

The Ten Virgins

“1. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. 9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:1-13)

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins the story is told by Jesus of a party of virgins given the honor of attending a wedding. Each of the ten virgins is carrying a lamp as they await the coming of the bridegroom. Five are wise and bring oil. Five are foolish and they took no oil with them. The bridegroom is late in coming; the foolish virgins ask the wise ones for spare oil, but the others say that then they would not have enough. While the foolish virgins are away buying more oil, the bridegroom arrives. The wise virgins are there to welcome him and the foolish ones arrive too late and are excluded.

What is the meaning of this parable? Remember that *parables* are not *allegories*. They are stories designed to make one main spiritual point. *Some details are significant in that they help make that main point, while other details are merely local color.*

Jesus reveals the demands of the kingdom of heaven, “*be prepared;*” He sums up the main thought of the parable in verse 13, “*be on the alert.*” or also rendered, “*be ready.*” Just as only the wise virgins who were admitted into the time of celebration, those who are living in the “*kingdom of heaven*” will be a part of the great celebration of God’s kingdom. Who are they?

What does it mean to be ready? Drawing upon this parable and other scriptures, we can learn three important answers to this question . . .

With this in mind, it seems clear that some details are symbolic, especially as other Biblical passages use the same imagery. Things mentioned in parables are symbolic and all details do not always have exact counterparts in real life. The bridegroom stands for Jesus, the delay of the bridegroom stands for the period of time between his two comings, the bridegroom's arrival stands for Jesus' return at the end of the age, the wedding feast stands for His eternal kingdom, and the wise and foolish virgins stand for *preparedness* and *unpreparedness*.

The 25th chapter of Matthew continues and concludes Jesus’ discourse that

with another parable emphasizing the same principle -- ten virgins who take their lamps and go out to meet the bridegroom.

Those listening to Jesus knew exactly what He was saying. When Jesus gave this parable there were three stages to a Jewish wedding. The first was engagement -- a formal agreement made by the fathers. The second was betrothal -- the ceremony where mutual promises are made. The third was marriage -- approximately one year later when the bridegroom came at an unexpected time for his bride.

The Jewish weddings (or marriages) were different than ours in several respects. The celebration would begin when all was ready, and sometimes that could mean the guests having to wait. There was food to be prepared, and last-minute negotiations between the groom and his in-laws about the terms of the marriage. When everything was set, the groom would come to his bride's home to claim her, and to bring her in procession to his parental home for the wedding and the feast. Jesus' story is of a group of ten girls waiting for the bridegroom to come and for the wedding to begin. They were all equipped with oil lamps, and probably had a particular part to play, likely their job was to provide light for the feast: they would accompany the bridal party in procession into the feast and provide the much-needed illumination for the festivities.

Ten young virgin women were waiting with the bride. The bridegroom would come to fetch his bride. He would take her to their new home. Interestingly to note that in the Old Testament, God is referred to as the 'husband' of Israel, and Israel is called God's 'wife' (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:16 [*Ishi* is the Hebrew word of "husband"]) -- Isaiah 62:5 teaches that "*as a young man marries a virgin, so will the sons of Israel be married to God.*"). However, in the New Testament, Christ is referred to as the 'Bridegroom' and the church is called Christ's "bride" (Ephesians 5:23). The word, "bride" is used in connection with believers (John 3:29; Revelation 21:2, 9 & 22:17). These passages refer to believers who are the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Jesus describes "Ten" virgins because it was the custom of that day to have, as Talmudic authorities affirm, ten lamps in a bridal procession. The Jews never held a synagogue, circumcised, kept the Passover, or contracted marriage, but ten persons at least were present. Boaz, when he married Ruth, had *ten* witnesses, Ruth 4:2.

In this parable, the first two stages have already taken place. Now the wedding party, Ten Virgins, wait for the coming of the bridegroom for his bride. Ten Virgins took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. The "wise virgins" represents those who prepared for the bridegroom's coming.

"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"(1 Peter 3:15).

