

BE READY
Parable 24: Ten Virgins
Mt 25:1-13

I. ILLUSTRATION

Readiness—‘alerts’ in Germany—awaiting return of dad—bags packed and ready to go

II. BACKGROUND

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mt 13:32

1 *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

1. NO PARALLEL PARABLE
2. AFTER JESUS’ PROPHECY OF END TIMES—**Mt 24**
 - a. Question posed by Peter, James, John, Andrew—**Mk 13**
 - b. Audience = Jesus’ disciples—not the crowd—all of **Matthew 24-25**
 - c. Parallels = **Mk 13** and **Lk 21**
 - d. All versions end with this *crescendo*—**Be alert!**
 - e. Matthew’s version only—inserts four parables—dealing with readiness
 1. Two **contrast** readiness with unreadiness
 - ❖ Two Servants—and—Ten Virgins
 2. Two **show how** to be ready
 - ❖ Talents—and—Sheep and Goats
3. SIMILAR TO WEDDING FEAST HOSTED BY KING—**Mt 22**

- o Improperly attired guest is expelled—[vv11-14](#)

B. PURPOSES OF THE PARABLE

1. ALLEGORIZING LOSES SIGHT OF THE PARABLE'S TRUE PURPOSE

a. Misleading interpretations

1. The bride = church—marrying Christ the Bridegroom
2. Virgins = specific groups of people—in relation to the Church
 - 5 foolish ones = Jews—5 wise ones = Christians
 - 5 foolish ones = disobedient Christians—5 wise ones = obedient Christians
3. Lamp = the Bible—God's word
4. Oil = good works—or faith—or the Holy Spirit

b. Misleading conclusions—about foolish virgins

1. They are Jews—who have God's word—but are not saved
2. Or they are Christians—who are saved—but with two possibilities
 - a. Either they fall from grace—and lose their salvation
 - ☆ But this is not biblical
 - b. Or they do not fall from grace—they 'lose their reward'
 - ☆ But no evidence for this distinction in this parable

c. Problems

1. Jesus never mentions the bride
2. Jesus was talking to Jewish disciples—not Christian followers
 - Though we can now make applications to the Church and Christians
3. This is not only about the Church—or specific groups related to it
4. Remember—Jesus' description of the Kingdom of Heaven
 - The 'field' = the world—Parable of Wheat and Tares—[Mt 13](#)
 - The kingdom is filled with both true and false believers
 - Not everyone who professes to follow Christ will be saved

2. THE SIMPLE—NON-ALLEGORICAL MEANING

- a. The virgins are **any persons** who profess to follow the Bridegroom—Christ
 - Either Jews in His own time—or persons later professing to be Christians
- b. Foolish virgins are not true followers—they are unprepared for His coming
- c. They will not be 'saved'—but will be shut out by the closing door
- d. We cannot soften this meaning—by claiming they will simply lose their reward

3. THE PURPOSES OF THIS PARABLE

- o **Evangelistic**—to encourage all persons to become true followers of God in Christ

- o **Eschatological**—to urge Christ-followers to be ready for His second-coming

C. THE PARABLE

1. SETTING AND SITUATION

- a. The couple
 - 1. Brides—were young virgins—12 years and older
 - 2. Grooms—typically 18-20 years old
- b. Three stages of marriage
 - 1. **Engagement**—pre-arranged by parental match-making—often as children
 - 2. **Betrothal**—as they approached marriageable age
 - Occurred in bride’s father’s house—festive celebration, with blessings, candles
 - Time period from betrothal to marriage—could extend several years
 - Absolutely binding—broken only by death or divorce
 - Did not live together—bride stayed in father’s house
 - 3. Wedding/marriage—one year later
 - Bride adorned and perfumed by attendants
 - Groom went to bride’s home for banquet
 - Then took bride to his home in procession
 - Procession usually began at nightfall—but could be delayed
 - All activity in village stopped—universal celebration
 - Week-long celebration—couple remained and held court as ‘king’ and ‘queen’
- c. Others in wedding party
 - 1. Virgins = **παρθενος**
 - Marriageable maiden
 - Ladies in waiting—to help prepare the bride
 - Lit the way for the bridegroom
 - 2. Friend of the bridegroom
 - Waited and announced His coming—the ‘midnight crier’
 - Like John the Baptist—who waited to hear the Bridegroom’s voice—in **Jn 3**

