

# Behold, the Bridegroom Comes!

Matthew 25:1-13

Morning reading: Revelation 19:1-10



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**Main point:** Jesus calls us to be wise—take appropriate action—in light of His return by waiting in readiness.

## Introduction:

Is the return of Jesus Christ good news *to* you? Let me ask it another way. Will the coming of Christ be good news *for* you? The main message of this chapter is that the coming of Christ is and will be good news for you IF you are...

READY, FAITHFUL, and SERVING. If you are taking notes, here are the three main points of this chapter.

- Be ready—so that when Jesus returns, you will not miss the joy of the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- Be faithful—so that when the kingdom comes, you will share in Jesus' own joy and happiness.
- Be serving—so that on the day of judgment, your life will show that you are a sheep in Christ's fold and not a goat.

Matthew 24-25 sets before us the most extensive teaching of the last days according to Jesus. Known as the Olivet Discourse, our Lord continues to unfold what it will be like *when He comes*. Matthew 25 is a beautiful masterpiece of some of the most penetrating and powerful teachings that our Lord ever gave.

Structurally, it's easy to see that this chapter falls into three neat sections. There are **two parables** and **one illustration**. The first *parable of the ten virgins* is seen in verses 1-13. The second *parable of the talents* is seen in verses 14-30. And finally, Jesus gives us an analogy of *the separation of the sheep and goats* in verses 31-46. Each section cascades into the next one, so that if you are ready, you will be faithful, and as you are faithful, you will be serving, thus proven to be a true sheep in the fold of God, and welcomed to "*inherit kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt.25:34). These parables are not all gloom and doom, but they do exhort us to *wait in readiness*, to *work in faithfulness*, and to *serve in truthfulness* for no one knows the time of His coming.

In this message, we will concentrate our attention on the parable of the ten virgins. Remember, the main emphasis is on READINESS. Readiness makes the difference most when you find yourself in a pinch. Readiness counts when circumstances change suddenly. Readiness doesn't seem to matter when all of life is going along smoothly and easily and everything is convenient. Everyone looks ready when things are easy.

But now turn the page and imagine the news of a hurricane forming. The meteorologist can detect weeks in advance the formation of a storm. As it swirls and builds its strength in the Gulf of Mexico or in the Atlantic somewhere, everybody seems ready. Fast forward to a day before or hours before it hits land. The stores are crowded and you can't get any bread. The gas stations are packed and you can't get any gas. The shelves are empty you can't get any water.

All of a sudden you see *who is ready* and *who is trying to get prepared*, don't you? Readiness makes the difference when things change fast.

What Jesus wants to teach us in this chapter is that *we want to BE READY so that we don't have to get ready.* And we want to *STAY READY so that we don't have to get ready because you can't get ready in a pinch.*

This is the difference between the wise virgins and the foolish ones. This parable is a warning not to be caught *unprepared*. It is a warning which applies to different groups at different times. It is a warning addressed specifically to those who are *inside the church* who assume that their future is unconditionally assured.

Here is the question that Jesus will answer for us in this text: *what constitutes fitness for entrance into the festal chamber of the bridegroom?* What makes one *ready* to enter the marriage supper of the Lamb? We will discover the answer as we break open this parable under these 5 headings:

## Outline:

- A. The picture (v.1a)—what does the parable represent and why does it matter?
- B. The people (vv.1b-2)—who are they and in what ways are they similar to us?
- C. The preparation (vv.3-4)—what is *the essential difference* between those who are ready and those who are not?
- D. The problem (vv.5-12)—what dangers confront us as we wait for His return?
- E. The point (v.13)—what does Jesus want us to do in light of what He has said?

## Exposition:

### A. The picture (v.1a)

What does the parable represent and why does it matter? Jesus begins in verse 1,

<sup>1</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins,

The parable is about the kingdom of heaven. What is the kingdom of heaven? The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God speaks of the *rule and reign of God*. It has an "already-but-not-yet" aspect to it—that is, it has already started in the hearts of men, but it has not yet come in its fullness and completion. If you are a true believer, you have already tasted of the kingdom, but it is only a taste, my friends. We wait for the full enchilada! The full entrée! When you go out to dinner at a Mexican restaurant, the chips and salsa are useful as an appetizer, but it is the main course that we anticipate with great joy! So it is for the Christian in this world.

