to conquer all, and for all that He has longed for for His bride to come to fruition. There's going to be the best party ever when He finally comes – the bridegroom arrives at midnight... But suppose He comes and finds that we're not ready?

**Question 2:**

- **How helpful to you is marriage as a picture of our relationship with God?**

How are we supposed to be ready for the Jesus? With an ordinary wedding we can look at external things – "are my shoes clean, have the flowers arrived yet, is my hair tidy?" But to be ready for Jesus we have to look not on the outside but the inside: what's in our heart. Any suggestions? Could the parable's picture of a supply of oil and a brightly shining lamp give us any clues? Here are some ideas people came up with on Sunday:

- Holiness – pure and shining like the light of the lamp
- Witness – Jesus told us to be the light of the world
- Focus – we don't mess about with secondary matters like the five foolish bridesmaids and forget what we're really here for
- Our relationship with God, so that His light burns in us. We can help maintain this by Bible reading and prayer. The words of the Bridegroom are "I don't know you" – "that relationship just isn't there, is it?"
- Love – that was the most important thing for Saara and Tom's wedding. Imagine what a sham it would be to have all the exterior things perfect but for the bride and groom not to love each other. Our love for Him is the most important part of being ready for Jesus' wedding too!

**Question 3:**

- **Which of these do you think is the most important? Are there other ways to be ready for Jesus?**

In fact all these ways connect to the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It's hardly surprising that both the oil that the bridesmaids needed for their lamps and the flame that burned in the lamps are symbols for the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit is the One who lives in our hearts and grows the fruit of holiness in our lives
- The Spirit certainly empowered the early church to be witnesses and can do the same for us now!
- The Spirit is our connection to the life of God, living within us, so He is at the heart of our relationship with God
- The Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts (Romans 5:5)

So part of being ready is to be filled with the Spirit.

#### **Question 4:**

- **Do you think oil is a good symbol for the Spirit? In what way?**
- **What about flame?**

Don't forget though that we will never be as ready to receive Jesus as He is ready to receive us. Our love for Him will never burn as powerfully as His infinite love burns for us. The best of our readiness comes not through our own efforts to reform ourselves but through His grace working in our lives.

#### **Question 5:**

- **So where are you with all this? If Jesus returned tonight, would He find you ready?**
- **What might He want to change?**

#### **Worship ideas for groups with no musicians.**

Something with candles would be good tonight in view of the lamps the bridesmaids had. Can you each light a tea light or small candle and put it in front of a cross. Write out some one sentence prayers beforehand and give them out for people to pray, eg:

- *Lord, help us shine brightly for you*
- *Lord, refuel us with the oil of your Spirit*
- *Lord, renew our first love for you*
- *Lord, help us witness to the Light of the world*
- *Lord, grow the fruit of holiness in our lives...*

#### **Works/witness.**

Christmas is coming up soon and there are special opportunities for us. Could anyone in your group:

- Help distribute our Christmas flyers and posters?
- Have a Christmas party and invite friends?
- Invite friends or family to our Christmas events?