

# The Parable of the Ten Virgins

*The Parables*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 25:1-13  
**Preached on:** Tuesday, September 7, 2021

**Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Church**  
Prosper, Texas

**Website:** [www.reformedonline.com](http://www.reformedonline.com)  
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Our topic is the parable of the 10 virgins. We're in the midst of that series on the parables and we've come to some eschatological parables that are warning us about being ready for the coming of the Son of Man. I'm going to read verses 1 to 13.

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out [literally in Greek, our lamps are going out]. 9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10 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. 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

The Savior who is with us disciples, they're still on the Mount of Olives facing Jerusalem, he delivers a second parable related to the necessity and importance of being ready to meet Christ when he comes again. The first parable focused on both wisdom and faithfulness in relation to the second coming, this one's just going to focus on wisdom. Like the previous parable, this one emphasizes the need to be ready to meet Christ by contrasting those who were wise and ready and those who were unwise and not ready. This parable is a further illustration of the necessity to watch, to be spiritually alert, and thus the commander to watch is even repeated at the end of the parable, 25:13, that comes from 24:36, and there's some introductory matters that we want to consider first.

This parable which is found only in Matthew, is based upon Middle Eastern customs and the procession to the wedding feast. By the way, it's also found in Greco and in Roman customs as well about first century weddings, and it was common among many cultures at that time to have unmarried women or virgins partake in the procession to the bridegroom's residence. A girl who was unmarried in Israel in the days of our Lord would be in her early teens. Since we lack exact information about their customs, we can only say that the girls would have likely have been friends of the bride or bridegroom or both or relatives. The wedding was to occur at night and the responsibility was to meet the bridegroom at a certain place and then escort him with their lamps or torches. Now in this parable there is no mention of a bride at all but focuses on whether the virgins are ready or not to meet the coming bridegroom. Since the girls here represent professing Christians and the bridegroom represents Jesus, the parable does not mention a bride because it would confuse the imagery and it wouldn't make any sense. The church is called the bride in many passages of the New Testament, but here he wants us to focus on the bride rather on the on the virgins who represent the church. In addition, the plurality of the virgins is necessary to the central lesson of the parable for a division of them is necessary to give the consequences of not being ready, and we see this over and over, a contrast, those who are faithful, those who are not, those who are wise, those who are not, and then the consequences.

Second, this parable throughout church history, especially the church fathers, has received all sorts of allegorical and spiritual meanings that are completely beyond the intent of the author. The oil is this, the door represents this, everything is given a spiritual meaning. The patristic period especially, every little element in the parable is thought to have some important hidden meaning. We must resist the temptation to over-allegorize and instead focus on those elements of the story that are crucial to the central lessons. That's true of parables in general. Consequently, there's no need to speculate on the meaning of the oil or the meaning of the lamps. The important things are the bridegroom, the virgins, the bridegroom's delay, and the need to prepare in order to be ready. If the oil represents anything, it represents readiness. Preparedness is essential for the time is coming when getting ready will no longer be possible and the door will be shut. That's the central point.

And then third, this parable is logically divided as follows. 1. The 10 virgins' task of going out to meet the bridegroom and this consists of A) an introduction, verses 1 to 2, a description of what makes the virgins wise or foolish, verses 3 and 4, seeing the bridegroom in verse 5. 2. The coming of the bridegroom and the virgins' response, verses 6 to 9. 3. The entrance into the wedding banquet of the wise virgins and the rejection of the foolish virgins, verses 10 to 12. And then number 4. Our Lord's concluding exhortation, verse 13, which is a repetition of the same exhortation in slightly different form that began this whole section of parables on readiness. Like the previous parable, watchfulness or readiness for Jesus' return, this story contains a terrifying warning regarding the consequences of not being ready to meet Jesus. You're going to be shut out, locked out of the kingdom of God. Be locked out of heaven.

Well, let's look at the 10 virgins and their task. Our Lord introduces the parable in verses 1 and 2. "Then 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." This introductory formula, which we often see "the kingdom of heaven shall be likened," is similar to other introductions in chapters 13, 18 and 22. But here Jesus uses the future tense because of his eschatological focus; he's going to be talking about what happens at the end of the world. The story is centered on 10 virgins who have an obligation to be well prepared to meet the bridegroom. There's nothing significant about the number 10 in his context. The number 10 is a good round number divisible by two which Jesus likes to do when he presents these lessons about the visible church; he likes to present, he likes to make parallel lessons where here's the people who go to hell, here's the people who go to heaven. And it is not unlikely that at that time the 10 virgins at marriage would frequently be near or at this number, and Edersheim, as we'll see in a quote in a moment, believes that 10 was the number.

