

## Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mat. 25:1-13) - Part 2

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### Continuing from where I left off prior to my Sabbatical.

1. **Team teaching in Matthew, working my way through Matthew 24 and 25, now into Matthew 25.**
  - A. **The context of Matthew 24-25: Jesus is responding to questions posed by the disciples (Matthew 24:3) concerning events yet future to their day.**
    1. The destruction of the Jewish temple.
    2. The sign of his coming.
    3. And of the end of the age.
  - B. **Remarks are associated with His Second Coming in Judgment at the end of this age.**
    - The general characteristics of the end of the age.
    - Specific signs of the end of the age.
    - The need to watch so as not to be among those Jesus comes upon as a thief.
  - C. **These passages do not concern Jesus' coming for the Church at the rapture.**
    - The coming of Jesus for the Church is imminent, without preconditions — but here there are preconditions (the signs).
      - Global persecution and betrayal of Christians (Mat. 24:9).
      - Abomination of Desolation (Mat. 24:15).
      - Signs in the heavens, the sun and the moon (Mat. 24:29).
    - Also: this is a period marked by “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mat. 24:21 cf. Mat. 24:29).
      - Elsewhere in Scripture this time is also characterized by God's wrath, something which Church-age believers are not appointed to.
  - D. **Failure to make this distinction = confusion.**

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### Today's passage (Mathew 25:1-13)

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And

the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.<sup>1</sup>

- Last time: understand the setting and context in which the parable is given in order to dispel possible confusion.
- Today: focus on the purpose of the passage: the application.

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## Brief review from last time - the setting and context

### 1. Matthew 24 and 25 contain a series of warnings about being unprepared for the return of Christ at the end of the age.

#### A. As in the days of Noah (Mat. 24:37-44).

Not watching, house broken into by the thief, unprepared taken in judgment.

#### B. Faithful and evil servant (Mat. 24:45-51).

Master delayed, stops watching, parties with the culture, opposes faithful servants: cut in two and lumped with hypocrites, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

#### C. Wise and foolish virgins (Mat. 25:1-13) — today's passage.

Unprepared, shut out from the wedding feast, "I do not know you."

#### D. Parable of Talents (Mat. 25:14-30).

Unprofitable servant cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

#### E. In each case individuals or groups which appear outwardly similar are separated to a radically different destiny among the saved or the damned.

#### F. The overall thrust of the warnings

1. External appearance and performance is unreliable as an indication as to one's ultimate standing with God.
2. Warnings to each individual to consider which of the two groups we occupy.
3. Motivation to make our "call and election sure," as Peter also urges us (1Pe. 1:10).

### 2. Who are the virgins?

- Roles within a wedding (Psalm 45): bride, groom, groomsmen, bridesmaids, guests.
- We examined the roles of various participants last time in light of Jewish wedding practices.

- The groom has previously fetched the bride and took her to his father's house where the intimate wedding ceremony transpired.
- The virgins "are anticipating joining the [wedding] procession and entering in the festive [wedding] banquet [or feast which followed upon the wedding]."<sup>2</sup>
- This parable is not endorsing polygamy: the 10 virgins are not expecting to marry the groom.
- These ten virgins appear to represent "chaste" individuals<sup>3</sup> invited to the wedding feast which follows upon the wedding.
- The private portion of the wedding has already taken place before the return of the Groom (Rev. 19:7 cf. Rev. 19:14).
- Thus, in agreement with the context of Matthew 24 and 25, the virgins do not represent the Church.
  - Believers of the present age will not be present at the coming of Jesus in judgment—having been previously taken at the Rapture.
  - Instead, they will be returning with the groom to earth (John 14:3; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:14).
- The virgins represent believers of the end of the age who are to watch for the arrival of the bridegroom signalling the beginning of the wedding feast: which ushers in the millennial kingdom to follow.

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## What does the Parable Teach?

