

# Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #67

## Unprepared for the Lord's Return

Matt 25:1-13

### Introduction:

1. Here Jesus gives a warning parable to illustrate His repeated declaration that the exact time of His second coming will not be known in advance.
  - a. It will be at a time when it is least expected ([24:36](#), [42](#), [44](#), [50](#); [25:13](#)).
  - b. The general time will be known by those who heed the birth pain signs He has given ([24:4-29](#)), because that is the purpose of those signs
  - c. But the precise time of His personal appearing in power and great glory ([24:30](#)) will not be known in advance even by the angels.
2. The parable of the ten virgins is given to accentuate the importance of being spiritually prepared to meet Christ when He returns to earth, because after He appears, unbelievers who are then alive will have no further chance for salvation.
3. The setting for this parable was a typical Jewish wedding ceremony.
  - a. In Israel a wedding was the most celebrated social event.
  - b. Virtually everyone in a village or in a neighborhood community of a large city would be involved as a participant or as a guest.
  - c. It was a time of great happiness and festivity.
4. A Jewish marriage consisted of three parts
  - a. The first of which was the arranging of the wedding - Most often arranged by the fathers of the bride and groom, the engagement amounted to a contract of marriage in which the couple had little direct involvement
  - b. The second stage was the betrothal
    1. This was the marriage ceremony at which the bride and groom exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends.
    2. At that point the couple was considered married, and their relationship could be broken only by formal divorce
    3. If the husband happened to die during the betrothal, the bride was considered a widow although the marriage had not been physically consummated and the two had never lived together.
    4. The betrothal could last for many months, sometimes a year, during which time the groom would establish a business, trade, and would make provision for a place for the couple to live.
    5. At the end of the betrothal period the wedding feast would be held, and the entire community became involved.
    6. This festivity, which could last a week, began with the groom's coming with his groomsmen to the bride's house, where her bridesmaids were waiting with her.
    7. Together the bride and groom and their attendants would then parade through the streets proclaiming that the wedding feast was about to begin.
    8. The procession was generally begun at night, and lamps or torches were used by the wedding party to illumine their way and to attract attention.
  3. At the end of the feast period, a close friend of the groom, who acted much like a best man, would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom, and the couple would for the first time be left alone together. The marriage would be consummated and the couple would henceforth live together in their new home.
  4. It was that third part of the marriage rite that Jesus used as the framework for this parable.
  5. As the parable unfolds, Jesus focuses first on the bridesmaids, then on the bridegroom, and finally on the warning that the parable is given to reinforce.

**BYZ Matthew 25:1** Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις, αἵτινες λαβοῦσαι τὰς λαμπάδας αὐτῶν ἐξῆλθον εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου.

Ten virgins (deka parthenois). No special point in the number ten. The scene is apparently centered round the house of the bride to which the bridegroom is coming for the wedding festivities. But Plummer places the scene near the house of the bridegroom who has gone to bring the bride home. It is not pertinent to the point of the parable to settle it.

Lamps (lampadas). Probably torches with a wooden staff and a dish on top in which was placed a piece of rope or cloth dipped in oil or pitch. But sometimes lampas has the meaning of oil lamp (luchnos) as in Acts 20:8. That may be the meaning here (Rutherford, New Phrynichus).

**BYZ Matthew 25:2** Πέντε δὲ ἦσαν ἐξ αὐτῶν φρόνιμοι, καὶ αἱ πέντε μωραί.

## I. The Marriage Call - Vs 1-5

- The circumstances in this parable are that of a wedding. This wedding portrays some important features of the coming of Christ, and Christ uses them to give a warning to be ready for His return to earth.