In the parables of Matthew 13, Jesus taught us *what the kingdom is like now* in this present world.

- The kingdom of God has *mixed conditions* now (Matt.13:24-30), which include *authentic* and *imitation* Christianity.
- The kingdom of God prohibits *separation* now but *ensures separation later* at the harvest when the wheat is separated from the tares (darnel weeds).

- In the kingdom now, Christians must be careful how we measure outward growth of the kingdom as in the parable of the mustard seed (*Matt.13:31-32*).
- In the kingdom now, we must be discerning about the inward impact of God's rule, because like leaven which leavens the whole lump of dough, when God's rule comes into our hearts, it touches every area of our lives (*Matt.13:33-34*).

But here in Matthew 25, He teaches us, not what the kingdom is like now, but *what the kingdom of heaven will be like* when it comes in its completeness. When Jesus comes in His glory, what will it be like? The parable of the ten virgins explains that some will be ready and some will not. Will you be ready? And if so, how does that readiness look?

## B. The people (*vv.1b-2*)

<sup>1</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.

Who do the ten virgins represent? In what ways are they similar to us? Always remember that the details of any parable should never be pushed too far. A great deal of clever ingenuity has been expended on speculation about what each feature conveys.

- What is the significance of *ten* virgins? Why not six or three?
- Why were they *equally* divided?
- *Where* did the wise ones come from to meet the bridegroom?
- Why did they fail to enter the marriage procession when they were supposed to join it?
- Is the feast held at bridegroom's house or the bride's house?

And so forth.

Listen, dear friends, the fastest way to destroy a parable and end up missing Christ is to run unrestrained into all these kinds of reckless speculations. This is not an allegory where every part means something. The *plain sense* is the best way to approach this parable, and if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, the Lord's meaning will burst into our understanding with vivid color and conviction.

The scene here would have been a familiar one to those to whom Jesus spoke.

At a **wedding**, the spotlight shines mainly on the *bride* and *groom*, but in this story, it is the *bridesmaids* from which the central lesson is taken. In Matthew 9:15, Jesus used the *groomsman* (*attendants*) to teach the disciples of John about fasting. Here He uses the bridesmaids—or as they are called, virgins—to show us about readiness.

The term "**virgin**" refers to a female beyond puberty but not yet married.

It was a custom in that day that during the last stage of the wedding process, the bridegroom came with his friends, late in the night, to the house of the bride, where she expected him. But no one knew precisely when the bridegroom would come to the appointed place. When the bridesmaids were given notice of the bridegroom's approach, the bridesmaids were to go out provide a torchlight procession with lamps in hand, and light the way into the bride's house to celebrate the nuptials with great joy and

then from her home to his for the feast. But in our story, a contrast is made between five who were called wise and five who were called foolish.

They are set before to draw out a **difference** between those who are *ready* and *wise* and those who are *unprepared* and *foolish*. In many respects they are alike. But in their PREPARATION or lack thereof, they are polar opposites. Before we consider the essential difference, it would be helpful to see their *similarities*—for these similarities are also found in the church at this present time.

1. All ten had been invited to the banquet. There may have been many in the village or town who did not receive invitations, but each of these young women had received one, and each one was right to anticipate a wonderful occasion when the bridegroom came. It was a great honor and privilege to be a part of the bridal party. So, what was the difference? Hold that thought!
2. All responded to the wedding invitation. In Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus told another parable in which a king gave a wedding feast for his son, and those who were invited rejected it—some with open *hostility*, others with flimsy *excuses*. But here, all the young women invited responded with joy. So, what was the difference? Hold that thought!
3. All clearly had some affection and love for the bridegroom. This is the point where the story commences in Matthew 25, "...ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." All ten! They all had a fondness or an affection for the bridegroom. So, what was the difference? Hold that thought!
4. All were alike in that they become drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom was delayed. In spite of their affection, they all drifted into "la-la land" when the bridegroom was delayed. No blame is given for falling asleep. It did not interfere with their readiness to meet the bridegroom. So, what was the difference?

