The Parable of The Ten Virgins

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**Foundational Scripture:** Matt. 25:1-13

**Intro**:

* This particular parable continues the general idea of what Jesus discussed in the previous chapter. In Matt. 24, He addresses the disciples’ question: *“When will these things be?”* The question came as a response to what Jesus told them about the buildings that would be destroyed and the city left desolate as they marveled at the beauty and design of the temple structures. Jesus, while sitting on the Mount of Olives, spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem after which He seems to foreshadow, more importantly, His second coming which is the final judgment. Whether or not we are to understand Matt. 24 as incorporating the second coming or as a stand-alone narrative in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, we cannot argue that such a destruction and its vivid description inevitably point us to the day when Jesus will Himself return for the final judgment. Time and time again in the biblical narrative, we observe similar language when speaking of the destruction and uprooting of a people or nation. Apocalyptic language has always been used to convey one quintessential idea: **All of human history will converge one day in an epic scene where everyone will stand before their maker and answer for the deeds they have done.** And this is exactly what Jesus addresses three times in Matt. 25 beginning with the parable we will discuss tonight. Matt. 24, then, provides for us a perfect segue to discuss the nature of the second coming of Christ and what our responsibility to that is.
* The nature of this particular parable is such that it incorporates aspects from other parables of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel as well as some of His sermons/teachings and we will see those later. In 25:1, the typical opening to Jesus’ parables (the kingdom of heaven) is used in the future tense (*kingdom of heaven will be compared to*) and not in the present, present continuous or aorist form we have grown accustomed to seeing in Matthew’s gospel (*the kingdom of heaven is like*, *the kingdom of heaven may be compared to*). This anomaly is used on purpose by Jesus to draw our attention to the significance of the eschatological scene of the final judgment that is yet future. The comparison of the kingdom of heaven is not made to the virgins themselves but to their respective situations and behavior. The Kingdom of Heaven is God’s rule, His purpose and His domain. In the NT, it is often used to refer to the **church** and in the greater sense in the final consummation: **Heaven**. It is presented in this parable in relation to the behavior of 3 key characters: The bridegroom, the foolish virgins and the wise virgins. What do they tell us about the second coming and our responsibility to it?

