

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

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In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus gave the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The parable follows immediately after Jesus' teaching on the end times in Matthew 24, and it is a continuation of His teaching of what it will be like when He returns.

The parable begins with the words: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent." (Matthew 25:1-2). In Jewish customs of that time, the virgins, or bridesmaids, were responsible for preparing the bride to meet the bridegroom. The bridegroom in this parable of course signifies Jesus Himself.

As the parable continues, we see that the five foolish virgins took their lamps with them, but they took no oil for their lamps. The prudent (or wise) virgins, on the other hand, took not only their lamps, but they also took oil in jars. Here the lamps signify a profession of faith in Christ. The oil signifies a genuine faith in Christ, which all true believers possess as a result of God's sovereign choice and His calling of His elect to faith in His Son.

While the ten virgins with their lamps signify "professing" believers, we should keep in mind that not all who profess faith in Christ are genuine believers; some are in fact unregenerate. In the Parable of the Sower, these professing but unregenerate individuals are characterized as rocky soil. The seed of the word of

God fell on this rocky “soil”, and immediately it sprang up, signifying an apparent conversion, but when the sun came up, these plants withered, “because they had no root”, as Jesus said. (Matthew 13:6, 20-21).

As Jesus continues His teaching in verse 5, we see that the bridegroom was a long time in coming, and both the wise and the foolish virgins got drowsy and fell asleep. This drowsiness and falling asleep signifies weariness or complacency, which can come upon even genuine believers at times. (Consider Matthew 26:40-41).

Then we read: “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’” (Matthew 25:6). The shout announcing the coming of the bridegroom can signify the second coming of Christ for those who are alive on the earth at His coming, or it could signify the day of our physical death.

With the shout announcing the coming of the bridegroom, all the virgins awoke and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones then said to the wise: “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” (Matthew 25:8). The wise then answered saying no, because there might not be enough for both of them. Instead, the wise virgins told the foolish to go to those who sell oil and buy some for themselves.

Salvation, which comes only by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), cannot be imparted from a believer to an unbeliever. It comes about only as result of God’s calling to faith of His elect (John 6:37, 44, 65), whom He chose before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Although the wise could not give the foolish some of the grace that God had given to them when He called them to faith in His Son, they could advise them on how this “oil” could be obtained, and all of us as believers can do the same when we share our faith with others. The results, however, are entirely up to God, as we learned in the Parable of the Sower. He is the one who makes the “good soil” differ from the other soils (1 Corinthians 4:7), and the seed of the word of God bears fruit only when it falls on the good soil. (Matthew 13:8, 23).

While the foolish were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Later, the other virgins came imploring the bridegroom, saying: “Lord, lord, open up for us”. However, He answered them saying: “Truly I say to you, I

do not know you.” At this point Jesus concludes the parable with the main lesson He was communicating: “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:11-13).

Jesus’ admonition to keep watch and be on the alert in this parable was the same message He communicated earlier in the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24:42-44. It is also the same message He communicated when He contrasted the faithful and wise servant with the wicked servant in Matthew 24:45-51.

Those who do not possess a genuine faith in Christ will not be ready the bridegroom comes. Though they profess faith in Christ, and their lamps may seem to shine before men, their lamps will go out when the time comes to meet the bridegroom, and they will not be allowed into the wedding feast.

Jesus’ use of the analogy of a wedding feast in the Parable of the Ten Virgins may bring to mind His teaching in the Parable of the Wedding Feast recorded in Matthew 22:1-14. In this parable, the king gave a wedding feast for his son. However, when the king came to see the wedding guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He commanded that this man be bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness, where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13).

The foolish virgins, who had no oil to keep their lamps burning, and the man who had no wedding clothes, were both excluded from the wedding feast. Both the oil and the wedding clothes signify a genuine faith in Christ, without which no one may enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus teaching here in the Parable of the Ten Virgins may also call to mind His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, where He warned us to watch out for false prophets (Matthew 7:15-23). These false prophets came “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians, but Jesus said that inwardly they were ravenous wolves. He also characterized them as bad trees that could bear only bad fruit. In the end, although they acknowledged Him as Lord and claimed to have done many good works in His name, Jesus would tell them that He never knew them, and He would command them to depart from Him. (Matthew 7:21-23, 25:11-12).

The main point that Jesus communicated in the Parable of the Ten Virgins is the same point He communicated earlier in the Olivet Discourse, which is

emphasized as He concludes the parable: “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:13, 24:42-44).

Jesus emphasized to everyone who heard His words to be on the alert and to keep watching for His return (Mark 13:37). Those of us who have been brought to faith in Christ will be ready when the bridegroom comes for us (Matthew 25:6). By God’s sovereign choice, by His grace and not because of any works of our own, we were called to faith in His Son. We are those who represent the “good soil” in the Parable of the Sower. The seed of the word of God fell in our hearing and bore fruit. We are those who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear and understand (Matthew 13:8-9, 16, 23), whereas all the others have not (Matthew 13:11).

For those of us who possess a genuine faith in Christ, to watch and be on the alert means that we are to obediently be about the tasks that God has assigned for each of us when He called us to faith in His Son. Using the spiritual gifts and resources that God gave to us, we are to minister to the body of Christ (Matthew 24:45-46), and we are also to work to bring in His harvest, as He provides the opportunities for each of us (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to always be laboring to build upon the foundation of our faith with the gold, silver, and precious stones of works done in obedience to the word of God (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).