There also is nothing symbolic about their virginity. Jesus is simply setting out an accurate portrait, accurate details of a first century wedding. The common view, you know, which was you invite your friends and people got married back then at the age of 12-13-14. If you're getting to be 15-16, people were getting worried. "Why aren't you married yet?" They got married very young, and thus all the friends would be virgins in that society, that culture. The common view of the church fathers that our Lord is here commending nunnery or celibacy is totally without foundation, pure speculation, and once again they over-allegorize. The 10 virgins represent the visible or professing church of Christ. Not everyone who professes Christ has true faith or properly prepares for his coming. Okay, that's the point.

Verse 2 tells us that these 10 virgins will be the main focus of the parable, and it tells us why. Five more wise and five were foolish. The word wise here, *phronimos*, this adjective comes from the verb *phroneo*, which means thoughtful, prudent, sensible or practically wise. The main idea of this word is not intelligent which would be *synetos*, but practical action based on thoughtful or correct thinking. This idea of biblical wisdom where you take the word of God, you take the law of God and then you apply it to everyday life. It is the same as the wisdom of the book of Proverbs where the wise man has learned to carefully apply the precepts of the moral law to everyday life in specific temptations. That's wisdom, take biblical truth and learn to apply it to everyday situations. Biblical wisdom. The wise virgins were prudent because they carefully thought about all the contingencies and made careful preparation to meet them and not be defeated by them. That's wisdom. Because of their foresight and preparation, they were ready to meet the bridegroom.

Now the word foolish is the adjective *moron*. Sounds familiar. Which was taken over into the English to describe a mentally retarded person where today we would say mentally handicapped, I guess, who has the mind of a young child. In Greek, the primary meaning is dull or sluggish and thus it came to be used of people who were stupid or foolish. Now in Scripture the word fool can have negative moral connotations in certain contexts and it can refer to someone who is morally worthless or a scoundrel. It's often used that way so

in Scripture it's often given this moral tone. For example, Matthew 5:22. In this context, the main thought is a lack of foresight or prudence in preparing for the future. The foolish virgins are imprudent because they did not think about what was necessary to achieve their task. They were given a task, the task was to go out and meet the bridegroom and to be ready and they had to take into account all the contingencies surrounding that and they had to be ready, they had an important job to do. It was a very crucial job. It was a privilege to escort the bridegroom back to the feast.

They represent professing Christians who go throughout life without meditating on God's word and thinking about what is necessary to be ready to meet Christ. They are thoughtless, careless and complacent, and thus they do not persevere. Okay, being a Christian involves meditating on the word of God, putting it into practice in your daily life on a daily basis, and doing this over your whole life. That's what perseverance is all about. It's got to be watched.

The fact that Jesus divides the virgins into two equal halves does not mean that our Lord is saying that at the final judgment the church is going to be equally divided between hypocrites and true protectors, or the half of all professing Christians will be apostate. He simply prefers parallel comparisons in his parables. That's the way Hebrews do things. That's the way Hebrews think. If you read the Proverbs, for example, and you read many of the Psalms, they love parallelisms. The fact that half is mentioned does, however, indicate that a large proportion of the professing church will contain foolish, complacent, unprepared church members. It is a stern warning.

Throughout the long history of the visible church, there are times when most professing Christians are totally unprepared and there are other times when the visible church is largely wise and ready. You could contrast the dark, darkest part of the Middle Ages when people were completely into idolatry and superstition with the second Reformation period in Scotland and the rise of the Puritans in England and New England. Those people will... Well, for example, in New England, when the Puritans were at their height, the divorce rate in New England was less than 1%. The crime rate was so low it was very negligible and most of the crimes occurred from people that were not Puritans who settled in their communities, that it did not happen from Puritans and so forth. Unfortunately, in our day it's not like the time of the Reformation or the days when solid doctrine and practice prevailed. We're living in a time of great unpreparedness for the second coming which is ironic, since people talk about the second having now and the rapture and so forth more than ever.