But SUDDENLY He came, and at once the *similarities vanished*, and the essential difference emerged. Here is the difference: five had *oil in their lamps*, and five did not. Five were *ready*, and five were *unprepared*.

Who did the virgins represent? On this occasion, Jesus was not speaking to people who had never made a profession of faith in Him. He was talking to the disciples (*Matt.24:1-2*). These virgins were a picture of those who, at least outwardly, were His followers.

Concerning the interpretation of the virgins, R.C. Sproul said,

"By extension, they (virgins) are representative of church members, of those who profess to believe and trust Him, people who consider themselves to be Christians, loyal disciples of Christ...and although all ten virgins were in the bridal party and all ten of them went out to meet the groom, there was a huge difference among them, and so there is a huge distinguishing feature among church members."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Matthew. St. Andrew's Expository Commentary*, Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, p.719

There are many people within the church who have heard the invitation of Christ. Some have even responded somewhat. It may even be said of you that you have some affection for Jesus, but you are not ready to meet Him.

They all had their invitations. They all had a good standing with the bride. They all had their wedding clothes on, but just as there was a difference between these ten bridesmaids, there is a difference among those in church today. Some *know* the Lord, and some know "*of*" the Lord. Some are ready, others are not. You are a good church person, but you do not know the Lord. You would never say anything in opposition to Christ, but you are not born again. You do not have that *inward change* which alone entitles you to enter heaven.

Jesus desires to set these two classes or groups before us to show, not only the sin of unpreparedness but also the absurdity of unreadiness. He is aiming at teaching us that true readiness is not something that is found in the head only, but it is also located in the heart!

Two groups: *wise* and *foolish*. Two conditions: *prepared* and *unprepared*. One question: which one are you?

We move now from *the people* in the parable to *the preparation* or lack thereof that was discovered. What was the essential difference between those who were ready and those who were not?

### C. The preparation (vv.3-4)

<sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>four</sup> but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

In Palestine at the time of Jesus, people used small clay lamps that held a small amount of oil. A wick floated in the oil, and once it was lit, it would burn until the oil was consumed. If a person were going on a long journey in the night and needed to have illumination, they would have made sure to fill their lamps with oil, and also to bring along another vessel containing extra oil if the first supply ran out. This is what we would call "a no brainer."

It would be like going on a camping trip with flashlights and no batteries. A flashlight is absolutely of no use if it has no batteries! The translators are sensitive to us in their translation of the word "**foolish**" here, for in the original Greek, the word *moros*—from which we get our English word moron—means "stupid."

Now, this does not seem so harsh when you think about what is taking place here. In order to participate in the feast, you must be prepared. They had lamps, but no oil. They were careless, short-sighted, thoughtless, neglectful, inexcusable, and personally unprepared.

**What does the oil represent in this parable?** Oil is used in a number of ways in the Bible. When a prophet, priest, or king was placed in office, they were anointed with oil as an outward sign of their divine appointment (*Ps.23:5; 2:2*). Christ—which is not the last name of Jesus, but rather His title—actually means, "the Anointed One." Isaiah 11:1 foretold that the Spirit of God would rest upon the Messiah. In John 3:34, Jesus was given the Holy Spirit without measure. As Jesus inaugurated His public ministry, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, stood up to read and the book of Isaiah was handed to Him. He opened it to chapter 61 and read,

- **Luke 4:18-21**—THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,  
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.  
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,  
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,  
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,  
<sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."  
<sup>20</sup> And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue  
were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup> And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In 1 John 2:20, true believers have "*an anointing from the Holy One*." In other words, the Spirit was given to us, when Christ was given to us at salvation (*Rom.5:5; Eph.1:13; 4:30*).

