

2. The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13
The Parables of Jesus

Warm-up Question: Have you ever found yourself locked out of your car, house, etc.? If not, can you think of a time when you felt “left out” in any situation? Briefly share your experience.

Jesus had a way of telling stories or parables that captivated hearts and shook people to the core of their being, especially when He turned the story around and applied it to those who were listening. He did this with Simon the Pharisee after Simon criticized Jesus for allowing a prostitute to weep over His feet and wipe them with her hair (Luke 7:41-43). Christ’s parables revealed the hearts of His listeners. Regardless of class or gender, His words would reach them, even the self-righteous and those who thought they were okay with their religiosity. The Lord would paint a picture with His words and cause the listeners to conclude, and then reveal to them that they were a part of the story! This would cause people to see themselves in a new light.

The prophets of the Old Testament spoke in a similar way. The Lord would give listeners stories or analogies to illustrate a point and provoke them to form an opinion. For example, the prophet Nathan did this to King David with his account of the little ewe lamb beloved by its master that was stolen (2 Samuel 12:1-10). The story made David see his life from God's perspective. The Lord did the same to Jonah with the story of the gourd. God showed Jonah that the prophet cared more for a gourd that sprang from the ground than the people that God wanted to reach with a message of warning (Jonah 4:5-11). Jonah was offended because God chose to show mercy to this Gentile city of Nineveh! □

I am sure we all think that we would never be offended if God chose to extend mercy to someone. But wait a minute. Have you ever wanted to see someone get “what is coming to him?” You see, when God shines the light into the recesses of our hearts, we are often surprised at what comes to light. He does this because of His great mercy for us. In the story that we are about to consider, He wants to speak to each of us and wants us to think where we see ourselves in this story. This parable focuses on the continued readiness of all believers for the coming of the Bridegroom and the advent of eternity. □

¹“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ ¹²“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ ¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew

25:1-13).

Middle Eastern Weddings (v. 1)

First of all, we need to look at the context of this parable. Jesus had been talking to His disciples at some length about His return and when He will set up His kingdom and His marriage to His Bride (Matthew 24). Of course, there were no chapter divisions when Matthew wrote his gospel, so we should view this parable as being connected to the last chapter. It carries on with the theme of heart readiness and heart response at the time of His second coming. Remember that, in the previous parable we studied, *The Parable of the Wedding Feast*, Jesus talked about a man at the wedding feast without a wedding garment. These stories being told together are in a similar vein of thought. □

Marriage customs of the day were very different from what we are accustomed to in Western culture. This parable is a story about a typical wedding celebration in the Middle East. The bridegroom, along with his close friends, would make the trip to the bride's house where there would be festivities. A procession would follow this to the new home, where the couple would be the king and queen and celebrate for a week (Genesis 29:27). The bride's close friends were ten virgins or bridesmaids whose job it was to light up the way and welcome the bridegroom and his close friends to the house of the bride. They would then enter the wedding and celebrate with the bridegroom. The bridesmaids would know to go out and light up the way when they heard the sound of the bridegroom's friends calling out, "**Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!**" (v. 6).

The reader is to assume that the bridegroom is not from the same town as the bride, and therefore, the time he will arrive is uncertain. Whatever the time, though, the bridesmaids were to be ready. No mention is made of the bride in the parable; we are not to read too much into the detail. What the world sees as the Church, God sees as wise and foolish virgins waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom. What we should be doing while we are waiting is the focus of the passage. □

To show the way to the place of the wedding, the bridesmaids (virgins) were to trim their lamps as soon as they heard the call that the Bridegroom was near. To trim one's lamp was to cut off the burnt part of the wick so it would burn evenly again. Then, they would pull out more of the wick from the inside of the lamp causing the light to shine more brightly. Of course, this usually meant that one needed to pour more oil from the receptacles they carried (v. 4). They then welcomed the bridegroom and his friends and went to the wedding with them. Alfred Edersheim helps us get the picture: □

