

# The Ten Virgins

*Matthew 25:1-13*

*With Study Questions*

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# The Ten Virgins

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Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. <sup>3</sup> Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. <sup>6</sup> "And at midnight a cry was *heard*: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' <sup>12</sup> But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (Matthew 25:1-13).

## Introduction

Weddings are a time of celebration and participation in an event that is both holy and festive. Weddings should be profound and weddings should be fun. There is no human relationship as intimate as that one which God joins together of husband and a wife (Matthew 19:6). And judging by the fact that Jesus turned six thirty-gallon waterpots into wine at a wedding (John 2:6-10), it would appear that weddings should be a time of merriment as well.

It is this most joyous of human events that God ordained to instruct us of His love for us. Time after time man's relationship with God is likened to a marriage or a wedding.

**I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the Lord (Hosea 2:19, 20).**

The Apostle Paul compares the relationship of the husband and bride to the relationship of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5). Jesus had earlier given a parable of a marriage feast (Matthew 22. See also Luke 12:35-40; 14:7-11). We read in Revelation: **“Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9)!**

Roman Catholics view weddings as a sacrament. And although we would not agree, it can be easily argued that weddings and the marriages which follow are primarily designed as pictures of God’s relationship with His church – imagine how much better marriages would be if we could manage to keep that thought ever before us! In my many years as a pastor and Christian I’ve developed an increased appreciation of God’s love for us in the face of our unworthiness. In the hundreds of weddings I have done I am continually reminded of God’s call in my life of what it means to be a husband. It is always humbling, challenging and encouraging.

Here we have an interesting parable which Jesus gives toward the end of warnings about the destruction of the temple. Jesus now does something He had done with great regularity through Matthew but hasn’t done throughout the entire Olivet Discourse – tell a parable about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

The picture given is one of ten virgins who traditionally would have escorted the bridegroom from the house of the bride to the wedding banquet, where they would have been guests. As we’ll see half of them will attend and half will not. Half of them will have found they have entered the kingdom of heaven in its final and eternal form and half of them will have been shut out forever.

**Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish (Matthew 25:1, 2).**

### **Wise and Foolish, Not Sinful and Sinless**

Jesus places the virgins into two categories – wise and foolish. Foolish (*morai* from *moros* meaning dull or sluggish) is not mere name-calling nor does it relate to IQ. Foolish people can be very intelligent, but what makes them foolish is their trust in their own intelligence, goodness or industriousness as ultimate and their lack of willingness to recognize their creaturely limitations.

The “rich” (Luke 18:24) and those who have the “wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 1:20) can amass for themselves many things – but their own riches and wisdom can become their greatest enemy when failing to recognize the source of true riches and wisdom. It is not without reason that the Psalmist declares “**The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’**” (Psalm 14:1).

When Jesus uses the word ‘wise’ it is not the conventional *sophos*, but *phronimoi*, meaning prudent, sensible or practically wise. This is the person who has not ignored (or by the grace of God, suppressed) that which they know to be true. It’s simple and it’s right. Like the Hillbilly’s Ten Commandments posted on the wall at Cross Trails Church in Gainesboro, TN:

- (1) Just one God
- (2) Put nothin' before God
- (3) Watch yer mouth
- (4) Git yourself to Sunday meetin'
- (5) Honor yer Ma & Pa
- (6) No killin'
- (7) No foolin' around with another fellow's gal
- (8) Don't take what ain't yers
- (9) No tellin' tales or gossipin'
- (10) Don't be hankerin' for yer buddy's stuff

What’s true is simple. Things only become complicated when the lies show up – as they regularly do. Keep in mind that Jesus doesn’t categorize the virgins by sinful and sinless or good and bad. We’re all sinful, but it requires a willful effort to be foolish. And unfortunately, like any other discipline, with practice foolishness becomes natural and easy.

**Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps (Matthew 25:3, 4).**

### **Insufficient Oil**

Oil, lamps and vessels stand for so much in the Scriptures – implements in the temple, elements utilized for anointing and healing (Exodus 35:10-15;

Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9, etc.). But I don't think those particular uses are significant here.

The foolishness versus the wisdom here is not distinguished by the elements or implements per se (they all had oil and lamps), but by the amount of the oil (which of course required a carrying vessel). It would appear that the primary point of the previous illustration (Matthew 24:45-51) and this parable is one of endurance.

