

Dear Friends,

So many imaginative, as contrasted with Biblical, ideas about today regarding the Second Coming that possibly the most important Bible topic in the Bible is either neglected by caring but timid Bible teaching pastors, or dramatized into something not remotely similar to the event as taught in the New Testament by others. In John 5:28-29 Jesus specifically taught that God's final judgment of **all humanity** would occur in one epochal moment of time, "...**the hour is coming**," not be split into two hours of judgment separated by a confusing (Few people in the dispensational camp of eschatology agree with each other on the timing. Is the imagined "Rapture" before, in the midst of, or after the final week? Or does it occur long centuries before the final time?) In Acts 24:15, Paul affirmed his belief in the same truth that Jesus taught, that God intended only one hour for the resurrection of all the dead, "...**both of the just and unjust**." In these words, Paul both agreed with Jesus' teaching (He should; after all he wrote that Jesus taught him) and rejected any idea that the just would be raised at one time and the unjust at a later time.

Many folks who believe the various ideas of dispensational eschatology will interpret Matthew 24 and related accounts in Mark and Luke to describe the final Second Coming or the Rapture. If we study the three accounts in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), noting especially the activities Jesus described as wise and deliberate responses to seeing the signs of the predicted judgment, we readily conclude that He was not teaching about either of these events, but rather about a local, temporal judgment against the religious inhabitants of Jerusalem and surrounding Judah in that generation. Jesus described several very distinct lifestyles and activities of daily living in His words in these lessons in a manner that cannot be reconciled to either an imagined unannounced "Rapture" or a final Second Coming. Do the folks who believe that Jesus was teaching regarding either of these events honestly believe that all pregnant women and nursing mothers at that time shall be sentenced to eternal hell? Jesus specifically named them and pronounced a "Woe" on them. However, if He was teaching His disciples regarding a temporal, local judgment, the "Woe" would be circumstantial and temporal, not eternal. If either a pregnant woman or a nursing mother had to immediately leave home and flee into the mountains for safety, they would face severe difficulty in complying, a far more logical and moral view of the "Woe" that Jesus pronounced.

Given Jesus' unique introduction of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, "**Then shall...**" it is my view that He used this parable specifically to teach His disciples of the coming judgment against Jerusalem that would occur within their lifetime. Sadly, some of His disciples believed and understood His words, and some didn't, the "Wise" and the "Foolish" virgins in the parable. Jesus didn't speak these words to all the Jews, but to His disciples who question him regarding the judgment He pronounced at the end of Matthew 23. Both classes of people in the parable Jesus described as "Virgins."

While I believe this parable was addressed specifically to first century disciples regarding a first century temporal judgment that would occur within their lifetimes, I also believe the spiritual wisdom it teaches applies to many children of God in every age since Jesus spoke those words. Wise believing children of God to this day are blessed to enter into the Lord's gospel kingdom and celebrate the extended and blessed gospel "Wedding feast" with Jesus, while foolish and unbelieving children of God often fail to measure up to their New Testament responsibilities as believers, and subsequently they never fully enjoy the gospel "Wedding celebration" in Jesus' spiritual kingdom. Lord help each of us to spend much serious time with our Bibles and prayer, to be prepared for faithful service to the Lord and to others, even when the opportunity surprises us at unexpected times.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Parable of Ten Virgins

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish

took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (Matthew 25:1-4 KJV 1900; the parable continues through Verse 10)

Jesus introduced this parable in a unique manner. His typical introduction of the parables was “*The kingdom of heaven is like...*” He introduced this parable with “*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be...*” In the other parables, Jesus addressed a present likeness of His kingdom. In this parable, that likeness did not exist at the time He taught the parable, but a specific time was coming when that likeness would be true. We should follow “Then” with our question of this context, “When?”

For enough years to embarrass me at my careless study, I thought Jesus’ Olivet Discourse ended with the end of Matthew 24. No, it continues to the end of Matthew 25. Jesus answered our “When” question in Matthew 24. In Matthew 23, Jesus confronted and effectively judged the present generation of the leaders of Judaism for their blatant hypocrisy and their rejection of Him as their Messiah. In effect, in Chapter 24, He pronounced the sentence of judgment that would fall upon **that generation** because of His righteous judgment in Chapter 23. Do not discount His words.

*Verily I say unto you, **This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*** (Matthew 24:34 KJV; emphasis added)

The judgment Jesus announced and described in detail in Matthew 24 does not at all match the judgment of the Second Coming. For example, (Matthew 24:40-41 KJV) when the final judgment arrives at the Second Coming, will one field worker be taken into judgment and another worker left in the field? Will one woman grinding wheat into flour be taken into judgment and another left? Further, based on Jesus’ words, there shall be no intermediate judgment or rapture between His ascension and that final day of judgment. In John 5:28-29, Jesus stated that the time of final judgment **for all**, not a segment of humanity, would occur in “**the hour**,” in one hour, not in two distinct “Hours.”

However, if Jesus intended to teach the disciples regarding a temporal judgment against first century unbelieving Jewish religious people, this description perfectly matches what might occur. And it would occur within that particular “Generation,” a time window of approximately forty years, not untold centuries later. In Matthew 24:48, when the wicked servant who exemplified that specific day and judgment said, “*My lord delayeth his coming*,” the “Delayed coming” likely referred to His first coming, not His final coming in judgment. First century Jews understood Old Testament prophecy such as Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27) as a ticking alarm clock of prophecy **whose time had arrived**, meaning Messiah was to come in their lifetime. They had no thought of a punctuated and interrupted final week of that prophecy. Thus, for them to dismiss such prophecy from the Old Testament was equivalent to their denying the integrity of those prophecies in their words, “My lord delayeth his coming.” God’s prophetic clock kept perfect time, and that alarm, announcing that their Messiah, their “God with us in human flesh,” was imminent. The prophetic time had arrived. We see this awareness in Gamaliel’s caution to his fellow court members in Acts 5:34-40. Despite false messiahs who came and disrupted their culture for a time, the time for the true Messiah had come, so his doubting fellows would wisely exercise caution in their harsh judgment against the apostles of Jesus. He just might be their true Messiah.