The oil is an indirect reference to the Spirit of God. I say "indirect" because, if you interpret oil literally as the Holy Spirit, then you have some problems.

- The first problem is that oil runs out in the story, but believers do not run out of the Holy Spirit. (*Eph.1:13; 4:30*)
- The second problem is that the virgins are pictured as going away to purchase more oil, but the Holy Spirit cannot be purchased. (*Acts 8:9-24*)

It is best to interpret **the oil** as simply representing *an inward preparation* or saving faith, which is a gift from the Holy Spirit. The crucial and determining difference was *within*. It was not their good standing with the bride, it was not their invitation or their wedding garments—all of that was *outward*. The essential difference was the lack of *personal, inward preparation*.

The great Prince of Preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, also interpreted this oil along these lines. He wrote this in one of his sermons:

"A great change has to be wrought in you, far beyond any power of yours to accomplish, [before] you can go in with Christ to the marriage. You must, first of all, be renewed in your nature, or you will not be ready. You must be washed from your sins, or you will not be ready. You must be justified in Christ's righteousness, and you must put on His wedding dress, or else you will not be ready. You must be reconciled to God, you must be made like God, or you will not be ready. Or, to come to the parable before us, you must have a lamp, and that lamp must be fed with heavenly oil, and it must continue to burn brightly, or else you will not be ready. No child of darkness can go into that place of light. You must be brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, or else you will never be ready to go in with Christ to the marriage, and to be forever with Him."<sup>2</sup>

And so, I bring the question before you: are you ready? Are you among the five wise virgins or the five foolish ones? The foolish ones were unprepared because they thought that responding to the invitation was enough. Coming to church is not enough to get you into the kingdom! They thought that having affection for the bridegroom was enough. Don't be deceived into thinking an emotion prepares you to meet your Christ! There is a difference between *profession* and *possession*. No one was ever saved by a mere profession of faith. Unless the faith we profess is authentic, unless it has taken root in our hearts,

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "*Entrance and Exclusion*," in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vols.7-63, Pasadena, TX, Pilgrim Publications, 1976, p.30

unless it is there by the power of the Holy Spirit, it will not save us. Jesus is pointing out the difference between those who are Christian in name only, versus those who are truly, inwardly changed.

Do not think that an appeal to all of the wonderful bible lessons you have taught or the witnessing opportunities you have had will be sufficient. Do not think that your bible knowledge, theological understanding, or willingness to sacrifice goods and even suffer physically is enough. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, you may have exceptional gifts, but without the love that comes from saving faith, they are pointless. You may have clear theological knowledge, but without the love that comes from saving faith, it is worthless. You may have sacrificial service and a willingness to go beyond the call of duty, but if you do not have love that comes from saving faith, it is valueless. Such were the foolish virgins. They lacked that which was essential. (1 Cor.13:1-3)

Up until this point in the parable, no difference can be detected among the virgins, but the difference between the condition of the *wise* and the *foolish* is revealed by two things:

1. The delay.
2. The arrival.

#### D. The problem (vv.5-12)

<sup>5</sup> Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep.

**Delays** are purposeful in the divine plan of God. In God's administration, *delays* work to expose what is really in the heart. And so it is concerning the hiddenness of the time and the delay of Christ's coming.

<sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet *him*.'

The coming of bridegroom brought a **crisis**! The same will happen when the Lord Jesus returns. Many who have considered themselves to be Christians will be shown not to be, and many who have perhaps struggled with assurance or weakness will discover that they, in fact, were saved.

James Montgomery Boice suggests that you can preview the results of final judgment by the way you react to crises now.

"Nothing will correctly reveal what is in a man than the coming upon him of some crushing and unlooked-for-crisis. Let it be the temporal ruin by the failure of his calculations or the disappointment of all his hopes; let it be the entrance of the death-angel into his home and the removal from it of his nearest and dearest earthly friend; let it be his own prostration by some serious illness which puts him face-to-face with his dissolution, and it is at once discovered by others and by himself whether he is animated with unfailing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, or whether he has been deceiving himself, all the while relying on some other support."<sup>3</sup>

The coming of Christ will bring a crisis. It will bring out what is really inside.

