

The Parables of Our Lord

The Parable of “The Ten Virgins” - Matthew 25:1-12

Sunday, October 23rd 2022

We are examining the parable of our Lord known as “The Parable of The Ten Virgins” (also known as The Parable of The Wise & Foolish Virgins) from Matthew 25.

By way of reminder:

- Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived
- The crowds were astonished by the way He taught
- He used parables
- Only used by Jesus in the NT
- Rare in the OT (Nathan the Prophet & King David is one example)
- Parable means “to throw something alongside something else” ie, a comparison thrown alongside a truth
- Jesus used parables to reveal deeper truths to those who have been given understanding but used them in judgment against those who had not been given understanding.
- Main theme of most parables was the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven)
- We never interpret parables allegorically
- Look for a single, clear main point in a given parable (though there are sometimes exceptions)

Look at the end of Matthew 24. Jesus gives a serious warning to those with Him about them being prepared for His coming. Matthew 24:44, “*Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (my own emphasis added). And after Jesus

says that, He gives three Parables: the first is The Parable of The Faithful Servant & The Evil Servant (or The Parable of The Two Servants). The second is The Parable of The Ten Virgins, and finally The Parable of The Talents. Many believers consider The Parable of The Ten Virgins the scariest of all of Jesus's parables.

(translation used: English Standard Version)

“[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.”.

So we see a story of a wedding and ten virgins (five of them were wise and five of them were foolish). These virgins would be like bridesmaids or maids of honor. So they would be there to help the bride and make sure everything was run well and that she was taken care of so that the bride would be able to enjoy her wedding day without a lot of stress. And not only were these virgins INVITED to the wedding, they were part of the actual bridal party. So you can see their status within the wedding was that of the bride's inner-circle.

The bridegroom of this parable is THE Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The coming of the Bridegroom to be wed with His Church is the main theme. But half these women in the bride's inner-circle, the virgins, are said to be foolish. Why? They came to the wedding unprepared.

The virgins in the parable represent the people in the church; professing Christians inside the church. This isn't about the world or about atheists. These virgins were FRIENDS OF THE BRIDE and are expecting to participate in the wedding feast when the Bridegroom comes. And while waiting for the Bridegroom who was delayed, they got tired and fell asleep. At midnight, they heard the shout, "Here is the bridegroom! Come and meet him.". And they all got up and trimmed their lamps. But only the five wise ones were ready to get into position whereas the foolish virgins didn't have the needed oil for their lamps.

Throughout church history, many have interpreted this parable as an ALLEGORY. And remember that we are NEVER to interpret parables as allegories. Rather with parables, we always attempt to understand the one main theme of it. Because otherwise, we normally end in serious error and confusion. It's obvious that at the very center of this story, there is one group of virgins who are lacking something that the other virgins were not. And of course the lack in the parable, is defined as the oil for the lamps. "What is the significance of the oil?". Since we don't interpret parables allegorically, ultimately the answer to that question doesn't matter.

However, historically the Roman Catholic church saw the oil as "good works" which they believe are necessary to be added to faith in order for a person to be saved. Protestants on the other hand, usually see the oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. But again, whether there is an allegorical significance to the oil or not, one thing is clear and that is that whatever it was that they WERE missing, lacking it prevented them from entering the wedding feast.

The wise virgins were able to go into the place where the marriage celebration was at. The foolish virgins (who lacked what was needed) begged the wise ones asking them “Hey, how about giving us some of your extra oil because we’re out. But the wise ones refused and suggested they run into town and buy some oil from a merchant there and to hurry back before the bridegroom comes.

But the bridegroom came while they were away and the doors to the outside were locked. And these foolish virgins, who were invited, found themselves locked out of this wedding feast. So they start shouting, “Lord, Lord! Open to us!”.

In Scripture, wherever someone’s name is repeated, it was a Jewish way of showing personal intimacy. So when the foolish virgins arrive and the door is locked, they don’t just cry out in the night, “Lord!” as in some matter of formality; they say “Lord, Lord!”. They’re saying, “You’re my Lord! I was expected to be here for the wedding! I have a close personal relationship with you”. But the bridegroom says, “I don’t know you”.

At the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus says (Matthew 7:21-23), “[21] *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name’ [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’* At the wedding, the bridegroom says “I don’t know you”. At the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus says that He will say to many, “I NEVER knew you”. When the Bridegroom (who represents Christ) says this, He’s not talking about an absence of information in the mind of the bridegroom. It’s not like Jesus is saying “I was never acquainted with you in the informational sense”. He says He “never knew you” in the PERSONAL sense of the word, ie the redemptive sense.

What was missing in the lives of the virgins was a saving faith - salvation. If they HAD a saving faith, even if they were late, the Lord might have commented about their tardiness but He would never say "I don't know who you are". Brothers and sisters, this parable describes people who profess faith in Christ but who don't actually have what they profess. And if we tie this in with Matthew 7, Jesus says their number will be MANY.

Which group do you identify with? We've all likely made professions of faith if we attend church, so maybe it's easy to identify with the wise virgins. But what if you're one of the foolish ones?

What's both clear AND terrifying about this warning that Jesus gives is that when the door is shut, it's too late.

So my plea is that we take the weight of this parable very seriously and that we make sure that we have a saving faith. That we manifest the fruit of that saving faith and aren't relying on church attendance or being involved in ministry. Everyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb but not everyone will get to enjoy it. Let this be a call to wake us up, especially if we've developed a false sense of security or are unsure of Who it is that we put our faith in for our salvation. That we are certain to trust in Christ and Christ alone for our salvation.

Quite a sobering parable because it's about people who are in the church, not those who are outside of it. In other words, this is for us. So let us all examine ourselves and ask "Who do I put my absolute trust in for my salvation: Me? Or Christ?".