

Matthew 25:1-13 – “The Parable of the Ten Virgins”

Matthew 25 is still dealing with the Olivet Discourse. The Olivet Discourse deals with the end times – the sign of Jesus’ coming and of the end of the age, based on the disciple’s question in Matthew 24:3. Jesus took us through the events of the tribulation leading up to His Second Coming.

So as we get into Chapter 25 Jesus continues to share some parables that are meant to give some warning to be ready for the end of the age. That’s been a big part of the exhortation through this Olivet Discourse, to be watching and ready. Today we look at the parable of the ten virgins.

Summary Statement:

Jesus reminds us that He is coming at an unexpected time and it is our responsibility to remain watching and ready for His return. Our readiness is linked to our relationship to Christ.

1. Wise vs. Foolish – 25:1-4

25:1-4 - *Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³ Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

Now if you’re unfamiliar with some Jewish cultural customs around marriage you’re going to be reading this and wondering, ‘*Why is this bridegroom hanging out with some virgins? Where’s his wife? This groom is asking for trouble.*’ Perhaps that is what’s going through your mind at first reading.

But this parable all centers around the Jewish wedding, which was very different than what we’re accustomed to today.

- In our day, a couple get engaged, they set a wedding date, they get married and then go on a honeymoon.

In Jesus’ day, marriages were completed in 3 phases.

1. The Engagement
2. The Betrothal
3. The Wedding Ceremony

(1) The **Engagement** was an agreement that was reached between the parents of the bride and groom. A price was set for the bride and the couple entered into this arrangement for marriage.

(2) The **Betrothal** was more official. This is when the couple exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends. This is when they were considered officially married. They had covenanted to be together and be one, and this could only be broken by divorce. This betrothal period could last for up to a year. In the meantime, the groom was adding a room onto his father's house for them to live in.

- The picture is wonderful as Jesus said in **John 14:1-3**, *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*

As the groom and his bride were apart, and as the groom prepared a place for them to dwell, the groom would come for his bride at an unexpected time. The bride would not know when, but would live watching, waiting, and expecting.

- These first two events have taken place in our parable. But the third event in a Jewish wedding is where we find ourselves in this story.

(3) The **Wedding and Wedding Feast** was the third event. When it was time for the wedding, the groom would leave his father's house and go to where his bride was to bring her back home with him.

“The bridegroom set out with the bride from the house of her parents, and there followed a grand procession all the way to his house. The streets of Asiatic cities were dark, and it was necessary that anybody venturing forth at night should carry a lamp or torch (cf. Psa. 119:105). Those invited guests, who did not go to the bride's home were allowed to join the procession along the way, and go with the whole group to the marriage feast. Without a torch or lamp they couldn't join the procession, or enter the bridegroom's house.” ¹

Now although the Jewish wedding so wonderfully pictures the rapture of the church, the rapture is not in view in this parable. Again, the context of the end of Matthew 24 and now into chapter 25 is dealing with the second coming of Christ.

¹ Wright, F. H. (1954). *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (pp. 131–132). WORDsearch.

The theme throughout is to be watching and waiting. That's the point of this parable.

- Some try and say that this parable teaches a partial rapture view. This is where they say that only the real on fire Christians are going to be raptured up. Whereas others who may not be living very holy lives will be left behind. But this is not taught anywhere in Scripture. We're saved by grace, not by your level of holiness!

So we're not dealing with the church or the rapture here but with those who will be saved in the tribulation. Notice there's no mention of a bride here, that's not the focus.

- Although, "the Syriac and Vulgate versions say that he came *with his bride*. This fits the prophetic picture perfectly. The Lord Jesus will return from the wedding with His bride, the church (1 Thess. 3:13). (The wedding takes place in heaven [Eph. 5:27] after the Rapture.) The faithful remnant of Tribulation saints will go in with Him to the marriage feast."²

So the purpose of talking about a groom coming is to share that he comes when you're not always expecting it.

Now why did Jesus use virgins as the subject matter here and why 10?

- Ten was a favourite number with the Jews. Ten men formed a congregation in a synagogue. In a passage from Rabbi Salomo, cited by Wetstein, he mentions ten lamps or torches as the usual number in marriage processions: see also Luke 19:13.³
- Most likely these 10 virgins were simply referencing the bridal party that was supposed to be a part of the marriage supper.

2. Prepared vs. Unprepared – 25:5-9

25:5 - *But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

Again, Jesus is making clear to the disciples that things are going to happen in a very different timetable than they had thought (***the bridegroom was delayed...***).

- The disciples thought that since Jesus was the Messiah, the kingdom of God must be ready to get established. The best was now to come! But

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; pp. 1297–1298). Thomas Nelson.

³ <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/hac/matthew-25.html>

Jesus is letting them know that it's not going down that way. There will be a delay before the kingdom gets established physically on earth.