### A. The Practices of the Marriage – vs 1

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

- Then refers to the time of Christ's unexpected appearing in power and glory, about which He was speaking.
- At that time, He said, spiritual preparedness for entrance into the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to the preparedness of a certain ten virgins who served as bridesmaids at a wedding.
- As with all of Jesus' parables, the message of this one is simple. It is meant to illustrate truths He has just been teaching: that He is coming again, that He will then judge sinners and reward the righteous, that people must be ready and that His coming will be unexpected.
- The central truth is that once He has arrived, there will be no second chance and the opportunity for salvation will be gone forever.
- The ten virgins are professed believers in Christ

### B. The Participants in the Marriage

- Ten virgins are listed in our text as participants in this wedding.
- They would be friends of the bride obviously.
- The location of the participants – vs 1  
1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom (who had the bride with him).
- These ten virgins came to the particular place where they were to meet the procession of the bridegroom and bride (and others already in the wedding procession) going to the bridegroom's house.
- The lamps of the participants – vs 2
  - Because of the late hour (night) of the procession, it was necessary for these virgins to each take a lamp to light their way.
  - The torches used by wedding attendants consisted of tightly wrapped cloths attached to long poles.
  - In addition to lighting the way for the procession, the lamps, or torches, served to identify members of the wedding party, marking them off as special participants.
  - The torches also represent expectation of His imminent return, the preparation and readiness of the bridesmaids to meet the divine bridegroom when He comes to gather them for His wedding feast, the kingdom of heaven.
  - It was therefore important that each of the bridesmaids have a torch.
  - Today it would be a flashlight of some sort.
  - These lamps point out an important difference in the participants' character and provide the lesson from this parable.
  - "Five of them were wise and five were foolish" – vs 2
  - The wise took enough oil for their lamps but the foolish did not.
  - The wise were prepared, the foolish were not.
- The lethargy of the participants – vs 5  
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.
  - Foolish comes from moros
  - The bridegroom delayed his coming so the group became weary
  - Spiritual lethargy gripped the whole group.
  - Our day is like that, for spiritual lethargy is the typical condition of most people, be they in or out of the church.

BYZ Matthew 25:3 Αἴτινες μωραί, λαβοῦσαι τὰς λαμπάδας αὐτῶν, οὐκ ἔλαβον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν ἔλαιον·

BYZ Matthew 25:4 αἱ δὲ φρόνιμοι ἔλαβον ἔλαιον ἐν τοῖς ἀγγείοις αὐτῶν μετὰ τῶν λαμπάδων αὐτῶν. In their vessels (en tois aggeiois). Here alone in the N.T., through aggē in Matthew 13:48. Extra supply in these receptacles besides the oil in the dish on top of the staff.

BYZ Matthew 25:5 Χρονίζοντος δὲ τοῦ νυμφίου, ἐνύσταξαν πᾶσαι καὶ ἐκάθευδον.

They all slumbered and slept (enustaxan pāsai kai ekatheudon). They dropped off to sleep, nodded (ingressive aorist) and then went on sleeping (imperfect, linear action), a vivid picture drawn by the difference in the two tenses. Many a preacher has seen this happen while he is preaching.

## II. The Midnight Cry – vs 6-9

- A crisis developed among the virgins which involves the lamps.
- It portrays the crisis that will occur at the coming of Christ for those that are unprepared for His coming.

### A. The Darkness at the Time of the Cry – vs 6

6 And at midnight there was a cry made...

1. The crisis occurred at midnight which speaks of the darkest hour of the night.
2. At **midnight** most people are typically deep in sleep, just as the bridesmaids were, and the bridegroom's arrival at that time underscores still again the unexpectedness of Christ's return
3. Symbolically, it pictures the dark sinful conditions of the world when Christ comes back.

### B. The Declaration In the Cry – vs 6

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

- The announcement of the coming of the bridegroom was made to alert those waiting at their stations.
1. The character of the declaration - "Cry."
    - a) *This cry was piercing, shocking, surprising, and startling especially for those who were slumbering.*
    - b) *When Christ returns, it will be an exciting time; it will not be a dull event.*
    - c) *We need to be ready for His coming.*
    - d) *"Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Lu 21:34).*
  2. The coming in the declaration – "bridegroom cometh"
    - a) *The declaration in the cry was an important one.*
    - b) *It spoke of the coming of the bridegroom.*
    - c) *It was the most important announcement the waiting virgins could have made to them.*
  3. The command in the declaration - "Go ye out to meet him"
    - a) *The promise of Christ's coming is not without duty.*
    - b) *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness... Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:11, 14).*
    - c) *Those whose interest in the second coming is only that of curiosity have missed the command.*

### C. The Discovery Because of the Cry – vs 7

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.