"The 'lamps,'—not 'torches'—which the Ten Virgins carried, were of well-known construction...they consisted of a round receptacle for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup of a deep saucer, which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, on which it was born aloft. According to Jewish authorities, it was the custom in the East to carry in a bridal procession about ten such lamps, ten being the

number required to be present at any office or ceremony, such as the benedictions accompanying the marriage-ceremony."¹

These lamps that the virgins brought were their own lamps. The emphasis of the parable is that particular attention and preparation should have been made by each of them to be ready for the bridegroom's coming. They were to prepare to be lights in the night that preceded the arrival of the bridegroom. Unfortunately, five of them were not expecting the bridegroom to come late into the night, and they did not prepare to face the darkness of the night so long. The way Jesus worded the parable indicated that he was prophesying that His coming would be a long time in waiting. "The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep" (Matthew 25:5).

Some say that the church needn't prepare for the night because the Lord will come for them before the darkness sets in. Would you say that the Church worldwide is ready for the darkness of nighttime? How should believers of today prepare for the onset of darkness?□

All ten virgins represent all those that profess to be believers, but only some have the light of life while others do not. Some people are empty lamp stands that do not bear the light of Christ's life. In any church, there are good actors and hypocrites. Among the band of disciples, Judas acted the part of a disciple, but he never truly repented—he was a hypocrite, an actor on the stage of life (John 12:4-6, John 6:70-71). Only those who have genuinely repented (turned around from sin) and received Christ and the provision of His Spirit are lights in the world (Matthew 5:14). "The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD that sheds light on one's inmost being" (Proverbs 20:27). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The five wise virgins represent true believers. The oil in their lamps represents the Holy Spirit living in them, and of course, no one can be a believer without having the Holy Spirit:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

All ten virgins fell asleep while waiting in the dark. We might not know everything that our enemy is planning as he increases the darkness over men's souls, but our part is to be ready, awake, watchful, and concentrate on being lights in the world to those around us. The darkness in our day has already incrementally descended to the point that many in our day are saying that those holding forth the light of God's truth are foolish. It is a prevailing thought that those who call themselves Christians are out of step with today's reality and that we should give up such ideas that Christ would ever come and set things right. Those who are spiritually awake are admonished by the world to "go back to sleep."

³Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Hendrickson Publishers, Page 788.

What are some of the elements that cause the Church to experience spiritual drowsiness?

The Five Wise Virgins

At the darkest point, at midnight (Matthew 25:6), when sleep was at its deepest, the suddenness of the call awakened them all with a start. They all heard the herald calling out that the bridegroom was coming. Quickly, they arose to meet him. Those who were wise and prepared put more of their oil in the lamps from the jars, which they had brought (v. 5). They then trimmed their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Let's now think on one of the most beautiful sentences in the Word of God. "**The bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut**" (Matthew 25:10). Yes, the Bridegroom will come. Those of you who have waited long and have remained faithful will hear the call to come to the wedding.

Four Important Thoughts from Verse 10:

1) The first thing we see is that there was an immediate entrance to the wedding upon the coming of the bridegroom. We are not listening to fables as we think upon that moment when we hear the call. Do not entertain any fallacies of purgatory to go through first. No, it will be instant upon His coming. Great shall be your joy if you are a believer. Your face shall light up as you behold His coming in the midst of the darkness of the earth. Those of you who are sick and dying, if death calls you before Christ comes, you shall awaken and go first before those who are still alive and remain on the earth on that day. □

¹³Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** ¹⁵According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, **will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.** ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷**After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so **we will be with the Lord forever.** ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Those of you that have already lost a loved one that is in Christ to the sleep of death, rest assured that if he or she died in Christ, they are already with Christ in glory:

We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:23).

