

The Parable of the Ten Virgins – a Parable of the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 25:1-13

Matthew 25:1-13 - *“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. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

⁶ “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.’ ¹⁰ 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.”

Background Notes

Parables are short stories with a deeper meaning. The parables of the Lord Jesus were earthly stories with a spiritual meaning. They contain teaching and truth that the Lord wanted to convey. In verse 1, notice that the parable of the ten virgins (or bridesmaids) is a “parable of the kingdom of heaven.” *“The kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”*

In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus said that His “parables of the kingdom of heaven” contain the “mysteries” of the kingdom of heaven. *“And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:10-11).*

Remember, a biblical mystery is not something mysterious, but rather it is truth that was previously concealed. A truth or doctrine that was concealed in the Old Testament, but has been revealed in the New Testament, is called a “mystery.” So the parables of the kingdom of heaven reveal truth about the kingdom that was concealed in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the present form of the kingdom was concealed. For example, the fact that there would be two Advents, or two separate comings of Christ, is not revealed in the Old Testament. Some truths were concealed in the Old

Testament, although sometimes they were sketched out in picture form, such as in *types*, or foreshadows. These “mysteries” were not fully revealed until the New Testament was given.

So the fact that there would be two Advents of Christ was not revealed in the Old Testament. The fact that between the two advents of Christ there would exist a situation in which there would be true and false believers, wheat and tares, faithful and unfaithful, the good and the evil all mingled together was not revealed in the Old Testament. These truths are revealed in the parables of the kingdom of heaven in the Gospel of Matthew, and in other portions of the New Testament. So the parables of the kingdom reveal the world of Christendom that exists at the present time, between the two Advents, or between the two comings of our Lord Jesus.

From other Scriptures we know that before the Return of the Lord to the earth to set up His millennial kingdom, there will be a seven-year period of turmoil and disaster on this earth, known as the Tribulation Period. Before this Tribulation period the Rapture of the Church will occur, and Christians will be caught away from earth to meet the Lord in the air. So both the Rapture of the Church and the Tribulation Period occur before the Lord’s Return to this earth at His second Advent.

Now comes a logical question about this parable of the ten virgins. Does the time frame of the parable of the ten virgins cover the entire period of time between the two Advents of Christ, or only the end of that time period, the Tribulation Period? Some commentators go with the idea that it deals primarily with Tribulation Period, and thus the wise virgins are the believers of the Tribulation. I believe that this parable of the kingdom is like the other parables of the kingdom in Matthew, and it covers the whole period of time between the two Advents of Christ. Thus the wise virgins in this parable are true Christians and the foolish virgins are false “Christians” - people who only claim to be believers.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Return of the Lord was forgotten by the foolish and the wise.

“But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept” (v5). What is the meaning of this part of the parable? Well, it’s fairly obvious that the long delay of the bridegroom represents the long period of time between our Lord’s two comings, or the time between our Lord’s two advents - right? That’s easy! Now notice - for much of this time **all** the bridesmaids became drowsy! The foolish virgins **and** the wise virgins **all** fell asleep. They **all** slumbered and slept. And how true this was in the history of the Church! If you read Church history, you’ll find that for many centuries Christians lost sight of the Lord’s return. In large measure, the professing Church completely forgot this precious truth! Even during the time of the Great Reformation, the doctrine of the Lord’s return was not prominent. Like the virgins in the parable, all Christendom slumbered and slept!

However, a revival of the doctrine of the Lord's return took place, and for the past 200 years the great hope of the Lord's return has been taught and proclaimed. As a result, true believers have trimmed their lamps and prepared for the Lord's return, and false believers (represented by the foolish virgins) have certainly been awakened, and realize that they're not in a different "camp." So we see that this part of the parable has already been fulfilled in history. The Return of the Lord was forgotten by the foolish **and** the wise virgins.

2. The Return of the Lord will separate the foolish from the wise.

In the parable, the foolish virgins were foolish because they didn't have any oil for their oil lamps. These lamps were small clay vessels that held only a small amount of oil, so they had to be refilled frequently. In the parable, the oil represents the Holy Spirit. Without oil there can be no light of testimony, and only true believers have the Holy Spirit. Because the foolish bridesmaids had no oil, when the bridegroom finally came only the wise bridesmaids went out to meet the bridegroom and went into the wedding feast.

In this parable of the kingdom of heaven, the wedding feast represents the blessings of Christ's millennial kingdom. When the Lord returns, He will set up His kingdom on earth, and only true believers will enter this kingdom. Who are these true believers? All believers down through the ages! They will be resurrected to reign with Christ for 1000 years in His millennial kingdom on this earth. Revelation 20:6 says, "*Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*" And we Christians of this present age are included in that great company of believers - the wise virgins! We leave with Christ at the time of the Rapture, and return with Him to enjoy the blessings of His millennial Kingdom.

Because this is a parable of the kingdom of heaven (that is, the kingdom in its present-day form), I believe that the wise virgins in this parable specifically represent true believers of the Church Age. Notice, by the way, that the wise virgins go out to meet the bridegroom **before** His return to the wedding feast. Is this possibly a glimpse of the Rapture in this parable? It may be, but I wouldn't want to be dogmatic on that possibility! When the Lord doesn't give the meaning of a parable (as He did in the parable with the wheat and the tares, and the parable of the sower), we are left to interpret the parable using the rest of Scripture as our guide. So we must be very careful to **focus on the main thrust of the parable**. However, there will be small details, and those details may have significance. I believe it may be significant that the wise virgins go out to meet the bridegroom before he goes into the wedding feast. It may be a glimpse of the Rapture.

In any case, the foolish virgins are shut out of the wedding feast. Who are the foolish virgins? Are they unfaithful Christians, or Christian backsliders who will lose out on the kingdom blessings? No - they are **unbelievers**. They're

people who only claim to be Christians. They're "Christians in name only." The foolish virgins are like the tares in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, and the bad fish in the parable of the good and bad fish in Matthew 13.

Notice what the Lord says to the foolish virgins: "*Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you*" (v12). The Lord would **never** say that to a true believer, no matter how much that true believer might have backslidden. So clearly here the foolish virgins are not true believers. They're not unfaithful Christians. They are "Christians in name only." They are not true believers - they're unbelievers. The Return of the Lord will separate the foolish from the wise.

Practical Application

No person can give you salvation.

In the parable, when the foolish virgins realized that they didn't have any oil, they asked the wise virgins to give them some of their oil. The answer was, "No - you have to go and get your own oil."

Do you see the obvious lesson? The oil represents the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives within every true believer. Ephesians 1:13 says, "*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...*"

An unbeliever doesn't have the Holy Spirit! There's only one way to receive the Holy Spirit, and that one way is by becoming a true believer in Jesus Christ as Savior. You must acknowledge that you're a sinner and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from the penalty of sin. No person can give you salvation - not your mother, brother, a preacher, a pastor, or a Christian friend. They can direct you to the Lord through His Word - but you must come to Jesus yourself.

Have you come to Him for salvation from your sin? Are you a true believer? You can receive the Lord Jesus right now, wherever you are, by saying a simple prayer of confession and trust in Christ as your personal Savior. But **you** must do it yourself - because no person can give you salvation!