**The Message Through the Actions of 3 Key Characters**

1. **The Bridegroom**
	1. The bridegroom in this story represents Jesus Himself. To properly understand the behavior of the bridegroom and the message of the parable, we need to discuss a little on the ancient Jewish wedding customs of the day.
	2. When a Jewish man selected his bride to be, there would be a betrothal which consisted of a paying a bride price to the father or family of the bride. They would then consent with each other, establish their covenant betrothal and the groom would leave for a period of time to make preparations for a place for his bride and their life together.
	3. At a time unknown to everyone, he would return to get his bride, enjoy the wedding feast, and consummate the marriage. This ancient Jewish wedding custom is exactly what Jesus has in mind in this parable. Jesus, being the bridegroom, left Heaven to get His bride (the church) which His Father selected (Eph. 1:3-4) He paid the bride price (Acts 20:28) and established the covenant with His blood (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:15).
	4. Jesus then, after He rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven where He is preparing a place for His bride (the church, Jn. 14:2-3). Like the groom, Jesus has been gone for a long time now and we the church are awaiting His return in which our matrimony to Him will Lord willing be consummated in Heaven. We do not know when it will be and that’s exactly the point of the parable.
	5. In v. 5, the behavior of the bridegroom is one of delay and that was not surprising to the audience then and it should not surprise us now. The fact that Jesus emphasizes His return at midnight in v. 6 does not indicate 12:00am but rather He seeks to illustrate the importance of the unexpected nature of the second coming. It may come at a time where we least expect it and in which we are most inconvenienced.
	6. The mention of the *“shout”* brings to mind Paul’s discourse to the Thessalonians in regard to this very event (1 Thess. 4:16). Together these passages stress the guarantee of this promise. Many people doubt the return of Christ since it has been so long. The Jewish bride never once doubted her groom would return for her despite him being away for an extended period of time. We should take the groom at His word be ready and be on the alert (v. 13).
2. **The Foolish Virgins**
	1. The bible tells us that this parable put forth by Jesus concerns ten virgins and their behavior towards this second coming. The parable never mentions a bride (church) but it is clearly understood that Jesus is coming back for His bride. These virgins would have been a part of the wedding party or the escort to the groom as he walked in the procession with his bride to the wedding feast.
	2. We know who the bride represents (the church), so who do these virgins represent? Well I would suggest to you that they symbolize the individual Christians and individual humans being as a whole. Jesus is not looking to place emphasis on the church here as much as He is seeking to place of the individual and his/her responsibility with respect to His imminent return.
	3. And so we are told in v. 2, there are 5 foolish virgins. This is not a description of their intellectual capacity but rather a description of their failure to make the right decision. The description of these 5 virgins recalls the end of Jesus’ powerful discourse on the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:26-27).
	4. Their foolish nature is further paralleled with the illustration of having lamps but taking no oil with them (v. 3). Typically in the Jewish weddings, these virgins would walk in the procession lighting the way to the wedding feast. Generally speaking, a lot of these weddings occurred at night time and so the lamp would play a crucial role. The fact that they took no oil may indicate they thought they knew when the groom was going to arrive.
	5. The lamp and oil connotation go back to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14-16) but it goes back even further to the days of Israel and the tabernacle (Ex. 25:31-40). Christians are repeatedly called to be lights (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19) but one cannot shine if there is nothing fueling the fire!
	6. While the bridegroom delayed, all the virgins fell asleep (v. 5). When the shout came and they all awoke, the foolish quickly realized that the oil in their lamps would not be enough and since they had no extra oil, in desperation they turned to the other virgins but to no avail (vv. 6-8).
	7. As a last-ditch effort, they hurry to the dealers to get some oil but when they return the groom has come and the wedding feast has begun: doors shut. They plea desperately to the groom to open up for them but his response is deathly, harrowing and final (vv. 11-12). They were a part of the procession and left which was an insult to the groom. The response of the groom to these foolish virgins bring to mind the words of Jesus in Matt. 7:21-23 which further tell us who these virgins are.
	8. These 5 foolish virgins may symbolize unfaithful Christians, half-hearted disciples and the so-called religious people of the world. These are those who believe they will get to Heaven by showing up to services on Sunday morning to warm the pews. These are those who may be at services on Wednesday and Sunday but they make no concerted effort outside of that to be a faithful disciple to Christ.
	9. These virgins assume a relationship with Jesus which is really non-existent. They make no effort to fuel their fire and yet their hope is to get in to the wedding feast. Friends, pilot lights aren’t gonna cut it! Jesus is looking for people who will fan the flame, shine their lights and do whatever it takes to be ready; to be at the wedding feast (Lk. 9:23; 14:27).
	10. There is constant and consistent effort that needs to be poured out in our relationships with God and these virgins were not willing to do that. They had the same opportunities as the other virgins did but they would not listen and they would not take advantage of it (Rev. 3:15-17).
	11. The reason Jesus emphasizes individuals in this parable is because individuals and many Christians have a tendency to depend on the faith of others. They, being lazy and not wanting to do the work, pick the church the deem pretty decent and hope for the best. We must individually work out our own salvation and we must cultivate our own faith (Lk. 14:27; Phil. 2:12).
	12. God has blessed us richly and given us all the tools we need to be prepared for His return. He has given us His word and His principles and the ball is in our court. We need to make an informed decision and put in the work. If we think we’re going to get to Heaven by sitting around doing nothing and scrambling at the last minute, we are in for a rude awakening like these foolish virgins.
3. **The Wise Virgins**
	1. The third key character is this narrative are the 5 wise virgins. And again, being called wise is not denoting their intellectual capacity but rather Jesus is pointing out their success in making the right decision. Going back to Jesus’ conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 7:24-25, we learn what makes these virgins wise.
	2. Unlike the foolish virgins, these wise ones to do presume to know when the bridegroom is coming. The don’t set expectations that cannot be met but instead they simply prepare in the event that he is delayed (v. 4). These, unlike the foolish ones can actually afford to go to sleep (v. 5). The meaning of that phrase is probably that which pertains to the passing of time in the ordinary day to day activities of life. The wise virgins can afford to go about their day as usual because Jesus is always at the forefront of their mind. He is truly their Lord and they long for the day He returns. The foolish cannot do this since Jesus is not number one for them and they are not ready for return.
	3. The wise virgins who symbolize the faithful disciples, do not sit around and assume a relationship with God that may be non-existent. They know the ball is in their court and the pick it up and run to the other end to make it count. They put in the work (Eph. 5:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:13). They suffer, they sacrifice and they serve.
	4. These wise virgins are further proved prudent by the response the give to their foolish companions (v. 9). It’s not that they’re selfish and don’t want to share but instead they understand the nature of salvation and faith. Salvation in Jesus is both personal and individual.
	5. Faithful disciples will do as these virgins did. They will advise and offer as much help as they can but they will also encourage them to grow their own faith, make the necessary changes and do what it takes as long as they have opportunity. We ought not to be pushovers but instead we must be those who motivate others towards spiritual makeovers.
	6. When the bridegroom returned, these 5 virgins who were ready, entered the feast with him and they were blessed and able to partake of the festivities. They were ready because their lamp was shining. They made sure they had enough oil to keep the fire going. When Jesus returns, He will take notice of those whose lamps are burning brightly. Those are the ones who will enter the feast with Him (Lk. 12:35-38; 1 Pet. 3:15).

**Conclusion:** We said earlier that this parable contains aspects from previous teachings of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel which we have pointed out, but it also contains aspects from a parable Jesus told in Matt. 22:1-14 concerning the wedding feast. As the king made his rounds to greet the guests, he noticed a man who was not wearing wedding clothes and he asked him how he got in there. The man was speechless. There was nothing he could say. He had no excuse. But what is the wedding clothes? The wedding clothes is what Paul describes for us in Gal. 3:27. The parable of the wedding feast is connected to the parable of the ten virgins because of the nature of the preparation involved. We know those who get in to the feast (Heaven) are those who are ready, those who have prepared. Are we willing to suffer, are we willing to sacrifice, are we willing to be honest with ourselves and make the necessary changes to be ready? No one knows the day or hour Jesus will return but He is coming back (2 Pet. 3:9)! Be on the alert! Be ready!