In verses 3 and 4, we learn what made some virgins wise and others foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them but the wise took oil in their vessels, with their lamps. Now the word for lamps, *lampas*, can refer to a clay or silver lamp which held olive oil, Acts 20:8, and if you can go get any good Bible dictionary or good Bible encyclopedia set, you can open it up and they have actual lamps that they had in their houses that were made out of clay and they were kind of shaped like a boat with a bigger end to pour oil in and a small end where the wick went, and they would fill that

with olive oil, and it would burn for many hours. It was used in homes. That's not what is being discussed here. Okay, when I read this in the past, I would always think of the virgins with a household lamp in one hand and a jar of oil in the other, and that's not what's going on here. Such lamps were used to light homes.

The same word can also be used for torches or a lamp designed as a torch, and that's what we have here. We either have torches or even more likely, a lamp designed as a torch. The same word is used in John 18:3 to describe the torches carried by those who arrested Jesus. Regarding the design of this torch, there are two views. One view is that the torch consisted of oil-soaked rags wrapped on top of the pole. You take a bunch of rags, and you'd wrap them tightly around the pole and they would be soaked in oil and then they would be set alight, and they would burn for quite a while, maybe half an hour or so. They burned for quite a while and these are probably the kind of torches that you would use for a lot of illumination if you know you're not going to need a torch for a long time, or you would, you could even bring extra rags and a jar of oil and you could refurbish it. That's one view. Now obviously if you were having a wedding and you were poor, that's the kind of torch you would be using. This would be much brighter than a lamp and would need to be replenished with oil more often.

Edersheim is of the opinion that the virgins carried a sophisticated lamp-like pole and here's what he said, "Another archaeological inquiry will, perhaps, be more helpful to our understanding of this parable. The 'lamps' - not 'torches' - which the 10 Virgins carried, were of well-known construction. They bear in Talmudic writings commonly the name Lappid, but the Aramaic from the Greek word in the New Testament also occurs as Lampad and Lampadas. The lamp consisted of a round receptacle for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer - the Beth Shiqqua - which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, on which it was borne aloft. According to Jewish authorities, it was the custom in the East to carry in a bridal procession about 10 such lamps. We have the less reason to doubt that such was also the case in Palestine, since, according to rubric, ten was the number required to be present at any office or ceremony, such as at the benedictions accompanying the marriage-ceremonies."

Whatever design we should think of a torch or a pole, lamp, or handheld plate lamp, people tend to think of clay lamps here because modern readers do not understand how oil would be used to replenish torches. And the phrase trimmed their lamps in verse 7 calls to mind the practice of trimming the wick on a modern oil lamp, but keep in mind an oil lamp at the top of a pole would have to be trimmed also, and even if you had a regular torch that would go out, you'd have to cut off the ruined material and put new material on it and soak it again and relight it. So either way and we need to keep in mind that people using a torch at night for an extended period of time would carry a clay jar filled with oil to replenish the torch when it died out.

A pole when it breaks down, we tie it to the top, which would be soaked in oil and then set alight. When the torch went out, the burnt rags would be trimmed back and new rags would be attached and it would be dipped in the jar of oil. If the torches were lamps on a

pole, which I think is more likely given the period of time that they're waiting, they actually nod or fall asleep while waiting for hours, it would be a lamp on a pole because Edersheim observes they would only hold a small amount of oil and would also need to be supplemented after a relatively short period of time. If you had a big, huge lamp on top of a pole, it would be heavy and it would be cumbersome, and this is something that they held with one arm, with one hand.

Now the word vessels here, *anageiosis*, my pronunciation is not very good there, which only occurs here in the New Testament, refers to a clay jar. The oil from the jars could either be sprinkled on a torch that is dying out, or torches could be completely replenished before all of them died out. They keep on going. They didn't have matches like we do today or lighters.

Although the oil in the jars has been interpreted as a metaphor for many things, good works, the Holy Spirit, spiritual fervor and inward supply of grace, etc., it is wise to avoid such speculation or over-interpretation. The point of the taking of extra oil is to note the wise virgins' preparedness and all that that entails. They were prepared. They did what it took to be prepared to meet the coming bridegroom. While preparedness and perseverance flowed from a work of the Holy Spirit and inward supplies of grace, the main lesson of the parable is the necessity of diligent effort on the part of the disciples to be ready to meet the Lord. Whenever we see diligent, whenever we see commands to be holy, commands to attend to the means of grace, and these sort of things, yes, the presupposition is always that we're dependent upon the Holy Spirit. And one of the things that we do to prepare is pray for more faith and pray for a greater infusion of the Spirit in our lives, but the emphasis here is on what the people need to do to be holy, to be sanctified, to be ready.

