

WAITING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus is now giving another of the several warnings that illustrate that the exact time of His second coming will not be known in advance...but this time, He is specifically giving a warning to the Church...to people who profess to be Christians. It will be at a time when it is least expected (**Matthew 24:36, 42, 44, 50; Matthew 25:13**). The general time will be known by those who observe the *birth pain* signs (**Matthew 24:8, 33**)...but the precise time of His personal appearing in *power* and *glory* (**Matthew 24:30**) will not be known in advance even by the angels.

The **parable of the ten virgins** is given to accentuate how immensely important it is to be spiritually prepared to meet Christ when He returns to earth. Because after He appears, unbelievers who are alive at that time, will have no further chance for salvation.

The setting for this parable was a typical **Jewish wedding** ceremony. The imagery of marriage is used frequently in Scripture. A Jewish wedding consist of **three distinct stages**.

- **The Engagement:** First was the *betrothal*, or *engagement*...the time of **preparation**. This was the *legal wedding...the legal marriage*. This was typically an arrangement by two sets of parents contracting the marriage of their children, which included a *payment of the dowry*. It was *legally binding* and could *only be broken by a divorce* (**Matthew 1:18-19**). A betrothal contract was often signed long before the children reached the marriageable age of thirteen or fourteen...and the two children may or may not, have even met each other yet. Since a marriage represented the union of two families, it was only natural for the parents to be involved. Between the engagement and the presentation, there were usually several years of preparation for the time of marriage, as the boy/man prepared for his bride.
- **The Presentation:** The second stage of a wedding was the *presentation*, a time of festivities just before the actual ceremony. At the beginning of the *presentation* festivities, the groom and his attendants would go to the bride's house and take her and her bridesmaids to the ceremony...typically back to his father's home. Those festivities could last up to a week or more, depending on the economic and social status of the bride and groom.

- **The Ceremony:** The third and most significant stage of a wedding was the actual *ceremony*, during which the *vows were exchanged*. After the ceremony would come the *marriage feast...a banquet meal*, followed by the *consummation of the marriage*.

Scripture uses this familiar imagery of a wedding to picture the Lord's relationship with His **church...the bride of Christ**. Speaking of both the *present time of preparation* (**The Church Age**, of which we live in today), as He prepares and makes ready a home for His bride...and the moment of *presentation* when He comes for her.

I. **THE PREPARATION: (vs. 1-4)**

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom (vs. 1)...

Then...refers to the time of Christ's sudden appearing...the time when He comes in *power* and *glory*. At that time, *spiritual preparedness* for entrance into **the kingdom of heaven will be comparable** to the *preparedness* of **ten virgins** who serve as bridesmaids at a wedding.

The central truth is that once He comes, there will be no second chance for one to be saved...the opportunity for salvation will be gone forever.

Lamp...Gk. *lampas*, used to describe a *torch*. It was customary for each bridesmaid to carry a torch to identify them as members of the wedding party.

To meet...Gk. *hupantesis*, a **noun** that is used to *describe an official welcoming of a dignitary*.

Ten virgins...used to represent *professing followers* of Christ...all of whom claim to love the prospect of His appearing and all whom demonstrate an *outward readiness* for entrance into His kingdom. In *outward appearance* all **ten virgins** looked alike.

Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent (vs. 2)...They all carried torches that looked exactly alike...but **five** of them had nothing to make them burn...nothing that would give *light* and *significance*.

A torch without fuel is worthless...just as a profession of faith in Jesus Christ without a saving relationship to Him is worthless...

infinitely more worthless...because it leaves one in *spiritual darkness*.

Foolish...Gk. *moros*, we get the word *moron* from it.

Prudent...Gk. *phronimos*, we get the word *wisdom* for it.

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps (vs. 3-4)...This describes the difference between someone who professes that they are a Christian, yet lacks the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...and a spirit filled child of God...someone who is genuinely saved.

Oil...In the New Testament it is a symbol of the *Holy Spirit*.

The **foolish** had a form of godliness but had *no spiritual life...no power...no light*...because they didn't belong to God.

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.”

~ II Timothy 3:1-5

One of the staggering warnings that can be drawn from this parable is that a large part of the church professing to be saved...in reality are lost and do not belong to God (**Matthew 7:17-23**).