When believers stand before the Lord it will be day of searching and enquiring as to how we lived our life on earth and how we prepared for our Lord's return.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. "Wise" and "foolish" does not refer to good and bad in a moral sense, but to a wise or a foolish attitude regarding the kingdom of God (See Matthew 24:45). After the previous parable (Matthew 24:45-51),

which dealt with a *wise* and *faithful* servant, or being "*wise*" as dealt with here, and in the following parable (Matthew 25:14-30), being *faithful*.

Matthew 25:3-4, "*The foolish ones ... did not take any oil with them.*" The foolish virgins did not take any extra oil. The wise virgins took occurrences into account, and took extra oil along. It would appear later that they needed them (verses 8-9). The difference between the wise and the foolish is that the foolish did not do what they should have done, and what the wise did. This is the reason why the foolish virgins do not reach the goal and the wise do (verse 10).

The five foolish virgins *appeared* to be prepared for the bridegroom, because they had their lamps. But they really were not prepared, because they took no oil with them.

These virgins were light bearers, leading the bride out to meet the bridegroom, proceeding to the groom's home, where friends awaited to celebrate. These marriage ceremonies normally happened at night and hence required light. The chief purpose of the young maidens was to wait for the bridegroom and, when he appears, to attend him with lights in their hands, thus to honor him and do him service.

The "*foolish virgins*" symbolize vain confidence and conceit of the goodness of their state and their inclination of another world

Matthew 25:5, "*The bridegroom was a long time in coming.*" This was not unusual. Waiting hours on end for the bridegroom was a familiar occurrence in that day. All ten virgins fell asleep. It was not unusual. In this respect they do not differ from each other. It was natural and to be expected. The issue is not that the virgins went to sleep -- both the wise and foolish did so; this detail is merely part of the narrative's setting. The issue is here is not "*awake*" and "*watchful*," as Matthew 24:42-44 teaches, but on being *prepared*.

Verse 6, "*At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'*" After hours of waiting the bridegroom suddenly comes, in the middle of the night! The course of events evidently was the following -- the virgins are in the home of the bride's parents; they await the bridegroom's arrival; he will come to collect his bride and take her to *his* parent's home, where the marriage will be celebrated. When the bridegroom comes, escorted by his friends, the virgins go to meet him, carrying lamps to greet him warmly. Then they all go together in a great procession together with the bride and the groom and all the guests to the home of the groom's parents.

It was the custom among the Jews on the occasion of weddings, that the bridegroom came, attended with his friends, late in the night, to the house of the bride, where she expected him -- (she just didn't know "*what hour he would come*") -- attended by her bride-maids; who, being notified of the bridegrooms' approach, would go out with their lamps, to light their way to his house, where ceremony and formality would take place, followed with the celebrating of the nuptials with great mirth.

The groom came late and unexpected by both wise and foolish virgins.

Verses 7-8, "*Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, 'Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.'*" It immediately appears that

their lamps would go out. The actual rendering of the original Greek is, “*Our lamps are going out.*” Their casual manner and lack of preparation was fatal.

Alas, five of the ten virgins -- whom Jesus calls “*foolish*” -- discover, to their chagrin, disappointment and embarrassment that they do not have enough oil to continue with the activities. The other five virgins -- whom Jesus calls “*wise*” -- have *enough* oil to keep their lamps burning for the imminent activities.

Five foolish virgins did not have outlook enough to make provision for this event that was to happen. They had lamps, but not enough oil. This incognizance, being totally unaware or true spiritually reality; not having the faculty of thought of Christ, whom they must someday appear -- is the ruin of many. Speak of things *not seen as yet*, and, like Lot to his sons-in-law, you are as one that mocks. They do not provide for hereafter, as the ant does, nor lay up for the time to come.

“Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:19)

Like the seven parables of the “*kingdom*” Jesus gave in Matthew 13, the “*seeds of the word of the kingdom*” fell on stony ground and had no root, or, like seeds that fell on hard ground and the birds came and took the seeds all away, these five foolish virgins were void of true spiritual understanding..