The foolish virgins took torches but they did not bring any oil in case the bridegroom was delayed. They did not think ahead and as a result were unprepared when the bridegroom finally arrived. They were careless, not forward looking, guilty of inexcusable and senseless neglect, shortsighted and thoughtless. They weren't thinking ahead. They weren't thinking of contingencies. Tragically, there are many professing Christians who look at the faith as simply accepting Jesus or having a personal salvation experience. And I had people tell me when I was Pentecostal, "Yeah, Elvis Presley is a Christian. Elvis Presley, we'll see him in heaven because he accepted Christ back when he lived in Kentucky when he was 15 years old or something." That kind of talk. They do not look at redemption from the broad biblical perspective which involves a whole life of sanctification, progress in holiness and perseverance in the truth, doctrinally and experimentally. Remember, the bible always speaks of salvation in two senses, there's salvation in the narrow sense which talks about your justification. The moment you trust in Christ, the moment you believe in Christ, you are saved, you are justified. And then it also talks about salvation in a broad sense which includes sanctification and even glorification at the second coming, which is a much broader term.

Now such people who have this limited view, therefore they do not see any point in studying the Bible or learning doctrine or memorizing Scripture or attending a church

that is serious about the means of grace. What's the point? You know, if the rapture is going to happen next week, what's the point? That's the attitude. Everything is excitement, fun and games and thus man-centered, and then when temptations or heresies arise and they will arise, people have risen all throughout church history and even in our lifetime many times, when they do arise they cannot withstand the satanic assault because they did not prepare themselves. They did not prepare themselves. They built their worldview of Christianity on the sand of a mere profession or a personal experience and not on the bedrock of the whole counsel of God, and our Lord addressed such folly in his conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, which is really teaching the same thing for Matthew 7:24 to 27. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." Okay, he looked at the future and he thought, "You know, there are storms that come. It might flood here. So I'm going to build all the way down to the bedrock and I'm going to make this really killer foundation of solid stone that can take it." So we build this house on the rock, "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." Have you ever seen a house in a flood? I just saw one on the news a few days ago that hit a bridge and was completely obliterated. The whole house floating in floodwaters, hits a bridge and is completely demolished and those houses were pretty well constructed. Now California after the earthquake, 7.1 earthquake, in I don't know when it was '89? Every single house that was not in the towns I went through that was not bolted to the foundation properly was thrown off the foundation.

It is somewhat ironic that the modern, any moment rapture theory, and the idea that Jesus is coming soon, has led many evangelical churches into a kind of spiritual laziness. People think that since Jesus is coming at any moment, what is the point of praying for, preparing for a long struggle? Why master Scripture or theology when we may depart the earth tomorrow? Why go to all the trouble? Why work to change society and build Christian institutions when our departure is at hand? In other words, why bring extra oil for our lamps when the bridegroom is right around the corner? You don't need extra oil. The any moment rapture theory and the conclusions drawn from it are diametrically opposed to the main point of this parable. We must watch and constantly be on guard as if Jesus will return at any moment, but we must be wise and carefully plan for a longer period of struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil. We live every day as though Christ could return today. It's a great attitude to have, but we also prepare for the long haul. If you asked the apostles, "Do you think Jesus is going to come back 2,000 years from now?" They would have thought you were crazy probably, but it's been that long. It may be another 2,000 years, so we have to be ready for the long haul, long struggle.

This point is exemplified with the wise virgins who brought along a clay jar full of oil just in case it will be needed. They were prepared for a long delay. They understood that a torch without fuel would be useless for a procession with the bridegroom. A profession of Christ is useless if it is not accompanied by true faith that works out its salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2:12. For this reason, Paul compares the Christian life not

to a sprint but to a marathon, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Run the race, as Jesus said, Matthew 24:13, only those who endure to the end will be saved. On the day of judgment, it doesn't help you that you made a profession of Christ 10 years ago if you're not a Christian when he comes.

He warned his disciples to count the cost of discipleship, Luke 14:28, and those who have been regenerated in life by the Holy Spirit understand that a life of faith involves diligent effort, that one must continue to move forward spiritually to avoid carelessness and stagnation. And you young people, why do your parents tell you to read your Bible every day? Why do they tell you that when you get out of bed in the morning, the first thing you ought to do is read your Bible and pray? Why? Because that is part of your preparation to meet Christ and if you don't take care of things every day, you're not going to be ready to meet him when he comes. They have counted the cost and are continually preparing themselves for the long haul.