The judgment of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24 is described in Mark and Luke as well. Luke even reveals that Jerusalem would be assaulted and held under siege during that judgment.

*For the days shall come upon thee, that **thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round**, and keep thee in on every side. (Luke 19:43 KJV; emphasis added)*

Remember Jesus' warning in Matthew 24:34 regarding these specific prophecies occurring within "This generation." This siege began in March, 70 A. D. when the Roman army laid siege against Jerusalem, a siege that last till August of that year, when they finally invaded the city and effectively destroyed it. He spoke those words around 30-33 AD, less than forty years from the date the Roman siege ended with the devastation that He described unfolding against Jerusalem. What Jesus spoke in prophecy occurred within the lifetime of the disciples to whom He spoke those words, within "This generation" that was alive and heard His prophecy.

One more point regarding the timing of the judgment of Matthew 24.

Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. (Matthew 24:16 KJV; study the following verses which describe logical events related to a local temporal judgment such as occurred in 70 A. D., but not at all related to a universal judgment such as shall occur at the Second Coming. At the Second Coming, there shall be no time for anyone to flee anywhere. However, when the disciples saw the Roman siege of Jerusalem, they would know that judgment had arrived. Safety would be in the mountains, not in the besieged city)

With these contextual teachings in our minds, let's go back to Jesus' parable that begins Matthew 25 and His opening time-defined application of this parable, "**Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.**" Only "Then" should we apply the points Jesus made in the parable. The "Wise" virgins in the kingdom of heaven remembered Jesus' caution to "Head for the hills," when they saw the unfolding of the Roman approach and siege of Jerusalem, not run to the (No longer) holy city of Jerusalem. Those who retreated into the hill country were the "Wise virgins" who lived to enjoy the gospel wedding feast with Jesus. Those who ignored His teaching and ran to Jerusalem suffered unimaginable trials during the siege and demonstrated that they were not prepared (No oil for their lamps) for personal participation in the gospel wedding feast. It does not at all strain the lesson to observe that Jesus focused the whole of His parable on people whom He described as "Virgins." Jesus did not teach this parable to describe all the people who ran into the city of Jerusalem when they saw the Roman army approaching. He only deals with those whom He knew were "Virgins." Unbelieving virgins, but virgins by His description, not our opinion.

In the parable, Jesus described ten virgins who were all waiting for the wedding to begin. A Jewish wedding often lasted several days, so provisions to comfortably accommodate the guests during this time were essential. Oil for lamps would be only one of many such provisions. Five of the virgins Jesus mentioned in the parable understood their personal responsibility as attendants to the bride at the wedding, and they had purchased oil to provide light for the duration of the celebration. The five "Foolish" virgins were happy to be attendants and to enjoy the extended celebration of the occasion, but they chose to ignore their responsibility. They bought no oil for the wedding. Happy enough to benefit and to enjoy the celebration, but they chose to ignore their personal obligations. Pastors will occasionally observe members of the churches they serve who match Jesus' description of both classes of virgins.

While the topic of giving has understandably become a sensitive one because so many carnal, worldly church leaders have hounded their members for money and have used excessive amounts given to them for extravagant lifestyles, the ordinary church faces financial needs, and Scripture teaches the necessity of church members to give to their church. When I was just a young "Pup" in my ministry, I heard an older pastor speak candidly of the very pattern we see in the two classes of virgins in this parable. He

spoke of two attitudes in churches regarding giving, "The Lord's people are the most willing people on earth. One group of folks in a church are willing to give, and to give some more for the needs of the church. And the other group gives nothing but are more than willing for the first group to give as much as they wish." Without necessarily intending to do so, this wise pastor described the two classes of "Virgins" in Jesus' parable.

The foolish virgins eventually realized that they needed to meet their obligation, but they waited too long. How many "Stores" in that culture were open for business at "Midnight"? Once discovered in their neglect, what did these foolish virgins do? In effect, they tried to "Blame" someone else, the wise virgins. Why didn't those wise virgins buy a double portion of oil so they'd have enough for everyone?

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. (Matthew 25:10 KJV)

In the general activities of discipleship, a wise, spiritual, and even logical timeframe applies. We can neglect our faith until the time comes when we simply cannot repair or restore it. A sad memory; many years ago, I preached a sermon from deep conviction regarding the importance of believers spending daily serious study time with their Bibles. After the service, a dear lady who was a member of that church (I was a visitor; not the church where I served) asked to talk to me about the message. Obviously, she had been touched by the message and understood the need for serious time with her Bible. She confessed that she had grievously neglected that study time, but she intended to follow her present conviction and amend her ways. Within a matter of months from this conversation, I heard from a mutual friend that this dear woman had been diagnosed with a serious age-related dementia. She no longer had the mental ability to flood her mind with instructive, strengthening, comforting Scripture. For her, as for those foolish virgins in the parable, the "Door was shut."

While Jesus spoke this parable to warn His people in the generation in which He came and lived of the coming judgment against Jerusalem, we find so much instructive truth for godly living that is timeless and so applicable to our present life and needs. What have you neglected? What have you ignored and hoped others in your church would "Take care of that"? Why not go to work today to step up and start carrying your responsibility instead of passing it off to others?

Elder Joe Holder