II. **THE PRESENTATION:** (vs. 5-6)

Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep (vs. 5)...The statement that **the bridegroom was delaying** reinforces Jesus' teaching that His second coming will be *unexpected*. Because so much time has elapsed since His first coming, most people, including many who profess Christ and are in the church, carry on business as usual (**II Peter 3**).

But at midnight there was a shout, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” (vs. 6)...

At midnight...most people are typically asleep just as the bridesmaids were...which again, underscores the unexpectedness of Christ's return.

There was a shout, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him”...people living during the Tribulation will have seen all the signs of His coming and will know that His appearing could be imminent. But they will not know the moment of His arrival until they are awakened with the **shout, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him,** and they see Him *coming on the clouds of the sky* (**Matthew 24:30**).

III. **THE CONSUMATION:** (vs. 7-10)

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps (vs. 7)...As soon as the bridegroom's presence was announced, **all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps**. The trimming would have amounted to cutting of any ragged edges of the torches and then saturating it with oil in order to be able to light it.

The foolish said to the prudent, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” (vs. 8)...At that point **the foolish** bridesmaids realized their predicament...*they had no oil*. It wasn't that they hadn't been aware of their lack of oil, but the fact that they weren't concerned enough to be prepared. They thought that they had plenty of time to acquire oil.

When the Lord appears at the end of the Tribulation, many who profess to be Christians will frantically realize their lack of spiritual life. They will be *self-deceived*. That's why **Paul** gives the advice to the *Corinthian church*...

“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you...unless indeed you fail the test?”

~II Corinthians 13:5

But the prudent answered, “No, there will not be enough for us and you too (vs. 9a)...It isn't that the **prudent** bridesmaids were *selfish* or *calloused*...but they were *helpless* to provide oil for their **foolish** friends. Their own oil **wasn't enough** to share with anyone else.

“Go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves” (vs. 9b)...It was necessary that each one take personal responsibility for buying their own oil...just as everyone is personally responsible for their response to God and His invitation to eternal life.

Just as one person can't transfer his *physical life* to another person ...neither can he transfer *spiritual life*.

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut (vs. 10)...The tragedy was that there was no more opportunity...**the door was shut.**

Door was shut...similar to **Noah** and the ark.

Luke says it this way...

“Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’; and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out.”

~Luke 13:25-28

IV. **THE SEPARATION:** (vs. 11-13)

When Christ returns, it will be a time of *separation*...the *wise* will be separated from the *foolish*...the *faithful servants* from the *unfaithful*...the *blessed* from the *cursed*...the *sheep* from the *goats* ...the *wheat* from the *tares*. The wise virgins had oil and were prepared to meet the Bridegroom. Unfortunately though, many people who profess to be Christians are like the **foolish virgins**, they do not have the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8:9**) and are not born again. They may mingle with the saved, but they are not one of them...and they will not enter into the *marriage feast*.

Later the other virgins also came, saying, “Lord, lord, open up for us.” (vs. 11)...These attendants *dressed like the others...acted like the others...even co-existed alongside of the others*. But they missed the great event...the *marriage supper of the Lamb*.

But he answered, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” (vs. 12)...It will be a moment of sheer terror for unbelievers when they face a holy God and realize with absolute certainty that their good works weren't enough and that they are eternally lost.

Truly...literally means *amen*...and it's used as an *exclamation mark*. In the Greek there's no exclamation mark, so they use *tense* and *vocabulary*. **Amen** for *emphasis*...**truly** as an *exclamation mark*.

Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour (vs. 13)...For the *5th time* in the **Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44, 50...and now)**, Jesus called on those who will be alive during the last days of the Tribulation to be **alert**...because they **do not know the day nor the hour** of His appearing. They will see the signs...but the exact **day** and the exact **hour**...they will not know.

Because He is coming again what sort of people ought we to be (II Peter 3:11-12)? We should...

1. **Remember** *the Lord's table* (**I Corinthians 11:26**)
2. **Relate** *to one another in love* (**I Thessalonians 3:12-13; I John 4:7-8**)
3. **Restore** *the sinning brother* (**Galatians 6:1-2**)
4. **Resolve** *ourselves to ministry* (**II Timothy 4:1-2**)
5. **Refuse** *to neglect the church* (**Hebrews 10:22-25**)
6. **Remain** *steadfast* (**I Corinthians 15:58; James 5:8**)
8. **Reach out** *to the lost with the mercy of Jesus Christ* (**Jude 21, 23**)