Their body may be buried or even burned, but their spirits will return with the Bridegroom when He comes. Those who are separated from their bodies will put on a new glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) at His coming and join all believers at the gathering in Heaven's banquet room. The Bible says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). There is no interval between His coming and the entrance to the wedding ceremony. Those who were unwise and had gone to buy more oil were surprised that the door was already shut. □

2) Secondly, notice that their entrance into the wedding was most intimate for it was *with Him*. What a glorious thought that Jesus the Bridegroom will take us by the hand and lead us into the presence of His Father and the marriage celebration. At the coming of Christ, we will be united with Him forever in a covenant of marriage. □

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2).

What glorious robes we will be wearing on that day! We will be changed into His image and show forth His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Can there be anything more glorious than to look into His beautiful face as He pronounces His everlasting love to us? □

⁷“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.) (Revelation 19:7-8).

What is it about heaven and eternity that appeals to you the most?

We shall be with Him forever. No one shall speak a word against us on that day, and there will be no one to accuse us before the Father because all sin has been forgiven and is under His blood. Divine justice has been fully met at the cross with Christ's substitutionary death for us. They that were ready went *with Him* into the wedding banquet.

3) I want to point out how joyous will be the entrance. This entrance into the wedding hall will not be as witnesses to His marriage; we are to be married *to Him*. Not a wedding on earth; this is a wedding *in heaven*. This celebration will be many times more glorious than any marriage you have ever seen, and I remind you again, if you are a believer in Christ, you are the bride! You will one day hear Him speak His eternal vows of marriage over you. At the moment, on this side of heaven, we are only espoused or promised in marriage as Paul explained in the passage above to the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 11:2). When the Bridegroom comes, then will be the wedding. Next time you go to a wedding on earth, you can view it as a dim view, a foreshadowing of that day when He comes for you to lead you up the aisle. They that were ready went in with Him into the wedding banquet. There will be no evil, no temptation. There will be no more tears, for it is said of the Son of God, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, mourning or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). □

4) There is one more thought that I cannot pass by. It is that the door is shut. This closure of the door symbolizes that our experience of this new order of things is eternal. That which God has been doing in your life has been but a preparation for that day, but when that day comes, it will be eternal, and pleasing to know that we are shut in with Christ (Matthew 25:10). None are naturally ready for the joys of heaven; no man or woman can ever be good enough. There must be a bestowing, a divine transfusion, of the life of God into your spirit. Each one has to change within. Jesus said, “**You must be born again,**” or born from above (John 3:3). The Greek word translated *again* in that sentence, also means “*from above*.” When we sincerely repent (turnaround from our sin toward obedience to the Lord Jesus) and receive the gift of God, which is eternal life in Christ, from that point on our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 21:27). As much as it is painful for those outside, it is pure joy for those of us, who by God’s grace alone, is inside the door at the wedding.

The Mistakes of the Five Foolish Virgins

[What were the mistakes that the foolish virgins made? How does this apply to the world we live in today?](#)

When I was a young Christian, God intervened to save my life when I fell overboard from my father’s fishing boat. In our net that day, we had caught at least two or three tons of fish, and to bring them aboard; we had to maneuver the boat in such a way to bring the net to the side of the boat. This meant that my father had to reverse the engine. As the boat went forward, I was to pin the net under the transom stern rail at the back end of the boat. As the net tightened, it caught me and pulled me over the rear of the boat, where my father could not see me. □

It was winter, and the shock of the cold hit me hard. I had long boots on that went to my thighs. They quickly filled up with water and started dragging me down. On top of that, my father did not realize I was down there and was now going in reverse, sucking my body down towards the propeller. I grabbed hold of the net and started panicking pulling down all the loose net into the water. Of course, all this happened so quickly as I stared death in the face.

Thankfully, one of the other boats nearby saw what had happened and radioed my father to put the engine into neutral. He dashed to the back of the boat, put his feet on the loose net, and looking down at me in the water, said, “What on earth are you doing down there?” Panting for breath, I held onto the net to stop from going under, for the problem was that I could not swim. I had always meant to learn to swim, but I never got around to it, and suddenly I needed to know how to stay on the top of the water. My Father saved me that day. Dad passed down a rope to put under my arms and hauled me out of the water using the winch.

