

I mentioned last week, that beginning with Matt.24:45, our Savior teaches three, closely related parables. There's the parable of the faithful and faithless servant (24:45-51); the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13); and the parable of the master and his talents (25:14-30).

Now, it's important to keep in mind, that all three parables are intended to explain what our Savior meant by being watchful (24:42) and ready (v44). Having exhorted His disciples to watch and be ready for His return, our Savior then illustrates what this entail by three parables. In other words, our Savior's eschatology was practical.

Thus, let me reiterate what I've said before—if your eschatology (your view of end-times) doesn't encourage you to watch and be ready, then abandon it—it's not the same eschatology as our Savior or the apostles. And this is a primary problem with many man-made theories of end-times. They remove the imminence of our Savior's return, and thus fail to encourage the church to be watchful, alert, and prepared.

- I. Its Historical Framework
- II. Its Fundamental Meaning
- III. Its Practical Application

I. Its Historical Framework

1. V1—"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom"—before I go further let me say something briefly about the phrase "the kingdom of heaven."
2. By "the kingdom of heaven" is meant God's rule upon earth in and through His universal and visible church.
3. This refers to, as we were taught in the previous hour, the church of God on earth, comprised of professing Christians.
4. For as our Savior says—"Then (in the day of His return) the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish."
5. That is, as we shall see here in a few minutes, five of them were true Christians and the other five hypocrites.
6. But they were all professing Christians—they all professed to be Christian and were waiting for His return.
7. Thus, our Savior uses a common situation as a means to teach a lesson—that's what a parable was—it used regular everyday situations to teach spiritual truth.
8. In olden days, in Jewish culture, weddings often took place at night—thus, the need for lamps for light.
9. A bride would have a wedding party made of friends and family members, who would wait with her for the bridegroom.
10. The bridegroom would come to the house of his bride's father, and take her with him, to their new house.
11. Thus, the bride (and her maidens) would wait outside the house, in anticipation of the coming groom.
12. The entire wedding party would then walk together to the house that the groom prepared for his bride.
13. And it would there, within the groom's house, that the ceremony and festivals, which might last several days, would formally begin.

14. Thomas Shepard—"The parable itself is set down agreeable to the custom of those times wherein our Savior lived, wherein their marriages were usually celebrated in the night time; she that was the bride was attended with sundry virgins to meet the bridegroom; these virgins, it being the night season, took therefore their lamps with them; those that were ready, and met the bridegroom, were admitted to the marriage room and supper; those that came after that time, if once the doors were shut, were surely kept out though they knocked hard to come in."
15. C.H. Lenski—"The imagery employed is that of a grand Jewish wedding. Groom and bride have been betrothed by the parents. This has made them man and wife. After the Jewish betrothal a certain time was allowed to elapse, and then on a certain evening the groom, accompanied by his friends, proceeded in a festive procession from his father's house to the home of his bride to bring her and her maiden companions to the groom's home for the consummation of the marriage with its days of wedding festivities."

II. Its Fundamental Meaning

1. The fundamental meaning of the parable is rather evident—Christ is the bridegroom, and the ten virgins are professing Christians waiting for His return.
2. Now, as we read through this parable, it becomes rather clear, that the emphasis lies on the foolish virgins.
3. In fact, it's actually possible to entitle it—the parable of the foolish virgins, in contrast to the wise virgins.
4. Thus, in seeking to explain it's intended meaning, I want to suggest four things about the foolish virgins (in contrast to the wise virgins).
5. (1) They were foolish not wise (v2), v2—"Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish"—I don't want to overlook this point.
6. Five of the virgins were wise and the other five were foolish—that means, five were saved and the others lost.
7. All men are foolish by nature, and we become truly wise by grace—"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God."
8. This means, every non-Christian, regardless how much education he may have, is actually, only a fool.
9. He may know much about mathematics, mechanics, or various sciences—he may have a BA, MA, and PH.D.
10. But if he's not in Christ, he's but an educated fool—because he doesn't know the truth about God, himself, salvation, morality, or eternity.
11. And so, this first point is important to keep in mind—our Savior is describing two people—one saved, the other unsaved.
12. (2) They had lamps but no extra oil (vv3-9), vv3-4—"Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."
13. All ten of the virgins had lamps with oil in it—the difference is this—the wise took extra oil in the vessels.
14. As a lamp could only hold so much oil, there was the need to carry extra in some sort of vessel (the foolish failed to bring extra oil, whereas the wise did).
15. The bridegroom delays his coming and they all fall asleep—finally at midnight he arrives, and they all go out to meet him.
16. And because the bridegroom was delayed, the foolish virgins run out of oil, and ask the wise to borrow some.
17. V9—"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.'"