### 1. Roles

- A. **bridegroom = Christ at His expected return**
- B. **virgins = chaste (moral living) individuals awaiting the bridegroom**
- C. **midnight = a time when the groom is least expected and those waiting are most likely to be inattentive**
- D. **lamps = the outward manifestations of apparent faith in God**
- E. **vessels of oil = source of spiritual inner life which enables the lamps to continue to shine**
  - I. **Caution concerning the interpretation of the meaning of oil**
    - a. **In a number of passages, oil seems to represent the Holy Spirit (1S. 10:1,6; 16:13; Isa. 61:1; Zec. 4:6,12).<sup>5</sup>**
    - b. **Parables are representations or approximations of the truths which they convey.**
    - c. **When pushed to an extreme, rigid interpretation of details within a**

**parable lead commonly lead to error - a parable must not be made to “walk on all fours.”**

- i. Both foolish and wise virgins initially possess some amount of oil - in their respective lamps.
    - At midnight, the foolish virgins say, “our lamps are going out,” rather than, “we need oil to light our empty lamps”.
    - Notice that all the virgins arose and “trimmed their lamps.”
      - “trimmed” is **ἐκόσμησαν** [*ekosmēsan*], with root **κοσμέω** [*kosmeō*], to adorn, prepare, arrange
      - from which we get the word 'cosmetics' (which adorns and prepares ladies faces!)
      - denotes adjusting a lamp to be sure it is working properly
    - *Are we to understand that both wise and foolish virgins initially possess the Spirit, but the foolish ones 'run out' of the Spirit — and lose their salvation while waiting for the groom?*
  - ii. The foolish virgins could potentially obtain more oil from the wise virgins.
    - *Are we to understand that 'more' of the Holy Spirit could be transferred from one person to another?*
  - iii. When the foolish virgins return, they have presumably returned after having obtained more oil. They find the door shut and the Lord still asserts that He doesn't know them.
    - *Are we to understand that they are denied entrance to the wedding even though they possess anew the Holy Spirit?*
- d. It is not the oil itself which is significant here, but the additional vessels of oil which differentiates the wise from the foolish virgins.**

## 2. Similarities

- A. **All are virgins - moral, upright living persons**
- B. **All expect the bridegroom, they all go out to meet him**
- C. **All had lamps containing an initial amount of oil**
- D. **All slumbered and slept while the bridegroom was delayed**
- E. **All heard the cry of his arrival**
- F. **All trimmed their lamps**
- G. ***How late in God's program do the tares appear just as the wheat!***

## 3. Differences: wise vs. foolish

#### A. Wise brought additional oil

- I. Only they had adequate resources to wait the full time until the groom's arrival.
- II. Only they apparently expected the groom's delay might be greater than the foolish virgins expected.

#### B. Foolish had insufficient oil, lacked preparation

- I. As one observer put it, the foolish virgins were characterized by concern for only the "hasty external equipment for the feast, which takes care of the appearance (the lamps), but forgets the essence (the oil)."<sup>6</sup>
- II. The parable reveals a "prevailing similarity in externals; . . . [but] unapparent and yet decisive difference in secret."<sup>7</sup>
- III. The wise are "prepared with the great essential, which the others lack,—the Spirit, and spiritual fellowship with the Lord."<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. Appearance vs. Substance - wheat often looks like tares

- A. The small amount of oil initially found within the lamps of the foolish virgins is only sufficient to fuel the appearance of spiritual life without true conversion and its attendant sustaining power.<sup>10</sup>
- B. Although the foolish virgins appeal to the bridegroom as "Lord," His response is a chilling: "Assuredly [amen, truly], I say to you, I do not know you" and the foolish virgins remain shut out.
- C. How similar the Lord's response to these is to others who appear to be religiously active doing works of the Lord in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew who also appealed to Him using the phrase "Lord, Lord." His response there is "I never knew you" — revealing that such as these have never been born of the His Spirit (Mat. 7:13).
- D. The lamps of the foolish virgins may appear to be lit for a time, but like three of the four soils in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-9), their lamps will eventually flicker and go out. In the end, their destiny is no different than the seed which fell by the wayside, the seed that fell on stony places, and the seed which fell among thorns.
- E. While their lamps shine, it is nearly impossible to distinguish the foolish from the wise. Just as the three types of seed initially sprout forth in what appears to be vibrant life, but eventually are devoured, wilt, or choke.

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## The Danger of Religious Activity

### 1. Religion vs. Relationship

#### A. Religion

- External adherence to rituals and behaviors.
- Performance-based relationship with God.
- Works which are motivated by pride, or even fear, but which are expected to mitigate our personal shortcomings.
- A belief that I *deserve* to go to heaven.
  - Belief that I'm a "good person" and merit His acceptance, at least in comparison with others.
  - Although privately never sure how much we must do to merit God's acceptance: to earn heaven.
- Disdain for the Biblical requirement of being born again to see God's kingdom (John 3:3).
- Trusting in the brightness of my lamp: "They all have the lamps: the forms of faith, ecclesiastical confession and position. But then the question comes as to whether the form is filled with the eternal substance of the Spirit of Christ. The foolish virgins lack the Spirit of Christ; they have no [continuing] lights, no evidences of love, no hymns of praise to welcome the Lord in His coming."<sup>11</sup>