My mistake had been to put off until a later date that which I needed to learn. I have now learned to swim! This foolish lack of action is the same mistake that the five unwise virgins had made. They always *meant* to get their lives right and prepare themselves with more oil. But they never did anything to prepare for the eventuality that their lamp would need to be alight. This need for action before the time Christ comes is the primary emphasis of the parable—do not put off to a later date getting prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. Be ready and always on the watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:13).

Hell is populated with people that meant well. They may have heard of Christ and intended to get their lives right with Him, and then suddenly will come a time when they will need to *know* Him, and it will be too late. They will come to the door only to find it shut, and the Master at the door will tell them that He doesn't know them. I don't want even to imagine their faces when they find the door closed on them as Christ promised. You cannot wait until that day to make your decision about what you will do with the claims of Christ. There will be many who always meant to turn their lives over to Christ, but they will be shut out of joy eternal. □

They had also made a big mistake in thinking that there would be another opportunity when the time came. Do not make the same error. The bridegroom will come in a time you are not expecting Him. They were not expecting the bridegroom to arrive so late into the night. The unwise virgins had made assumptions as to the timing of His return. They had heard that He was coming early, and they believed it! They were not prepared to endure the darkness.

Another mistake they made was to think that they could come later and find the door still open. When the foolish virgins finally arrived, they were surprised to see that there was no entrance for them. There are some Bible teachers today that say that after the Church has been taken out of the way, there will be a second opportunity—do not believe it! Do not contemplate any thought in your mind that, after Jesus comes for His Church in the rapture, there will still be an opportunity to get in. I see here no time whatsoever between the coming of the bridegroom and the shutting of the door. Jesus speaks a warning of no second opportunity in another place in this way: □

²⁶“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.
²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.
²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-29 Emphasis mine).

The door of salvation was shut in both instances at the same time that judgment fell. In both cases, there was no later opportunity to be saved. The five foolish virgins did not expect that maybe the Bridegroom would come in the dark time. I want you to think of the anguish of the hearts of those who put off their need of getting their lives right with God. Perhaps they will see a glimpse of your joy through the windows. Maybe they will hear the singing and cry out in pain of heart, “**Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’**” (Matthew 25:11). For those of us who are walking with Christ, this should drive us to our knees in prayer. Do you have a spouse, sons, and daughters, or relatives that are yet outside and still not worried about that day and what will happen? I can give no hope to those still outside of His knowledge. □

You may say, "Why did not the wise share their oil? That's not very 'Christian' of them!" A relationship with God cannot be on your terms; God requires you to come on His terms, through the substitutionary death of Christ. William Barclay said, “A man cannot borrow a relationship with God. He must possess it for himself. A man cannot borrow a character; he must be clothed with it. The time to make sure you are ready is now.”

The story is told of an infidel [a person who does not believe in Christ] who died after willing his farm to the devil. This gave the court some cause for head-scratching, but after several months of deliberation it handed down the following decision: "It is decided that the best way to carry out the wish of the deceased is to allow the farm to grow weeds, the soil to erode, and the house and the barn to rot. In our opinion, the best way to leave something to the devil is to do nothing." Therein lies a truth. Few of us would ever admit to such infidelity, but many will procrastinate and postpone the great decisions of life and end up having willed our soul to the devil.²

For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Prayer: Father, I confess that there have been times in my life when I have put off important decisions, but today I want to do something about what I have read. I give my life unreservedly to You. I turn around from my unwise life and turn toward You. Thank You for the offer of a completely free pardon for the guilt and condemnation that my sin has deserved. I receive today the gift of God, eternal life in Christ. Please write my name in the Lamb's book of life. I want to be born-again into a relationship with You. Amen!

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² 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Edited by Michael Green, Published by Baker Bookhouse, Page 293.