- Remember, Jesus has come to establish His rule and reign in your hearts on an inward level today by which we can experience His peace and blessing. We can walk in the goodness of God despite the wickedness and chaos that ensues in this world.
- Are you allowing that to happen in your life? Are you trusting in His timing rather than trying to enforce your timing? His timing never seems to be our timing, but we know it's always perfect. Don't forget that God is doing a work that will be to your blessing even in the delay.

Notice the condition of these virgins: they all slumbered and slept. Now this doesn't imply that they were all spiritually negligent, because 5 of them are wise. They were able to rest because they were secure in their relationship with the Lord. The foolish virgins however were foolish because they were slumbering when they should have been preparing. They weren't ready. We will see that they will be caught off guard.

The Greek word for **foolish** as used here is *moros*. Where we get our English word 'moron'.

- Again, we are exhorted throughout God's Word to be a prepared people. Don't be a moron, the Lord is coming again. Don't be caught up slumbering when we should be alert.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:6–7**, *"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night."*

25:6-9 - ***“And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’***

Again, the problem wasn't that one group knew the groom and the other didn't. It wasn't that one group fell asleep and the other didn't. It's not that one group heard the announcement and the other didn't. They all had lamps – an appearance that they were ready, but the difference was what was inside. The only difference is that the foolish virgins lacked oil.

Oil, throughout Scripture, is a consistent symbol of the Holy Spirit. Without oil these virgins were not ready for the bridegroom.

- So too for us. It's the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that truly sets us apart as Christians; as those that are in Christ and ready to be with Jesus.
- **Ephesians 1:13**, *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,"*
- **2 Corinthians 1:21–22**, *"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."*
- **Romans 8:9**, *"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."*

It's the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that marks us as truly born again. And being filled with the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity in the life of the believer. So we see we are sealed with the Holy Spirit at conversion, but I believe this is to be an ongoing work in our lives, an everyday refilling.

- **Ephesians 5:18**, *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,"*
- This is to be a daily occurrence because we leak, we get bumped around. We need fresh fillings daily by which we are constantly moving and functioning in the power of, and control of, the Holy Spirit.

Here's an important lesson we learn from this parable: being prepared is not transferable. You're not getting into heaven because you grew up with Christian parents. You're not going to be accepted by God because your best friend was a believer.

It can almost come across as selfish that these wise virgins didn't give any of their oil to the foolish virgins. But this isn't a parable about charitable works, it's a parable about readiness, and this readiness is based on your ability to stand on your own before Christ. Your spouse's faith won't save you. Going to church doesn't save you. The question in that day will be, where do you stand? Are you linked to Christ by being born again? Are you truly in Christ?

3. Known vs. Unknown – 25:10-13

25:10-13 - *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

There will be no time to try and get things right when the bridegroom comes. Many are sadly deceived to think that they will work things out when they stand before God, but if you are not in Christ, it will be too late at that point. You must make that decision to receive Him as your Saviour now lest you hear those words: ***I do not know you...***

- That’s heavy. But this is of utmost importance. You see, many can claim that they know God, or at least know about God. Many claim that they believe. But yet they have never truly surrendered their life to Him. Jesus has never become their Lord and Saviour.

*You see, it’s not whether you know Jesus, it’s whether are you known by Him?

Now Jesus is omniscient, He knows everything and He knows you! But what He means by this is that He was never brought into their life. There was never a relationship between this person and Christ. They may have played the part but it was done independent of Jesus. And He will say to that person, ***I do not know you.***

So watch and be ready, for you do not know when you will see Christ.

But what does it mean to be ready? Charles H. Spurgeon saw it as an inner change brought about by regeneration or new birth. He wrote, drawing on a good deal of Bible imagery:

“A great change has to be wrought in you, far beyond any power of yours to accomplish, ere you can go in with Christ to the marriage. You must, first of all, be renewed in your nature, or you will not be ready. You must be washed from your sins, or you will not be ready. You must be justified in Christ’s righteousness, and you must put on his wedding dress, or else you will not be ready. You must be reconciled to God, you must be made like to God, or you will not be ready. Or, to come to the parable before us, you must have a lamp, and that lamp must be fed with heavenly oil, and it must continue to burn brightly, or else you will not be ready. No child of darkness can go into that place of light. You must be brought out of nature’s

darkness into God’s marvelous light, or else you will never be ready to go in with Christ to the marriage, and to be forever with him.”¹⁴

“Jesus ended this parable with the warning He had uttered before: “Watch” (Matt. 24:42; 25:13). This does not mean standing on a mountaintop gazing at the heavens (Acts 1:9–11). It means “to stay awake and be alert” (Matt. 26:38–41).”⁵

Points to Ponder:

1. The coming of the Lord may not happen in the timing you prefer. Will you stay watchful and ready even if His coming is delayed?
2. Does the Lord’s timing in various things cause you to grow anxious, or to grow in trust?
3. Have you relied on a connection to other people or a connection to religious practices to make you right before God? A connection to Jesus, evident by the Holy Spirit in you, is what is truly needed. Are you living daily in Christ and for Christ?

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Entrance and Exclusion,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1976), vol. 43, 30.

⁴ Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 527). Baker Books.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 92). Victor Books.