There are multitudes of people who received the gospel with great excitement and they burned brightly for a time, but they had no root themselves, and thus only endured for a while, Matthew 13:21. Then the cares of the world come, are you going to keep burning? When life gets rough, are you going to keep burning? Are you going to be ready? The person who takes oil in his lamp is going to be serving Christ 5, 10, 20, 30, 40 years from now. That's how I know if you're a true Christian or not. I've known tons of people, people I even used to look up to that were professing Christians, some even seminary professors, and now they're not Christians at all. I know ministers who were great preachers left their wives for another woman and gave up the faith. You've got to persevere and you've got to take care of things every day if you want to persevere. You've got to order your whole life around Christ and you have to have a long-term vision of a plan of service.

His diligence and planning leads him to weigh every crucial life choice by Scripture and to think carefully of the long-term effects of every important decision. So every decision in life must be made in terms of the coming of Christ and what you think about Christ. Young man or woman who will be careful to pick a solid Christian spouse who is dedicated to the true gospel of biblical reformation. When I see a professing Calvinist go off and marry an Arminian, I know the guy's not serious about Christ at all. Even worse, the professing Christian who goes in so-called evangelistic dating with unbelievers. People will put their choice of a truly Reformed church and biblical worship before making a little extra money in a part of the country where there are no good churches. Now if you go back and you study church history and you studied early Presbyterians in the 1600 to 1700s, they would never consider moving to a town that didn't have a good church, and if they didn't have a good church in that town, there's instances, for example, where a whole group of like 20 families would move to a city and they would get a minister in advance to agree to move to that city to be their pastor and that's how you got all these Reformed Presbyterian churches in Kansas. They weren't there before. They moved en masse there and they got pastors to come. People don't think that way anymore. Now they think about a buck. How much money can I make? The church is secondary.



Such persons will set aside time every day for personal study of the Bible and good Christian books. It's crucial to have good preaching, that's very, very important, but you've got if you want to grow and you want to learn and you want to know your theology, you've got to study on your own. Now, why is it that a brand-new heresy comes along that is clearly heretical and unbiblical, the Auburn Avenue heresy or Federal Vision, and pastors start teaching it and it's completely new, it's different, and the churches don't fire them or that most people don't leave, only 1 or 2 families leave? Why is that? Because the head of the household and the people have not, they don't know their theology. They do not know their theology.

When I heard the the Federal Vision tapes for the first time, I don't know when it was back in 2002, I knew immediately this is heresy, this is heresy. It is a new form of Romanism and it's deadly, and you ought to be that way too, where you can identify heresy. You know, the original Presbyterians in Scotland in the second Reformation period after 1638, after the ?? came back on the throne, they set the most educated bishops, these were highly intellectual, highly trained, it would be like today's PhD's in religion to go down to Scotland and to get the people to accept Episcopacy. And they went out to these areas and these peasant farmers, these people who were very poor, refuted every single bishop brilliantly. They knew theology. They knew all the arguments about church government. No, it's not simply about the sacraments and about Christ and these things, but even something that today people don't even consider to be important they knew how to argue for Presbyterian church government and they set these guys packing. That wouldn't happen today.

And they will also pray for faith and grace to withstand temptations or trials. We must all be like the wise builder who looked at the future with prudence, anticipated the coming storms, and thus carefully prepared himself in advance. The purpose of this parable is to impress upon us the need of a constant, persevering, thoroughly biblical diligence. The Christian life involves vigilance daily. Long term daily vigilance. If Satan is not going to give up, the world is always going to be there and when things are getting, if anything, things are getting worse, churches are getting worse, you'd better be diligent and you'd better know your theology, and you'd better have some good Christian books talking about good, solid Reform books and know your confession of faith because things are getting bad.

Let's look at the delay of the bridegroom. In verse 5, we learn that bridegroom's arrival is much later than expected and while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. The virgins had gone out to a place where they were supposed to meet the bridegroom, probably out in the country, and with their lamps burning, they took a seat and they waited. And they probably expected him in 10-15 minutes. So much time elapsed that it became late and they fell asleep. The word slumbered, *anystazo*, from *nystazo*, only found here in 2 Peter 2:3 means to nod. So they're sitting there and what happens? They nod. They're starting to fall asleep. They're nodding. They're starting to nod off.

