

2. The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

The Parables of Jesus

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 listening. He did this with Simon the Pharisee after Simon criticized Jesus for allowing a sinful woman to weep over His feet and wipe them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50). Christ's parables revealed the hearts of His listeners. Regardless of class or gender, His words would reach into the hearts of even the self-righteous hypocrites and those who hid behind their good works. Jesus painted pictures with words that brought people to make conclusions and judgment calls before revealing that they were a part of the story! These parables caused people to see themselves in a new light bringing conviction and repentance.

Some of the prophets of the Old Testament spoke similarly. The Lord would give the prophets stories or analogies to illustrate a point, provoking them to form opinions. For example, when David had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to King David with his account of the little ewe lamb beloved by its master that was stolen and sacrificed (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 God wanted to reach with a message of warning (Jonah 4:5-11). Jonah was offended because God chose to show mercy to the Gentile city of Nineveh!

I am sure we all think 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's coming to them?" 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 parable we consider today, the Lord wants to speak to us about our destiny when the Lord closes the curtain on this evil age. The parable's focus is to be ready for the Bridegroom's coming 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. This parable is part of a talk about the events of Jesus' Second Coming that extends over two chapters, Matthew 24 and 25. There were no chapter divisions when Matthew wrote his Gospel, so we should view this parable as connected to Matthew 24. It carries on with the theme of heart readiness at His Second Coming.

Marriage customs of the day were very different from what we are accustomed to in Western culture. This parable is about a typical wedding celebration in the Middle East. With his close friends, the bridegroom would come to the bride's house or the place of the festivities for the wedding. The couple would be clothed as king and queen and celebrate for a week (Genesis 29:27). The bride's close friends were ten virgins or bridesmaids whose job was to light up the way and welcome the bridegroom and his close friends to the bride's house or the place of the banquet. They would then enter the wedding and celebrate with the bridegroom. When the bridesmaids or virgins heard the sound of the herald calling out, **"Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"** (v. 6), they would know to go out and light up the way for the bridegroom's coming.

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/virgins 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 this world sees as Christians, God sees some wise and some foolish people waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom. The parable focuses on being wise and making sure we are carrying the light of Christ while we wait for the coming of Jesus.

The bridesmaids/virgins were to trim their lamps as soon as they heard the call that the Bridegroom was near; they would then go and show the pathway to the wedding place. 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 stationed themselves several yards apart, showing the way and welcoming the bridegroom and his friends before going into the wedding with them. Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 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

The Sleeping Church

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

The way Jesus worded the parable indicates that he was prophesying that His coming would be after a long time of waiting, **“The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep” (Matthew 25:5)**. Two thousand years is definitely a long time of waiting, but most of us know inwardly that we are now in a period characterized by spiritual darkness.

All ten virgins fell asleep while waiting in the dark. We might not know everything our enemy is planning as he increases the darkness over men's souls. Still, our part is to be spiritually awake and watchful of what is going on and concentrate on lighting up the way for those around us. The darkness in our day has already incrementally descended to the point that many in our day are saying those holding forth the light of God's truth are foolish. Many today believe 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. The world admonishes those spiritually awake to "go back to sleep." Even many churches in our day speak little of the hope of the coming of Christ, and the world system heaps scorn upon those who believe in Christ's Second Coming:

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).

What causes some in the Church worldwide to experience spiritual drowsiness?

All ten virgins represent those who profess to be believers, but some have the light of life, and others do not. Some people are empty lampstands 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 and light in their lamps represent the Holy Spirit living in them, and of course, no one can be a believer without having the Holy Spirit residing in their hearts:

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).

The lamps the virgins brought were their own lamps, with each bridesmaid responsible for being light in the darkness preceding the bridegroom's arrival. Unfortunately, five of them were foolish and did not expect the bridegroom to come late into the night, and they did not prepare to face the darkness.