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<sup>3</sup> William M. Taylor, *The Parables of Our Lord Expounded and Illustrated*, New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1900, pp. 170-171

<sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' <sup>12</sup> But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'

There are two obvious lessons that the parable is meant to convey.

1. The life of the Lord Jesus within is not transferable. This does not mean that God doesn't use one saved person to bring the Gospel to another, but rather, it means you cannot be saved by the life of Christ in another person.

In the day of Christ's coming, or if He were to snatch you into His presence today by a convoy of angels through death and ask you, "What right do you have to come into My heaven?" your mother's faith will not save you. Your wife's faith, your daughter's faith, or your son's faith will not save you! You must stand on your own. Faith cannot be bought with tithes and offering. It cannot be borrowed by association and membership. So, the question is: where do you stand? Are you alive in Christ? Are you ready?

2. Lost opportunities cannot be regained. There comes a time when all opportunities are gone. There is a time when the pleading will cease and the door of grace will be closed forever! Cries for mercy will not be heard. Calls for a second chance will not be responded to, and the loud thud of the door being closed will be final. No more wrestling and striving with men, for God will shut the door to the kingdom and all that will be outside will perish.

If you are not saved, if you are not sure, this is your moment! Your opportunity! Do not say, "I will turn to Christ later. I will repent after I enjoy a few more months or years of sin." You do not know that. Today may be the last time you will hear the Gospel. And even if it is not—every time you hear it after this, it will be no easier for you to turn to God later. In fact, when you reject the free, clear, wonderful offer of God's grace now, it will harden you so that in the future, it will be much more difficult to repent. God may have to break you through tragedy, misery, or frustration, but He may not. "Now is the time!" (2 Cor.6:2)

What is it time for? It is time for you to recognize that you are in danger. It is time for you to recognize that there is no other Savior but Jesus. There is no other Lord except Christ. He is the bridegroom. He is the One who is coming again, and He is the One who suffered, hung on that cross, and died for your sins. Not for your mistakes, nor for your shortcoming, but for your sins! Our sins are real and our sins are an offense to a holy God. It presents a serious problem between God and us, but God provided a solution. The solution is Christ—crucified and crushed in our place, suffering the wrath of God, and now He is risen and ascended for our acquittal.

Christ satisfied the wrath of God. Christ satisfied the righteousness that God demands which we do not have. In His life, in His death, in His resurrection, He provides all that we need to enter into the kingdom and to enjoy the coming wedding supper! Without Jesus and this inward change, you have no entrance into the kingdom. With Him, you can be ready! Turn! Come! Trust! Enter! Call! Receive! Obey Christ!



## E. The point (v.13)

<sup>13</sup> Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

This does not mean we are to walk around or drive around looking up into the sky. Paul tells us what it means in very practical terms. In 1 Timothy 4:16, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says,

- <sup>16</sup> Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

What Paul means is to keep a close watch on what you believe and how you live, but you must persevere in these things because it is believing the truth and living the truth which demonstrate what it really means to be ready.

## Conclusion:

Today, I call you to *be ready* and to *stay ready* by coming *all the way* and *being all in* with Christ.

The sky shall unfold  
Preparing His entrance  
The stars shall applaud Him  
With thunders of praise  
The sweet light in His eyes shall enhance those awaiting  
And we shall behold Him, then face to face

The angel will sound, the shout of His coming  
And the sleeping shall rise, from there slumbering place  
And those remaining shall be changed in a moment  
And we shall behold him, then face to face  
We shall behold Him, o yes we shall behold Him  
Face to face in all of His glory

O we shall behold Him, we shall behold Him  
Face to face in all of His glory  
O we shall behold Him, yes we shall behold Him  
Face to face, our Savior and Lord

We shall behold Him, face to face  
Our Savior and Lord  
We shall behold Him, our Savior and Lord  
Savior and Lord!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sandi Patty, *We Shall Behold Him*

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