18. Now, as you can assume, there's been a measure of debate as to what precisely our Savior meant by "oil."
19. And while I will forgo mentioning all of the suggested answers, let me say the majority believe the Holy Spirit.
20. And there's good reason to believe this, as Scripture oftentimes uses the imagery of oil to describe the person and work of the Spirit.
21. Thomas Shepard—"By oil is meant the Spirit of Christ and the graces of it, peculiar to all the elect; and thus, the Spirit is called *the anointing*, and the graces of the Spirit, *The smell of Christ's ointments*."
22. Thus, simply put, the foolish virgins only had the common operations of the Spirit, whereas, the wise had the saving operations of the Spirit.
23. (a) Foolish virgins experience the common operations of the Spirit—they had some oil but not enough.
24. If there's anything about the person and work of the Spirit that's forgotten today, it's His temporary work upon the non-elect.
25. It's for this reason, the foolish virgins, while didn't have sufficient oil, they nevertheless, had some oil.
26. Heb.6:4-6—"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance."
27. Now, it's not my purpose this morning to explain Hebrews 6:4-6, but it refers to those who fall away.
28. That is, it describes people who've experienced certain things, that fall short of a saving work of God.
29. Notice, they "became partakers of the Holy Spirit"—that is, they had some oil in the lamp short of salvation.
30. And so, here I want to suggest three things about this common (non-saving) work of the Spirit upon foolish virgins.
31. (i) The Spirit enables them to escape outward pollutions, 2Pet.2:20—"For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning."
32. Notice, they have a knowledge of the truth, that enables them to "escape the pollutions of the world."
33. That is, they no longer live an openly immoral and/or wicked lifestyle—they live outwardly decent lives.
34. (ii) The Spirit enables them to experience certain emotions, Matt.13:20-21—"He who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while."
35. Such a person may have deep emotional experiences (including joy and sorrow), and yet be a foolish virgin.
36. (iii) The Spirit enables them to perform acts of ministry, Matt.7:22—"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name.'"
37. Just because a person is a great preacher (or even theologian), doesn't mean they are necessarily wise virgins.
38. Now, before I move further, let me take a brief look at Judas (who was a classic and tragic illustration of a foolish virgin).
39. If you remember, when our Savior warned the disciples that one of them would betray Him, they all asked—"Is it me?"

40. In other words, none of them secretly doubted Judas—none of them said—"It's got to be Judas because he's different than we are."
41. No! Judas was one of these ten virgins, and remember, they all had lamps, and they were all waiting for the bridegroom.
42. Judas had a knowledge of the truth that kept him from open wickedness; he had a type of sorrow; and he ministered the word.
43. And yet, he did all this as a foolish virgin—he only experienced the common operations of the Spirit.
44. (b) Wise virgins experience the saving operations of the Spirit—they are indwelt by the Spirit and receive all the graces of the Spirit.
45. Now, here I need to make an important clarification—the common and saving operations of the Spirit differ both in quality and quantity.
46. I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying—it's not that the foolish virgins get the same thing as the wise, only less.
47. Did the foolish virgins have some kind of faith, some kind of joy, some kind of holiness, and some kind of service?
48. Yes. But it wasn't true faith, joy, holiness, or service—because if they truly had these things, they would have lasted.
49. Now, before I go any further, let me say something about the Spirit—because the Holy Spirit is everywhere present, He is everywhere present.
50. You see, I fear sometimes we think that the Holy Spirit is actually more or less present in certain places.
51. But the Holy Spirit is everywhere present and, this may surprise you, He's equally present in everyplace.
52. So it's not that the Holy Spirit is present in some places, and not present in other places, but, it's that He's uniquely present in some places, and not uniquely present in other places.
53. For example, He's uniquely present with His people as they gather to worship Him, on the Lord's Day.
54. Technically speaking, the Spirit isn't any more present among us this morning, than He is outside our gathering.
55. Let me illustrate—let's say, there's two gatherings this morning—there's a church and then a gang planning a drive by.
56. The Holy Spirit isn't any more present in the one, than He is in the other—the Spirit is everywhere present.
57. But He is not present among His people in the exact same way, He is also present upon the gangsters.
58. And so too, while the Holy Spirit is present within all men, as He's everywhere present, He's not present in all men in the exact same way.
59. If you remember, this week at prayer meeting I mentioned Psalm 139, where David says God, by His Spirit, is present in heaven and hell (but, this doesn't mean He's in heaven and hell in the exact same way).
60. He's present within the wise virgins in a unique or special way, that He's not present within the foolish virgins.
61. He's present within the wise virgins as the Spirit of regeneration, illumination, justification, and sanctification.
62. In other words, the Spirit dwells within the hearts of wise virgins, so as to save them and to sanctify them.
63. And the NT Scriptures, speak of this unique work of the Spirit within wise virgins as indwelling them.