2. **VERSES 1-4**—GOING OUT WITH LAMPS AND OIL

- a. **Then**—points back to unknown ‘when’—the Master returns—**24:50-51**
 - Long-anticipated arrival time finally occurs—*now* He is the Bridegroom
- b. Virgins went out with lamps
 - 1. Lamps

- Nobody went out at night without a lamp—pitch black—no ambient city lights
 - Lamp was palm-size—filled with oil rags as wicks
2. Oil
- They **all** started with oil **in** their lamps—to light the way to their waiting station
 - Evidence of burning on the way—wicks needed trimming
 - Wise virgins took *extra* oil **with** their lamps
 - Foolish ones took *no extra* oil **with** them
- c. To meet the Bridegroom
1. Location
 - Near groom’s house—waiting for his return from banquet—with His bride
 2. Bridegroom
 - a. Obvious Christological meaning—not allegorical
 - b. John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Bridegroom—**Jn 3**
 - ☆ *He must increase, but I must decrease*
 - c. Jesus referred to Himself as bridegroom
 - ☆ They should celebrate—not fast until He was taken away—**Mt 9** and **Mk 2**
3. **VERSE 5**—THE DELAY AND SLEEP
- a. The delay
 1. Probably caused by extended banquet at bride’s house
 2. Eschatological meaning—in two other parables
 - a. **Ten Minas**—**Lk 19**
 - ☆ A nobleman went to distant country to receive a kingdom—then returned
 - b. **Talents**—**Mt 25**
 - ☆ A man went on a journey—and returned after a long time
 - b. They fell asleep
 1. *This* parable is not about vigilance—staying awake—but about readiness
 - Here—sleep is not a listless state of spiritual decline
 - Here—sleep is not a weakness—as it was with Peter in the Garden
 - Nobody was at fault—*all* including wise virgins rested—until alerted
 - Rest is part of everyday life—even as we wait for Jesus’ return
 2. *Other* passages warn against the kind of sleep that *is* spiritual lethargy—**I Thess 5**
4. **VERSES 6-9**—THE ALERT AND THEIR RESPONSES
- a. The midnight crier
 - Like John calling—*prepare the way for the Lord—make His paths straight*

- God has mercifully sent awakenings—to alert people to His eventual coming
 - But this *final* call will be so *sudden*—there will be no time to prepare
- b. Two responses—wise and foolish
1. They all *knew* what to do—trim wicks—fill oil—light lamps
 2. But only the wise were prepared
 3. This parallels parable of wise and foolish builders—**Mt 7**
 4. The problem—for foolish people—virgins or builders
 - Is *not* ignorance—they *know* what to do
 - But they *choose* not to do it—for many reasons
 - Laziness—obstinacy—independence—rebellion—willfulness
- c. The wise virgins were not selfish
- If they had shared—*all* the lamps would have gone out
 - The bridegroom would have been left in the dark—without a lighted escort
 - It was their duty not to disappoint the bridegroom
 - This story is not about ethics—but about being prepared to serve the Lord
5. **VERSES 10-11**—THE DISTURBING REALITY
- a. *The door was shut*
1. What was wrong with the foolish virgins?
 - Some Protestants say they lacked saving faith—and the Holy Spirit
 - Some Catholics say they lacked works—to justify themselves
 - No—Jesus was not teaching a theological formula or allegorizing
 - Instead—they lacked—a genuine relationship with the Bridegroom
 2. They did not care enough about Him to prepare for His coming
 - They were lazy, self-focused and dismissive about His need for light
- b. *I do not know you*
1. Be assured of this fact
 - **Jesus knows** His sheep and **they know** his voice—**γινωσκω**—**Jn 10**
 2. But Jesus also **knows who are** not His sheep
 - Matthew 7—*I do not γινωσκω you* = intimate knowledge
 - They are false followers—have no intimate relationship with Him
 - He rejects them because—they did not do the will of His Father
 3. This passage uses softer language
 - *I do not ειδω you* = see—perceive—understand
 - He does not recognize them