They began to nod off as time passed by. The second verb, *Katheudo*, from *thudo*, means to sleep. It is in the imperfect tense which indicates they fell asleep and they continued to sleep until they were awakened. In other words, they nodded off, they fell asleep and they were in a deep sleep. They were out. That's how long it took before he got there.

So there's a temptation here on the part of expositors to find something metaphorical that is negative regarding their falling asleep. The only problem with such an interpretation is that the parable completely ignores the fact that they fell asleep and only focuses on the foolish virgins' lack of oil. Since no fault is found regarding the wise who fell asleep and the identification of the problem is only a lack of oil and preparedness, the sleeping is incidental to the main lesson. We should not have a whole lengthy point on, don't fall asleep. That's not the point here, because the wise virgins fell asleep also. If only the foolish virgins fell asleep, yeah, we could make a big point out.

The point is that the bridegroom was delayed so long they eventually fell into a deep sleep. In addition, verse 6 indicates that they had a lookout to wake them up on the bridegroom's arrival, somebody wakes them up. "Here he comes!" You have a long delay like the delay of the Master in 24:48 is designed to emphasize the uncertainty of the time when Jesus returns. And once again, it could indeed be a hint that the second coming of Christ will come much later than the apostles expect. Yeah, this full preterism stuff that they all believe Christ is coming in their lifetime, that's just if you look at Jesus' parables, Jesus certainly didn't imply that at all. Yeah, when he talked about the destruction of Israel, absolutely. But when he talked about the second coming, there are definite implications and hints that, "Hey, it's going to be a long ways away. You guys better have your act together because it's going to be a long time away." In Acts 1:6, the apostles seemed to expect an almost immediate coming of the eschatological kingdom, but our Lord connects this thinking in the next verse, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." We must avoid probing the unknown times and seasons of the future and instead focus on serving Christ in the present while we're preparing to serve him in the future.

Let's look at the coming of the bridegroom and the virgins' response. So they're there, they're sitting there. They're nodding off. They fall asleep. They're in a sound sleep. Several hours go by. They've waited so long they are in a deep sleep. A friend of the wedding party wakes them up so they will be ready to meet him. "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold,'" this is verse 6, "'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'" The translation of midnight means literally in Greek in the middle of the night. So you take the darkness, you divide it in half, and that's when he came.

Someone cries out, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming!" What does that remind us? Well, it reminds us of John the Baptist who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The critical Greek text, by the way, omits "is coming," but is the incorrect reading. We accept the Textus Receptus or the majority text here. The point of this verse is to emphasize the fact that the bridegroom arrives at a completely unexpected time. If the virgins knew when he was going to arrive, they would have not been sleeping. And I like Matthew Henry's application of the unexpected time of the coming of Christ. His judgment is excellent

here, here's what he says, quote, "Christ's coming will be at our midnight, when we least look for him, and are most disposed to take our rest. His coming for the relief and comfort of his people, often is when the good intended seems to be at the greatest distance; and his coming to reckon with his enemies, is when they put the evil day furthest from them. It was at midnight that the first-born of Egypt were destroyed, and Israel delivered, Exodus 22:29. Death often comes when it is least expected; the soul is required this night, Luke 12:20. Christ will come when he pleases, to show his sovereignty, and will not let us know when, to teach us our duty." He deliberately does not want us to know so we'll always be watching, we'll always be active, we'll always be ready to meet him. Imagine if he told us the exact time? People would think, "Well, hey, I'm going to go out and have fun and I'll become a Christian the day before he comes." That's the way people are.

In verses 7 to 9, the failure of the foolish virgins' preparation is brought to the forefront. "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 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.'" After being awakened, the virgins prepare themselves for the procession, the bridegroom is about to arrive. This involves trimming their lamps. Now if they had a torch, a regular torch, this would involve cleaning off the burnt material, placing new rags soaked in oil on the pole, or if the poles had lamps attached, I believe is probably what they had, the burnt part of the wick would be trimmed back to produce a brighter flame.

Because so much time had passed, all the lamps or torches needed oil but the foolish virgins didn't have any, they didn't bring any. The verb here, *sbennymi*, are going out, New King James, NASB, RSV, NIV, is in the present tense and indicates that the foolish virgins' lamps had so little oil left that they were in the process of going out. You can imagine yourself camping and you've got an oil lamp and it's starting to flicker, you know, you've got about three or four minutes before it goes out.