Jesus was prophetically anticipating difficult times. He had earlier warned that **"because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved (Matthew 24:12, 13).**

Unfortunate terms have led to massive confusion among Christians in this issue. 'Once saved, always saved' and 'eternal security', though technically accurate give a misleading picture to many, especially in light of the type of popular gospel presentations within our culture which point to a single religious experience as the basis of our assurance of salvation. The accurate and biblical term is the **"perseverance of the saints."**

**Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12 NASB).**

The message Jesus gives here is not similar to the one I once heard at a youth conference where the speaker told the teens, **"Try Jesus and see if it works. What have you got to lose?"** The message is more akin to the so common message of Jesus, **"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish it (Luke 14:28)?**

The oil of which Jesus speaks is the oil of lifelong conviction. Not unlike the marriage vow – so often made yet so seldom taken seriously – **"as long as we both shall live."** As taught by Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, **"...this supply of oil must mean that *inward reality of grace* which alone will stand when He appears whose eyes are as a flame of fire.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 25:4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept (Matthew 25:5).**

### **Outward Similarities**

Up to this point in the parable the virgins are indistinguishable from one another. They all had lamps, oil and they all slept. It wasn't as if the readiness of the five wise virgins was based upon their doing some particular good deed at the time of Christ's coming. The Apostle Paul ends his epistle to the church at Ephesus with the words:

**Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen (Ephesians 6:24).**

The word "**sincerity**" (*aphtharsia* – literally without corruption) presupposes, at some level, the possibility of a corrupt or insincere religious conviction. This message especially applies to those raised in the church – who have not chosen to attend by their own volition but have been raised in the church culture – those who have managed to give the outward appearance of inclusion. But one will come who looks beyond the outward. Jeremiah records, "**I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind**" (Jeremiah 17:10). People can be fooled. But there is little value in it.

**And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps (Matthew 25:6, 7).**

### **Eager Anticipation – All Slept**

They all slept. Again, it wasn't some particular deed they were doing at the time of judgment. But where as some were about to have a glorious encounter, others would have a rude awakening. They all, upon the bridegroom's arrival trimmed (*ekosmesan* – to beautify and prepare for use) their lamps, but some were really not prepared. It's a crummy feeling to be ill-prepared – whether it's a test where the questions seem foreign or a race where we grow tired after our first few steps. But it will be the darkest point in a person's eternal existence to stand before the judgment seat of God

watching the dismal flickering lamp of our own sinful inadequacies quenched by His just condemnation.

Conversely, the presence of the Lord is spoken of in the most joyous terms by those with true, lasting faith. The author of Hebrews speaks of “**eagerly**” waiting for Christ’s coming (Hebrews 9:28). When Paul wrote of the nearness of his departure it was a glorious anticipation.

**For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).**

I pray these words are true of us all.

**And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> 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’ (Matthew 25:8, 9).**

## **Buying Oil?**

What do we make of buying oil? Is there truly a purchase price for redemption—for lasting faith? In one respect it might be answered ‘yes, sell all you have and follow Jesus’ as He required of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22). Jesus indicates that it is the simple nature of the case that one cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Yet at the same time we have nothing to offer God but sin. These terms of conviction and investment are nonetheless used to convey the point of commitment, the way the experience might feel.

**Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding (Proverbs 23:23).**

“Buying” is used to challenge the lukewarm church at Laodicea

**Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see (Revelation 3:17, 18).**

The experience we have is that of us buying, choosing, committing. But deeper and more biblical reflections reveals that our willingness to buy is a result of having been bought. Being bought by God through Christ makes us willing.

**For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20).**

Isaiah writes of what we bring in our purchase.

**Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1).**

**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. <sup>11</sup>**

**"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' <sup>12</sup> But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup>**

**"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (Matthew 25:10-13).**

## **The Door is Shut**

There is a finality to this judgment – **"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"** (Hebrews 9:27). When it comes to faith in Christ, the decisions we make today will make a difference forever.



## Questions for Study

1. In what different ways do weddings and marriages illustrate our relationship with God (pages 2, 3).
2. What were the differences between the wise and foolish virgins? What do these words mean (pages 3, 4)?
3. What does the oil represent in this parable (pages 5, 6)?
4. Discuss the similarities and dissimilarities of the virgins (page 6)?
5. How can meeting Christ be a joyous or horrible experience (pages 6, 7)?
6. Is it possible to buy redemption? Discuss your answer (pages 7, 8).
7. What door is shut at Christ's coming in judgment (page 8)?