Some say that the church needn't prepare for the night because the Lord will come for them before the darkness of the tribulation sets in. Would you say that the Church worldwide is prepared to face the spiritual darkness? How should believers today prepare for the darkness?

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 oil in their lamps from the jars they brought (v. 5). They then trimmed their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Let us now think about 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 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 bridegroom's coming. We are not listening to fables as we think about that moment when we hear the call. Do not entertain any fallacies of purgatory to go through first. No, believers in Christ will be with Him the instant He appears. Great shall be your joy if you are a believer. Your face shall light up as you behold His coming amid the darkness of the earth. Those of you who are senior citizens and believers, if death calls you before Christ comes, you shall come with Jesus when He appears. Then those who are still alive on earth shall be caught up with all believers to enter into the wedding festivities

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 who have already lost a loved one in Christ to the sleep of death, rest assured that if they were believers, 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 bodies may be buried or burned, but their spirits will return with the Bridegroom when He comes. Those 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 Scriptures say, "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 went to buy more oil were surprised that the door was already shut when they got back.

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 you to imagine how joyous it will be to enter the wedding banquet. 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 eternity, we are only betrothed, pledged or engaged 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 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. We will have to face no more evil occurrences and no further temptation. There will be no more pain and tears, for the

Scriptures say, “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 (v. 10). The closure of the door symbolizes that our new experience 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 apart from what Christ has done for us at the cross. There must be a divine transfusion of the life of God into your spirit. Each of us has to experience a change within. Jesus put it like this: “**unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3)**.” In another place, 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 painful as it is for those outside, it is pure joy for those of us who, by God's grace alone, are 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?

The world we live in has a way of making us procrastinate about important decisions. Please allow me to illustrate: When I was a young Christian, I fell overboard from my father's fishing boat. We had caught at least two or three tons of fish, and to bring them aboard; we had to carefully maneuver the boat to get the net to the side of the boat. My father had to go ahead on the engine and then reverse. 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 closed on my fingers 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 up to my thighs. They quickly filled up with water and started dragging me down. Also, my father did not realize I had gone overboard and was now reversing the boat, sucking my body towards the propeller. I grabbed the net and started panicking, pulling down 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 neutralize the engine. He dashed to the rear 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 myself from going underwater. The problem was that I had put off learning how to swim. I had always meant to learn that skill, but I never got around to it, and suddenly I needed to know how to stay on the top of the water and not drown. My Father saved me that day by passing down a rope to put under my arms and hauling me back on board using the winch.

My mistake was to put off until a later date what I needed to learn. Needless to say, I have now learned to swim! This foolish lack of action is similar to the same mistake the five unwise virgins 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; they thought the Bridegroom was coming during the daylight. 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 even want to imagine their faces when they find the door closed on them as Christ promised. You cannot wait until that day to decide what you will do with the claims of Christ. There will be many who meant to turn their lives over to Christ, but they will be shut out of joy eternal.

They also made a big mistake in thinking there would be another opportunity when the time came. Do not make the same error. The bridegroom will come at a time many are not expecting Him. The unwise virgins 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. Today, some Bible teachers say that after the Church is taken up to be with Christ, there will be a second opportunity for those left behind—do not believe it! Do not contemplate any thought that there will still be an opportunity to get in after Jesus comes for His Church in the rapture. I see here no time whatsoever between the coming of the Bridegroom and the shutting of the door. Jesus also spoke a warning of no second opportunity in Luke 17:

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).

In both instances in the passage of Scripture above, the door of salvation was shut when God's judgment fell. There was no later opportunity to be saved. It is tragic to think of the anguish in the hearts of those who put off their need to get 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 heart pain, “Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’” (Matthew 25:11). For those walking with Christ, this should drive us to our knees in prayer. Do you have a spouse, sons, 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 didn't 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 making his will and bequeathing his farm to the devil. This gave the court some cause for head-scratching about how to follow his last wishes, 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 souls 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 offering 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.