The refusal of the wise virgins to share their oil and their suggestion that the foolish virgins to go and buy oil for themselves, should not be interpreted in a negative way or an unkind way, as unkind treatment of the foolish virgins. There was not enough oil to share and they were totally dedicated to being ready to meet the bridegroom. The hard-nosed realism of the sensible girls invites the reader to reflect that spiritual preparedness is not something that others can provide for you. Each needs their own oil. Your parents can't believe for you, and they can't cause you to do the right things. Now they can kind of order you do it while they're there, but when you move out, you can do whatever you want. Every professing Christian has a personal responsibility to apply himself in order to be ready. Parents, pastors, friends, and elders cannot believe and make decisions for personal sanctification for another church member. They can tell people to do the right thing, but that's all they can do.

When Christ comes those who have treated the faith as of little importance will awaken to realize their own foolishness in not being prepared. You see, not want to be bothered

with the extra oil and were convinced it would not be needed. But now they realize they've made an incredibly, an incredible mistake and they begin to squirm under the pressure. Many people cling to their baptism or their church attendance, their outward professions, to the final day without realizing they don't have any oil. They don't have any oil. But it's not the one event. Let us have a strong love of Christ, a deep sense of sin and a strong dedication to the kingdom of God now. Now before it's too late to get the necessary oil. Genuine deathbed conversions are exceptionally rare. They almost never happen. They do happen but they're exceptionally rare. Our only hope is to prepare and be ready now before the midnight cry is heard and the day of grace is closed. There's a day coming. Now for you when you die it's closed, but if you're alive when Christ returns, it's also closed.

Well, let's look now at the consequences of having oil or no oil. In verses 10 through 12, we learn what happens when the bridegroom comes. "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. 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.'" While the foolish virgins are away trying to obtain oil, and it seems that they did because they come back and they try to get in. Of course, it's not part of the story. It's not necessary, but maybe it's not.

The bridegroom and the wise virgins enter the wedding feast, and the door was shut behind them. The entering into the wedding feast with the bridegroom symbolizes the true saints going into heaven, the eternal state of rest, joy, happiness, and bliss with Christ. At the second bodily coming of our Lord, he meets the saints in the air. Okay, the saints that are alive are with those that were in the graves go first and the saints who are alive when he comes, get their new glorified bodies and float up into the sky literally and will meet him, the bodily presence of Christ, in the sky, in the air and then he takes them to a new redeemed heavens and earth. At this glorious celebration which begins immediately after death, disease, sin, calamity, distress and heartaches and tears are finally defeated, in fact, and that is from God's universe. Remember, Jesus Christ defeated the devil, sin and death at the cross and the resurrection. If that's a definitive victory, and then there's a progressive victory all throughout history as the church preaches the gospel and people become saved. And then there's the final victory where it becomes a total reality in fact where every single Christian is going to receive a new body, every single Christian will never cry again. There will be no more tears, no more disease, no more death. Nothing that will upset anyone anymore. These things are finally defeated and banished from God's universe forever.

At this time, believers will be in the immediate presence of Jesus and will have such a satisfying and intimate fellowship with him that it is beyond our present comprehension. Only those who are ready to meet the Savior as he descends will enjoy the marriage banquet of the Lamb and only those. We must be prepared for Christ's coming and be ready for death. I've had people that I talk to and the very next day they died of a heart attack or the very next day they were killed in a car accident. I've had people that I knew and then I hear they just got killed last week. I knew somebody who went to the drug

store to get a 6 pack of beer and they got shot by somebody robbing the store as they walked in the door. Boom. Dead. Perfectly healthy young man.

The shutting of the door behind the bridegroom and the wise virgins is a blessing for the prepared virgins but a curse for those who are unprepared. Heaven does not have a revolving door and all those who are safe are eternally saved and secure. When Adam lived in paradise, there was an exit door to paradise called sin which, tragically, him and his wife went through. But after the second coming, the saints will be glorified and lose the ability to rebel against God. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has made us a door of safety and security that no one can knock down. There is no exit from heaven forevermore because of what Christ has accomplished. We are in a better state after the coming of Christ by far than Adam and Eve ever were. Adam and Eve could sin. We will not be able to sin because our glorified bodies will not sin.