1. The declaration of the coming of the bridegroom caused the five foolish virgins to discover the crisis they were in.
2. Their lamps had gone out, and they did not have oil to replenish their lamps.
3. They had not brought oil with them for this need.
4. They were not prepared adequately for the coming of the bridegroom and discovered their failure when it was too late.

BYZ **Matthew 25:6** Μέσης δὲ νυκτὸς κραυγὴ γέγονεν, Ἰδοὺ, ὁ νυμφίος ἔρχεται, ἐξέρχεσθε εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ.

There is a cry (kraugē gegonen). A cry has come. Dramatic use of the present perfect (second perfect active) indicative, not the perfect for the aorist. It is not estin, but gegonen which emphasizes the sudden outcry which has rent the air. The very memory of it is preserved by this tense with all the bustle and confusion, the rushing to the oil-venders.

Come ye forth to meet him (exerchesthe eis apantēsin). Or, Go out for meeting him, dependent on whether the cry comes from outside the house or inside the house where they were sleeping because of the delay. It was a ceremonial salutation neatly expressed by the Greek phrase.

BYZ **Matthew 25:7** Τότε ἠγέρθησαν πᾶσαι αἱ παρθένοι ἐκεῖναι, καὶ ἐκόσμησαν τὰς λαμπάδας αὐτῶν.

Trimmed (ekosmēsan). Put in order, made ready. The wicks were trimmed, the lights being out while they slept, fresh oil put in the dish, and lit again. A marriage ceremony in India is described by Ward (View of the Hindoos) in Trench's Parables: "After waiting two or three hours, at length near midnight it was announced, as in the very words of Scripture, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.'"

BYZ **Matthew 25:8** Αἱ δὲ μωραὶ ταῖς φρονίμοις εἶπον, Δότε ἡμῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἐλαίου ὑμῶν, ὅτι αἱ λαμπάδες ἡμῶν σβέννυνται.

Are going out (sbennuntai). Present middle indicative of linear action, not punctiliar or aoristic. When the five foolish virgins lit their lamps, they discovered the lack of oil. The sputtering, flickering, smoking wicks were a sad revelation. "And perhaps we are to understand that there is something in the coincidence of the lamps going out just as the Bridegroom arrived. Mere outward religion is found to have no illuminating power" (Plummer).

#### D. The Disaster in the Cry

- The condemning deportment of the foolish virgins was a result of their failure to adequately prepare.
  1. The soliciting

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone 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.

    - a) When the five foolish virgins realized they were out of oil, they tried to get oil from the wise virgins; but of course, the wise virgins could not give them any lest they also run out of oil.
    - b) Your faith must be your own, not borrowed faith.
  2. The shopping – vs 9

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.

    - a) The only option the foolish virgins had was to go shopping for oil.
    - b) And it was not a good time to go shopping (it was midnight when they found out their problem).
    - c) Last minute spiritual preparation is not promising.
    - d) Opportunities are not good for last minute salvation. Prepare while you can.

### III. The Mistaken Claim – vs 10-13

- One of the most sobering features of this parable is the shut door at the end of the parable.
- This closing made the final scene of the parable a tragic and dramatic scene.

#### A. The Report

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.

- When all those in the procession were in the house, the door was closed.
  1. The tradition of the closing
    - a) The closing of the door was final.
    - b) This was done to keep out distractions from the celebration and to keep out the unworthy.
    - c) If one did not honor the bridegroom in the procession, he would not have the privilege of the feast.
    - d) Honor the Lord, if you want to be honored by the Lord.
  2. The time of the closing
    - a) The door was closed while the delinquents were shopping for oil.
    - b) So only the wise virgins made it inside.
    - c) Delay in preparing for the Lord's coming can be disastrous.

