

Introduction: I had planned to cover the “Talents” and “Ten Virgins” parables in that order. On second thought, I have reversed the order and will do the “Ten Virgins” first. The “Ten Virgins” deals with inner spiritual preparedness. The “Tenants” concerns the outward work believers are to do for the Lord.

Both parables are part of the discourse in Matthew 24:3-25 which took place when Jesus and the disciples were sitting privately together on the Mount of Olives. The disciples asked Jesus, what sign would announce His coming and the close of the age. Jesus responded with some information, but made it clear no one knows the day or hour of His return at the end of the age. Then Jesus teaches the parable of the “Ten Virgins” which is concerned with being “inwardly” prepared for His return.

Matthew 25:1-13: *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

Significance of “Then”: The parable begins with “then” which obviously links the parable to the preceding chapter. But it also is a reference to a time when the kingdom of heaven will in some way be like the story of the parable. Since the context is Jesus’ response to the disciples question about His return and the end of the age, the time can be generally identified. The phrase *“then the kingdom of heaven will be like”* refers to the kingdom of heaven in the final stages before the end of the age. The message of the parable is that continuous preparedness for His return is essential because no one can know when it will happen.

The Main Point of the Parable: The principle point is that we must pay close attention to our inner spiritual life because it is the key to being accepted when Christ returns. We are to be continuously prepared because we don't know and cannot know the time of His return. A good rule is the old "boy scout" moto of "be prepared."

Human tendency is to listen and act when self-interest is at stake. Jesus, at times, presented His calls to discipleship as appeals to self-interest. In Mark 8:35-36, He said, *"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"* You must give up your life of sin. Deny your sinful self. Take up your cross and follow Jesus. In so doing you will save your "eternal soul" even if you lose your mortal life because of following Jesus.

We will be immeasurably better off following Christ. (1.) Matthew 6:1, *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."* Practicing righteousness is good in itself, but if its purpose is to impress other people, you will receive no reward from God. (2.) Matthew 6:14-15, *"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* We need forgiveness from God. If we refuse to forgive our fellow humans, God will not forgive us.

Righteous behavior whose purpose is to please God will be rewarded. Merely performing righteous acts is not enough. That can be done for wrong reasons like impressing other people.

The principal point of the parable of the "Ten Virgins" is that always being prepared for Jesus' return will be rewarded. We have no idea when Jesus will return (or when our mortal death will occur). The only wise thing to do is to live life so that we are constantly prepared for His return, whenever it may happen. The question raised is "what is adequate preparation?"

The Story: Why "Ten?" Ten is the number signifying completeness. Ten or more Jews constituted a "company" sufficient to justify having a synagogue.

There was to be a traditional marriage procession in which the bridegroom, along with friends and relatives, would go to her parent's home to take his bride to the home he had prepared for them. The arrival time of the procession was unknown. The bridegroom could appear at the bride's parent's home any time he chose.

Marriages in Israel were invariably celebrated at night. The procession would of necessity be in the dark. Lamps were needed to light the way for the procession of the wedding party to the place of the feast. Ten young women were given that task.

Of the ten women charged to light the way, five recognized that possible problems might arise to delay the procession. They wisely prepared for that eventuality by carrying with them extra oil for their lamps. The other five foolishly assumed all they needed to do was show up with their lamps. Because the precise time of the wedding procession was not known, it might possibly be quite different from what was initially expected.

This wedding party was in fact very late in arriving, so late that all the women had fallen asleep. Suddenly they were awakened by a cry saying the bridegroom was coming. All the women quickly got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish realized they were running low on oil and asked to borrow some. The wise answered, No! There would not be enough among them for all ten lamps. The foolish were told to go to the sellers of oil and buy some for themselves.

The unprepared women left to buy oil. While they were gone, the bridegroom came. Those who were prepared went into the feast with him. The door was shut. When the foolish women returned, they found the door barred. They said, “*Lord, lord, open to us.*” But the bridegroom said “*Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.*” Jesus said to His disciples, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*”

Similarities and Differences Among the Women: In many respects the women were similar, but their preparation (or lack of it) was practically opposite.

What are some ways they were alike? All ten were invited. Each one accepted the invitation. They anticipated a grand occasion. All ten took their lamps and went to the required location. All had some oil for their lamps. All must have had some affection for the bridegroom. They all became drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom’s coming was delayed.

But suddenly the bridegroom came while they were sleeping. Their similarities now meant nothing. The vital difference between them became obvious. Five were ready to join the procession with their lamps, but the other five were unprepared, the oil in their lamps was low and they had no back-up supply.

Application to the Church: The parable applies to the whole community of believers (the visible church). The five foolish women represent those in the visible

church who do not have the necessary inward change to entitle them to enter heaven. They have many outward signs but the vital inward transformation has not occurred. We have seen this situation in other parables, for example, the “Wheat and Tares.”

Some have interpreted the “oil” to be the Holy Spirit. He is in fact often symbolized as “oil.” But in this case if that were so, then the five foolish women had the Holy Spirit, but He gets used up. It is better to recognize the “oil” as the inward preparation of salvation, in which the Holy Spirit is indeed essential.

To enter the feast with the bridegroom, the preparation required is God’s work of grace. You must be regenerated, justified, adopted into God’s family, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and progressively sanctified until glorification. That is an astounding change for a former spiritually dead sinner.

The First Point: Are You Ready? Or are you like one of the foolish women who received the invitation, responded to it, but came to the place of the wedding feast insufficiently prepared (having no wedding garment like in the parable of the “Wedding Feast?” We want to be among the wise. The wise had a long wait and got drowsy. They fell asleep, but were nevertheless ready when the bridegroom came. Sufficiently prepared or not? That distinction determines our soul’s destiny.

A Time of Crisis: A second point of the parable is that the difference between being wise or foolish was not apparent until the crisis created by the late coming of the bridegroom. In the days before the wedding and the night during which the feast was to be held, no one likely noticed differences in the preparation of the women. But when the bridegroom came as the women were sleeping, the difference in preparation soon became obvious.

When the Lord Jesus comes again, those who are adequately prepared by the transforming power of God will be clearly distinguishable from those who resemble them in outward ways but do not have the inward transformation. The key identifier is inward change, becoming a new creature “in Christ.” Things hidden in normal times are often revealed in crisis experiences.

Three Additional Points: (1.) Salvation cannot be transferred from one person to another. It is strictly a personal gift from God. No matter how many friends and relatives are blessed with salvation, we must personally experience God’s regenerative power, forgiveness of sins, and progressive transformation into a

likeness of Christ. In the sense of the parable, you can't borrow oil from another person. Only personal salvation will gain us entry to heaven.

(2.) Lost opportunities cannot be regained. When the foolish women found it necessary to go out and buy additional oil, they lost their opportunity to attend the feast. When they returned, the door was shut. We should never assume there is plenty of time in the future to be saved. We have no idea what the future will bring. Now is the time of salvation. Don't lose the opportunity if it is offered.

(3.) Jesus, our Lord, always comes to us unexpectedly. That is the way it will be at His return. That is the way it will be if our mortal death occurs before He returns. The wise will always be prepared for no one knows the day or the hour when they will come face to face with the Lord. "Be prepared!" Seek Christ and His salvation with all your heart.

What's Next: The parable of the "Talents."