#### B. Relationship

- Relation-based interaction with God: born of God as His child.
  - "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)
- Works motivated by gratefulness and love in response to the unmerited grace of God given to us.
- A belief that I *do not* deserve to go to heaven.
  - Confidence and rest in Christ because I do not stand in my own righteousness (which is no righteousness) (Rom. 10:3-4).
  - Rather, I stand clothed in the very righteousness of God Himself (2Cor. 5:21).
- Readiness to speak of the time when we were born again of God from above (John 3:7).
- Trusting in the oil, the Holy Spirit Who brought about my birth, Who now directs my steps. It is He Who causes my lamp to shine (John 3:8).

### 2. The Great Awakening (mid 1700s)

- Initial colonization by Puritans who had vessels of oil - they were born again.
- Subsequent generations: unbelieving children who knew religion, but had not relationship with God.

- Participants in solemn religious ceremonies devoid of spiritual reality.
  - Church membership: but membership in the Body of Christ requires one be born again.
  - Baptism (especially child baptism): but this is an outward sign of an inward reality - conversion.
  - Communion: but this is reserved for those who are participants in the New Covenant in the blood of Christ.
- Result: churches full of foolish virgins: outwardly moral in behavior but lacking any spiritual relationship with God.

## A. The Persecuting Zeal of the Self-Righteous (Foolish Virgins)

### I. Jonathan Edwards

- 23 years of dedicated service.
- Attempted to limit communion to those who had been born again.
- Voted out of his church.

### II. George Whitefield

- Alarmed by how many among the clergy had never been born again.
- Maintained that those who did not know Christ could hardly teach of Him or truths which are spiritually discerned.
- Grievously persecuted by the established clergy.

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## What have we learned?

- The parable concerns believers during the tribulation awaiting the return of Christ and entry to the subsequent wedding feast which initiates the millennial kingdom to follow.
- The parable appears within a sequence of similar teachings all of which concern separation of the saved and unsaved.
- All the virgins appear to be saved, but some are not.
- The critical element is their lack of preparation for Christ's return, lacking vessels of oil they have not been born again.
- To the external observer, all ten virgins have lit lamps — do good works and participate in religious activities.
- Yet some are foolish and are not known by Christ.
- For believers of all ages: which group am I in? Do I truly know Christ as one born of the Spirit of God? Or am I merely going through religious motions without the all-important relationship of being a son or daughter of God?

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Mat. 25:1-13](#)

2. [Ref-0143, 284](#)

3. Compare with Rev. 7 and 14.
4. [Ref-0185](#), s.v. Oil
5. "Oil was a fitting symbol of the Spirit or spiritual principle of life, by virtue of its power to sustain and fortify the vital energy; and the anointing oil, which was prepared according to divine instructions, was therefore a symbol of the Spirit of God, as the principle of spiritual life that proceeds from God and fills the natural being of the creature with the powers of divine life. Anointing with oil, therefore, was a symbol of endowment with the Spirit of God for the duties of the office to which a person was consecrated (Lev. 8:12; 1 Sam. 10:1, 6; 16:13–14; Isa. 61:1)."<sup>4</sup>
6. [Ref-1304](#), 440
7. [Ref-1304](#), 440
8. [Ref-1304](#), 440
9. [Ref-0187](#), Mt 25:7
10. "Are we, then—with some even superior expositors—to conclude that the foolish virgins must represent true Christians as well as do the wise, since only true Christians have the Spirit, and that the difference between the two classes consists only in the one having the necessary watchfulness which the other wants? Certainly not. Since the parable was designed to hold forth the prepared and the unprepared to meet Christ at His coming, and how the unprepared might, up to the very last, be confounded with the prepared—the structure of the parable behooved to accommodate itself to this, by making the lamps of the foolish to burn, as well as those of the wise, up to a certain point of time, and only then to discover their inability to burn on for want of a fresh supply of oil. But this is evidently just a structural device; and the real difference between the two classes who profess to love the Lord's appearing is a radical one—the possession by the one class of an enduring principle of spiritual life, and the want of it by the other."<sup>9</sup>
11. [Ref-1304](#), 439

#### Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0143** Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold The King* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980). ISBN:0-930014-39-1<sup>b</sup>.
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).
- Ref-0187** Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-1304** John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008).

#### Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-930014-39-1>.