But all of those who are unprepared to meet the Savior because they had not believed the gospel or lived the life of faith, the door represents eternal exclusion from heaven and God's presence. Eternal exclusion. The unholy are not permitted access to God, Christ, or the heavenly feast. They are forever shut out from paradise because they were foolish and they served themselves instead of Christ. At the present time, the narrow gate of justification through Christ and the narrow way of discipleship and sanctification, it's still open. It's still open. He hasn't come back yet. You're still alive. Even if they're not safe, the door is open. You can believe in Christ. You can put your trust in him. You can repent of your sins and enter the narrow gate and then you can have a life of dedication to Christ and walk on the narrow way, live a sanctified life. Not a perfect life. We're not sinless, but a sanctified life. Christians sin but we repent and we pray and we ask for forgiveness.

People are still believing in Christ crucified and entering in, but when Christ returns the door to heaven will be shut and bolted for all eternity. You see why Scripture says now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to believe in Christ. Now is the time to reject that life of selfishness and sin and following the devil. On that great day, you think your ungodly, unsaved friends are going to care? They'll be trembling in terror.

A great impassable gulf will exist between the saved and the damned and this will be like the shutting of the door on the ark after Noah and his family entered in. It was shut tight by God himself. And there are the people drowning, begging, "Let us in! Please, we beg you! We're sorry we rejected the preaching. We're sorry we made fun of you. Please! We believe now, let us in!" The door was shut and they all died and drowned.

He was thoroughly preserved and all the rest were finally abandoned by God, they were rejected, and the reason the foolish virgins are not admitted is given in verse 12, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you." The emphatic formula "assuredly or truly I say unto you," has the force of a judicial verdict that is solemn and unalterable. Remember, on the day of judgment you know who's doing the verdict? Jesus Christ. It's part of his exultation. On the day of judgment he'll be on the white throne. "Truly, I say to you, assuredly I say to you, you are damned in your sins because you rejected the gospel,

you rejected me, you counted the cross the Christ, that My blood is worthless trash. The door is shut." The dismissive words, "I do not know you," means that no relationship ever existed between them and the bridegroom.

Here the story moves from symbolism to stark reality of the final judgment. Those who Jesus Christ knows are those who have been loved and saved by him. Now remember that term "know" is Hebraistic, it's being used in a Hebraistic sense, in the sense of love or intimate fellowship. "I never loved you. I never had a saving relationship with you."

"And they love and they serve him because he first loved them." There is nothing more terrifying and depressing than to hear such words from the lips of God's Son, "Get thee hence." We must make sure that we have entered the narrow gate and are traveling on the narrow path so that we do not hear this eternal sentence of death. Now Christ hammers this point over and over and over again. Parable after parable, he hammers this point home. You're alive. You still have that opportunity to repent. You're alive. The door is still open. You have to believe in Christ. You have to lay down the weapons of your warfare. Look to Christ dying and bleeding for sinners on the cross. Your sins can only be washed away by his precious, sinless blood. And then once you believe in Christ and you're justified by him, by his righteousness, you have to follow him. You have to dedicate your life to him. You have to lead a holy life. You have to dedicate your life to him no matter what your background is.

You must place all your faith in Christ and his work, and then live a life of gratitude and love toward him. Our life of dedicated service does not save us. Remember that. We're not saved by our holiness. We're not saved by sanctification. We're all, all our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. Every single one of us. Even John Calvin and John Knox and the greatest of Reformers sinned every day. But it is tangible evidence that we have truly believed in Christ. There's a clear demarcation between the old life and the new.

In verse 13, our Lord reminds us of the duty of watchfulness by repeating the command of 24:42 in a slightly different form. "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." Verse 13. The time of his coming is hidden so that we will always be watching, ready for his return. That's the point. Are you ready to meet Christ? Are you demonstrating by your lifestyle, by the way you think about the future, by the way you prepare for the future are you demonstrating that you've truly believed in Christ and placed your faith in him? Don't play games with yourself. Don't fool yourself. Don't think you're a Christian if you don't care about serving Christ. You don't care about reading the Bible. You don't care about going to church. If these things are meaningless to you, you just don't have saving faith. You need to believe in Christ now. Let us be ready for his return. May God enable us to live a prudent life of service, dedication and readiness of Christ.

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for this stern, incredible teaching of Your Son, what love He has for us that He would warn us so fervently and repeatedly. May we follow Him faithfully, that we would use biblical wisdom to study His word, apply it to our lives so that we would have that oil and we would persevere unto the end. Help us, Lord, to be obedient to this parable, cause us in Your sovereign grace to have that oil that we would be welcomed into the wedding feast, the wedding supper of the Lamb. In Jesus' name. Amen.*