

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

¹ “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.

I greet you with, grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit who lives within us as believers, empowering us.

Today we find ourselves at the 3rd to the Last Sunday of the church year, and thus we speak of what is at the end, the time of the coming of everlasting kingdom, a new heavens and a new earth, the time that is called the last days, the very time we are living in right now. This teaching is throughout the Bible, so we hear about this throughout the year, but now it becomes our focus as we finish the church year. Our gospel lesson gives us a parable or story that illustrates what Jesus has been talking about. Jesus has been teaching, and the disciples ask a question at the beginning of chapter 24, saying, ³ ... **“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”** (Matthew 24:3-4 ESV) The answer, or discourse, lasts till the end of chapter 25, some 97 verses, 2,042 words. Our lesson is part of that and urges these disciples and of course also us to be ready for His coming. The simple message that is conveyed is the closing words of our lesson, the words of Jesus, ¹³ **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.** (Matthew 25:1-13 ESV) The call is to be spiritually prepared to meet the Lord for there is no chance once He comes. May we hear and respond to this loving invitation, this involves our future and everything that is going on in our lives right now.

The setting of the parable is a Jewish marriage ceremony

Before we get into the text it is helpful to understand what was in the Jewish mind when they heard marriage feast, thus gaining a deeper understand of our lesson. Their marriage consisted of three parts. The first stage was an arrangement between the father of the groom and of he bride which amounted to a contract of marriage which the couple had little if any involvement. This is like our engagement today, except it was the parents then and a contract was made. The second part of the Jewish wedding was the betrothal, which starts where the bride and groom exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends. Some of that is like

the rite of marriage today in church. For the Jewish wedding, in this time of betrothal, they were considered married and their relationship could only be broken by a formal divorce, even though, the third part of the marriage, the feast and further vows and the husband and wife living together in marriage happened some time later. If the groom died during the time of the betrothal the bride was considered a widow, even though the marriage was not consummated physically and the two had never lived together. The betrothal could be for many months, even over a year. The groom would establish himself in a business, trade, or farming, and make provision for the couple to live. At the end of the betrothal there would be a marriage feast and celebration in which the entire community was involved. This is like our reception after a wedding, although theirs is more involved. It could last a week and would begin with the groom coming with the groomsmen to the bride's house where her bridesmaids were waiting with her. Together the bride and groom with attendants would parade through the streets proclaiming the wedding feast was about to begin. The procession typically would begin at night with torches used to light the way and attract attention. At the end of the feast period, the close friend of the groom who acted like the best man, would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom, and the couple would be left alone together for the first time. The marriage would be consummated and the couple would live together in their new home. It is this third part of the marriage, the coming for the bride and the marriage feast that Jesus used as framework for the parable. He teaches the warning to be ready, using the coming of the bridegroom.

The Parable

The parable starts with, ¹ **“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.** The **bridegroom** is Christ and He comes for his bride, the church, the believers. The word **lamps** here is the same Greek word translated torches in John 18:3, carried by the soldiers that arrested Jesus, and there is another Greek word used for lamps, so this was probably more like a torch. Whether lamps or torches, it provides light. If it is a torch it would be a long pole, with tightly wrapped cloth on the end, and soaked with oil. In a wedding procession, each person would have a torch to identify and light the way. The **ten virgins** are what looks like believers. The number **ten** may have been used since in the Jewish mind it represented completeness. All ten had torches and an outward appearance of brides.

Next we read, 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.** The **wise** are the true believers, the **foolish** those who profess outward faith but are without **oil**, or the light of the saving grace of the gospel. The message is like many other parables. The foolish virgins are like the man without a wedding garment in the parable of the wedding feast. It is also like the parable of the wheat and weeds, growing together, it is like the soils in the parable of the sower, some showing initial signs faith, but did not last and bear fruit.

Next we read, 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.** They all are **drowsy and slept**. All of them do not know when the bridegroom is coming, even those that are believers. The bridegroom arrives **at midnight**, interestingly, it was at midnight that the Lord struck down the first born of Egypt, and the children of Israel began their journey out of Egypt (Ex 12:29). There is a rabbinical tradition that Messiah will come at midnight. The trimming in the case of a torch, involved checking the cloth, and saturating it with oil, ready to light.

Next we read, 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.’** The foolish are without oil, and ask from the wise. It is not that the wise are selfish or calloused toward the other five, but that their oil is only enough for themselves. So it is with salvation, you can not, for another. The foolish are told to buy oil. This does not mean that salvation can be bought, but it is like God who spoke in Isaiah 55, ¹ **“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”** ² **Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.** ³ **Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,** (Isaiah 55:1-3 ESV) Salvation is for each to receive, it can not be done for another. How tragic in the parable, the foolish have waited too long, and when they return, this is what they say and the response, they say, ¹¹ **“...Lord, lord, open to us.”** ¹² **But he answered, Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”** ¹³ (Matthew 25:11-12 ESV) This is a clear reference that the foolish are not saved, not having a saving relationship with Christ. Jesus uses similar words in Matthew 7, saying, ²² **On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’** ²³ **And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’** (Matthew 7:22-23 ESV) The judgment has come, it is too late. But for you, now is the time of salvation, do not be like the foolish virgins in the parable. Jesus closes the lesson with the main point, **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.** (Matthew 25:1-13 ESV) Be ready for the Lord, by belonging to Him in salvation, and living for Him each day of your life, as He has called us to be about living His will each day of our lives. It is Jesus who said, ²⁴ **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”** (Matthew 7:24 ESV) Belonging to Jesus in salvation, and living each day through His power showing who we belong too. It is Jesus who is our Lord and our Savior, may you be ready for His coming.

In His name we pray, AMEN. May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.