64. Rom.8:9—"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."
65. (3) They were unready for the bridegroom (v10), v10—"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."
66. It was because the foolish virgins lacked oil that they were not ready, and it was because the wise possessed oil that they were ready.
67. CHS—"Their readiness consisted in having lighted lamps, or flaming torches; our preparation for death or Christ's coming is the possession of grace in the heart."
68. (4) They were unknown by the bridegroom (vv11-12), v11-12—"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'"
69. The reason the bridegroom refused to open the door for these virgins, is because he did not know them.
70. Now most of you are fully aware, that the Scriptures uses the notion of "knowing" to refer to "loving."
71. Matt.7:23—"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"
72. Christ says, that He "never" knew them—this means, He never loved them as He loved the wise virgins.
73. It's not that He knew them (or loved them) only for a time—no—He never knew them from all eternity.
74. Thus, by way of inference, if He refuses to let the foolish virgins in because He never knew them, then He let the wise in because He did know them.
75. This is why they were given the Holy Spirit to indwell them—because Christ indwells them by His Spirit.
76. CHS—"Those whom Jesus Christ knows in this sense, He loves; and they love Him because He has first loved them. The foolish virgins had professed to be the bridegroom's friends, yet they were proved to be not even His acquaintances. May none of us ever hear from the blessed lips of the heavenly Bridegroom that terrible death sentence, 'I know you not!'"

III. Its Practical Application

1. V13—"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."
2. Be watchful! Be alert! Be ready! That is, be sure that you a wise virgin and not merely a foolish virgin.
3. How does a person know if they are a wise or foolish virgin? How does a person know if the Spirit indwells them?
4. But before I seek to answer that question (or those questions), I need to first make an important clarification.
5. The point of this parable is to warn foolish virgins and encourage wise virgins—in other words, a person can and should know what kind of a virgin he is.
6. Our Savior gave this parable for the express purpose to expose some people and to encourage other people.
7. Thus, in the time we have left, I want to suggest a threefold description of every person indwelt by the Spirit.
8. (1) Those indwelt by the Spirit believe the Bible—it's the work of the Spirit to open our eyes to the truth.

9. But He doesn't just open up our understanding, without also engaging our hearts and our wills, with reference to Scripture.
10. That simply means—the Spirit teaches us the word in such a way that results in us understanding, loving, and obeying Scripture.
11. Yes, wise virgins understand and believe the Bible—they believe everything that it says about God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, morality, and eternity.
12. But, and this is very important, it's only the wise virgin who not only understands and believes Scripture, but also loves it.
13. And by loving it, I don't merely mean loving to study it and debate it, but to relish it and delight in it.
14. (2) Those indwelt by the Spirit love and trust Christ—this too is the work of the Spirit—to give us faith that we might trust, love, and obey Christ.
15. It's the purpose of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ, and necessary to glorifying Christ, is first, humbling man.
16. This is without doubt a true mark of every wise virgin—they no longer trust themselves but Christ alone.
17. (3) Those indwelt by the Spirit endure to the very end—remember what our Savior said—"he who endures to the end shall be saved."
18. Wise virgins continue to the end—that is, the end of their lives, or else, the end of the age when Christ returns.
19. But either way—they endure to the end—one clear evidence that someone was a foolish virgin, is if they return to the world.
20. Our Savior said—"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk.9:62).
21. But this anticipates a question—Does this mean that no one can truly know if they're a wise virgin until they've endured to the end?
22. Well, of course not, because if that were true, that would mean no person can have assurance until they die.
23. There have been those who taught that—for example, the Roman Catholic teaches against having assurance.
24. They believe it's prideful and presumptuous—one reason they believe that is because of this point before us.
25. They rightly understand that the Scriptures teach, that only those who endure to the end will be saved (and so they teach you cannot be truly sure you are a Christian until you actually endure to the end).
26. Now, what do I say to this? Well, in the first place let me say that I agree such assurance can be presumptuous (arrogant).
27. If you believe that you shall endure because of your own strength and ability, you are prideful and arrogant.
28. But, if you simply believe what the Scripture promises, that God will ensure His people endure, that's the furthest thing from pride and arrogance.
29. So, here's the point—you can believe that every wise virgin must endure to the end, and you can also believe, that God will enable you to endure to the end.
30. Thus, in closing, let me say a word or two to foolish virgins—you need more than a lamp, you also need oil.
31. And where is oil found? Where is the Holy Spirit found? Well, He's only found in Christ—those who get Christ get Him.
32. This is your fundamental problem—where is wisdom and oil found but in Christ—get Christ and you get oil (and not just a few drops, but enough to ensure you endure to the end).