The heart is the vessel. Grace is the oil that we must have in this vessel. Remember “*grace*” is the God-given ability to know, desire to do, and the ability to perform God’s will. In the Old Testament Tabernacle there was constant provision made of oil for the light (Exodus.35:14). Our light must shine before men in good works

It is important that we understand exactly what “*the grace of God*” is. The Bible can be confusing, or clear, depending upon our understanding of “*the grace of God.*” We have all heard that “*grace is unmerited favor,*” and this is true, but that does not tell us what grace is, it only states that we receive freely from God what we do not have a right to deserve. But what is grace?

Philippians 2:13 states, “*For it is God Himself whose power creates within you both the **DESIRE** and the **POWER** to execute His gracious will.*” (Weymouth translation)

Goodspeed translates the last phrase, “*...inspiring your will and your action.*”

What then is Grace?

*Grace is the active power that God gives through the Holy Spirit, giving the **‘DISIRE’** and the **‘POWER’** to do things God’s way!*

Some born-again believers do not “*grow in grace;*” do not develop spiritually; are not living “*Kingdom-living*” -- letting God rule and reign in their life.

The five wise virgins took enough oil in their vessels for the coming event, with the belief that the bridegroom might tarry. It is wise to prepare for the worst, to lay in for a long siege. But remember that this oil that keeps the lamps burning, is derived to the candlestick from Jesus Christ, the great and good Olive, by the golden pipes of the ordinances, as it is represented in the vision of Zechariah 4:2, 3, 12), and explained in

John 1:16, Of Christ's fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. They come short of God's grace and find the want of it when the Lord returns.

The bridegroom tarried; he did not come out so soon as they expected. What we look for as certain, we are apt to think is very near. Many during the apostles' times imagined that the day of the Lord was at hand, but it is not so. Christ, as to us, seems to tarry, and yet really does not. The Old Testament text, Habakkuk 2:3, speaking of Christ's coming kingdom, warns, "*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: **though it tarry**, wait for it; because **it will surely come**, it will not tarry.*"

There is good reason for the Bridegroom's tarrying; there are many intermediate counsels and purposes to be accomplished, the elect must all be called in, God's patience must be manifested, and the saints' patience tried, the harvest of the earth must be ripened, and so must the harvest of heaven too. But though Christ tarry past our time, *He will not tarry past the due time.*

While the bridegroom tarried, those that waited for him, some grew careless, and forgot what they were attending. They *all* slumbered and slept -- the *wise* virgins **slumbered**, and the *foolish* **slept**; so some distinguish it. The wise virgins kept their lamps burning.

This parable of the wise and foolish virgins comes right after Jesus gave the signs of *the end* and -- *no man knows the day!* This is significant. Read Matthew 24 to refresh your memory as you study this parable of Matthew 25.

Jesus announced just before this parable, "*But of that day [referring to Christ's return] and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*" (Matthew 24:36). The parables Jesus gives in Matthew 24 and 25 are about the *end time* -- especially focusing on being ready for the kingdom of the Son of Man (for example, 24:42--25:13). To live ready for Jesus' return involves living in light of the Day of Judgment, when our deeds and motives will be revealed.

Jesus is not here dealing with salvation, or having eternal life, He is referring to "*The Kingdom of God*" - or - "*The Kingdom of Heaven*" -- that is, God ruling and reigning in our life!

Jesus is saying to every believer, "*Don't lose heart if I don't return as quickly as you expect Me to. Keep prepared every moment of the time!*" What does it mean to be ready? It means what I call "*Kingdom Living*" -- letting God rule in every area of our life!

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves"

Matthew 25:6-9

Living by God's grace is a work of time, and cannot be done in a hurry!

However much the wise virgins wish they could give of oil to the foolish, it is utterly impossible for them to do so. The wise virgins not giving oil to the foolish virgins, was not because of unwillingness or self-interest. There was not enough for them all. The advice given by the wise virgins is not ironic either, for the foolish take it seriously. Apparently the possibility that oil may be on sale during the night is taken into consideration.