#### B. The Request

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

1. The request was fervent but too late.
2. They spoke the right language, but it was too late to do any good.
3. All men will confess that Jesus is Lord ([Phil 2:10,11](#)); but some will confess to their damnation, not salvation, because they waited too long to confess Christ.
4. Those five were sham attendants who had never belonged to the wedding party but had managed to dress and act like true bridesmaids.
  - a) Now the pretense was over, and their sinful, foolish character was exposed.
5. It will be a moment of sheer terror when unbelievers face a holy God and realize with absolute certainty that they are eternally lost.
6. That must have been the feeling of the people of Noah's day when they saw the flood waters rise above their heads and knew the door to the ark was unalterably shut.

<sup>BYZ</sup> **Matthew 25:9** Ἀπεκρίθησαν δὲ αἱ φρόνιμοι, λέγουσαι, Μήποτε οὐκ ἀρκέσει ἡμῖν καὶ ὑμῖν· πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τοὺς πωλοῦντας καὶ ἀγοράσατε ἑαυταῖς.

Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you (mēpote ou mē arkesei hēmīn kai humīn). There is an elliptical construction here that is not easy of explanation. Some MSS. Aleph A L Z have ouk instead of ou mē. But even so mē pote has to be explained either by supplying an imperative like ginesthō or by a verb of fearing like phoboumetha (this most likely). Either ouk or ou mē would be proper with the futuristic subjunctive arkesei (Moulton, Prolegomena, p. 192; Robertson, Grammar, pp. 1161, 1174). "We are afraid that there is no possibility of there being enough for us both." This is a denial of oil by the wise virgins because there was not enough for both. "It was necessary to show that the foolish virgins could not have the consequences of their folly averted at the last moment" (Plummer). It is a courteous reply, but it is decisive. The compound Greek negatives are very expressive, mēpote—ou mē.

<sup>BYZ</sup> **Matthew 25:10** Ἀπερχομένων δὲ αὐτῶν ἀγοράσαι, ἦλθεν ὁ νυμφίος· καὶ αἱ ἔτοιμοι εἰσῆλθον μετ' αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς γάμους, καὶ ἐκλείσθη ἡ θύρα.

<sup>BYZ</sup> **Matthew 25:11** Ὑστερον δὲ ἔρχονται καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ παρθένοι, λέγουσαι, Κύριε, κύριε, ἄνοιξον ἡμῖν.

### C. The Refusal

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

1. These tragic words of rejection will be the words many will hear from our Lord.
2. The refusal was **emphatic** ("Verily") and it was **enforced** ("I know you not").
3. They were not in the procession, so he did not meet them to know who they were.
4. The virgins were generally friends of the bride and would have to be introduced to the bridegroom in the procession.
5. If you are not known to the Lord through salvation, you will be rejected from entering heaven.
6. Only friends, not strangers, are welcomed in heaven.

## IV. The Conclusion From the Parable – vs 13

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

### A. The Requirement to be Watchful - "Watch"

1. Watching means to be prepared, alert, cautious, earnest, and attentive concerning the coming of Christ and concerning your spiritual condition.
2. For the fifth time in the discourse (see [24:36](#), [42](#), [44](#), [50](#)) Jesus called on those who will be alive during the last days of the Tribulation to be **alert**, because they will **not know the day nor the hour** of His appearing.
  - a) *They would know its nearness by the catastrophic signs, but the exact **day** and the exact **hour** they would not know.*
  - b) *So few people, however, have much concern about their spiritual needs.*
3. They will not be ready for Christ to come; they will not be ready for death or judgment.
4. Like the five foolish virgins, they are not preparing in advance for meeting God. They will find heaven a closed door.

### B. The Reason to be Watchful

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

1. We do not know when we will meet Christ.
2. We do not know the exact time that He is coming back.
3. We do not know when we will die and be ushered into eternity forever.
4. We can, however, be ready for meeting Christ.
5. And since we do not know exactly when these major events in our life will occur, it behooves us to be ready at all times.

BYZ **Matthew 25:12** Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς.

BYZ **Matthew 25:13** Γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν, ἐν ἧ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔρχεται.

Watch therefore (grēgoreite oun). This is the refrain with all the parables. Lack of foresight is inexcusable. Ignorance of the time of the second coming is not an excuse for neglect, but a reason for readiness. Every preacher goes up against this trait in human nature, putting off till another time what should be done today.