- Because they show little care for Him—careless and dismissive
- 4. But the effect is the same—they are still shut out!
- 6. **VERSE 12**—BE READY
 - a. *You do not know the day or hour*
 - 1. Repeated theme of **Chapter 24**—four times
 - v36**—No one knows
 - v42**—You do not know
 - v44**—When you do not think He will [come]
 - v50**—At an hour when the servant does not know
 - 2. Previous parable—**24:45-51**
 - He comes **sooner** than expected
 - 3. This parable
 - He comes **later** than expected—a delay
 - 4. But the effect is the same—His return will be sudden—and unexpected
 - b. *Be on alert!*
 - 1. **γρηγορεω** = watch—give strict attention to—[source for name: **‘Gregory’**]
 - 2. Not just watching *out* for His coming
 - 3. But watching *over* what we are *doing* in the meantime
 - 4. Living lives of engaged preparedness
 - 5. The next two parables explain **how** to live in readiness
 - **Talents**—being good stewards of God’s gifts
 - **Sheep and Goats**—serving the least of these

D. MAIN POINTS

1. THE BRIDEGROOM IS COMING
2. NOBODY KNOWS WHEN—MAYBE SOONER—MAYBE LATER
3. WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT
 - The interval between the first ‘midnight cry’ and His Second-coming
4. A WARNING
 - God’s people—Israel and the Church—have always been a mixed community
 - They include Wheat and Tares—and Wise and Foolish Virgins
 - True wisdom—is **not just knowing facts** and what to do—but **knowing Him**
5. BE READY
 - Watch *out* for His coming

- o But also watch *over* what we do—being good stewards and servants of the Lord

V. APPLICATION

A. BEING READY IS NOT JUST BEING PREPARED

- Not just more Bible study—more prayer—more tithing—more good works
- Yes—we should do all those things
- But if we do them *only* to prove how ‘ready’ we are—we are *not* ready!

B. TRUE READINESS FOCUSES ON CHRIST HIMSELF

- Is a deep hunger for His presence—and His coming again
- All our spiritual exercises should focus on Him
 - We read the Bible—to know Him better
 - We pray—to understand His will better
 - We serve others—to show our love for Him

C. BEING READY—IS LIVING IN HOPEFULNESS

- Readiness is a condition and attitude—not just an action
- Readiness is not just putting things in order—our duty—or doing everything ‘right’
- It is eager excitement—based on relationship—the joy of knowing the Bridegroom
- Is anticipating His presence—serving Him with hope and expectation
- **Hope** is our attitude of expectancy—that earnestly anticipates His return

VI. INVITATION

O JESUS, JOY OF LOVING HEARTS

O Jesus, joy of loving hearts,
thou fount of life, thou light of men,
from fullest bliss that earth imparts
we turn unfilled to thee again,
we turn unfilled to thee again.

Thy truth unchanged has ever stood,
thou savest those that on thee call;
to them that seek thee, thou art good,
to them that find thee, all in all
to them that find thee, all in all.

We taste thee, O thou living bread,
and long to feast upon thee still;
we drink of thee, the fountain-head,
and thirst our souls from thee to fill,
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.

Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
where'er our changeful lot is cast,
glad that thy gracious smile we see,
blest that our faith can hold thee fast,
blest that our faith can hold thee fast.

O Jesus, ever with us stay,
make all our moments calm and bright;
chase the dark night of sin away,
shed o'er the world thy holy light,
shed o'er the world thy holy light.