Verse 10, “ *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*” While the foolish virgins are away buying oil, the bridegroom came. The wise virgins had taken precautions and were prepared, and accompanied the bridegroom to his father's home. After the procession had gone inside the door is shut. After this there will not be welcomed any more guests. This can only be understood in the light of comparable Eastern marriage ceremonies. This is a most sobering part of the parable -- “ *the bridegroom came and the door was shut.*” **There comes a point in time when it is too late to get into the wedding feast!** Opportunities do not last forever! We can choose for the period of time we have on earth to let God rule completely in our life, but procrastination will rob us of our rewards. Our responsibility is to always make and keep our self ready for the Lord when He returns -- that means living in God's spiritual kingdom now in this life, letting Him rule in every area of our life -- living the Sermon-on-the-Mount.

“ **Afterward** came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, **Verily I say unto you, I know you not**” (Matthew 25:11-12).

The foolish virgins were not excluded because the door was locked., nor because the host actually did not recognize them, but because they had *insulted* the bride and groom as well as all their relatives! They would never be allowed to forget such an offense. To participate in their friend's wedding was a great honor; as virgins, these young women were in a sense practicing for their own impending weddings. To have spoiled the wedding for their friend by failing to do their part was a great *insult* to everyone else at the wedding. That they would be shut out of the feast is punishment that suits their case.

The finality of the door being closed and the bridegroom saying, “*I know you not,*” to the five returning virgins seems implausible, improbable and unbelievable in the light of this being a picture of village and rural life. The point isn't whether it ties in perfectly with what the disciples would have known to have happened but that it illustrated a point which they must be careful to pick up on - namely, that they were to pay attention and to stay vigilant because they didn't know either the exact day or hour at which He would return (Matthew 25:13).

The language used to depict this state of affairs (“*I know you not.*”) was not as callous and brutal as it sounds to us in our English language, but rather was a Oriental colloquialism meaning, “*I'm not going to recognize you,*” or “*I want nothing to do with you.*” It has to do with regarding them as an outsider, a stranger, to be shut out of the celebration.

“*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*” Matthew 25:13

A key to the application to “*being ready*” is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. At first glance, the problem with the five foolish virgins may appear to be that they didn't bring enough oil for their lamps. But the real reason for their exclusion from the wedding feast is that they didn't have a personal relationship with the bridegroom. In a small Jewish village, the bridegroom would almost certainly have known his bride's attendants. Jesus therefore seems to be going beyond the parable at this point -- as He does in all three of these parables in Matthew 25.

Though Christ tarry long, He will come at last; though He may seem slow. His second coming is as sure as He was in His first coming. This parable presents the demands of “*the kingdom of heaven*” -- or -- “*the kingdom of God*” -- that is, God's reign and rule in the believer's life.

Jesus clearly explains what He is mainly teaching by this parable, “*Therefore -- [because of what I have presented by this parable] -- keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour -- [of the establishment of my Kingdom on earth].*” It is obvious that Jesus is speaking about the day on which the Son of Man will come (See Matthew 24:36,42 & 44). We see that in this parable He is comparing the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven to the coming of a bridegroom in the middle of the night. This verse therefore does not form a part of the parable, but is the **conclusion** to it. The words “*keep watch*” is not form a part of the imagery of the parable, but are intended metaphorically mean “*be prepared*” (Note verse 10 and 24:44).

Constant preparation and readiness for our Lord's return is what Jesus is speaking of. Not even for a moment, must believers live with their own affairs uppermost in their minds. But rather, to wait eagerly for the coming of the Son of man and be ready for that unique moment when the call comes that He's approaching.

This message of this parable is more than just whether the believer is ready tonight for Jesus' return but whether he makes the necessary **preparation** for His return. The five *foolish* virgins were not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, while the *wise* made preparation for his return. They needed to light the path in their journey with him.

Readiness is best defined as being “*a state of living before God that's pleasing to Him*” (See Matthew 24:45-51 -- a servant who begins to misuse and abuse his authority over his fellow servants because he perceives that his master is delayed. When compared with the 2nd of the three parables (Matthew 25:14-30), we see that continued service is the natural state of the servant is a lifestyle that is opposed to the will of the absent master.

To conclude, the parable was given to explain “*the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 25:1) I believe that all ten virgins represent born-again believers. Five foolish virgins represent those who do not prepare -- do not allow God's grace develop them into “*Kingdom-living*” Christians. While the five wise virgins represent believers who learn to live under God's control.

The “*oil*” stands for God's grace working in the life of believers.