

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

In Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 1-13, Jesus provides us with another of His wonderful parables. Let us read it first, then we'll try to glean out of it what vital truth He is revealing to us.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

- 1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*
- 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.*
- 6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*
- 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.*
- 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.*
- 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.*
- 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*
- 12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*
- 13 Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*

As one of the Kingdom of God Parables, it is for teaching us the mysteries that are related to that period of history in which we now live, that time which is between His first and second coming. This includes two segments of time, the period from when Jesus ascended to heaven until the rapture, and also from the rapture to His second arrival, when He will literally sit on the throne of David as promised. "Mysteries," when spoken of in the Scripture, are things of God and His workings that are absolutely new and not previously revealed. Some of the parables speak specifically to the period before rapture; others seem to relate to the post-rapture times.

The Parable of the 10 Virgins is one, which has generated some differences of opinion as to which event is being used as a benchmark for conveying its message. Is it at the time

of the rapture, or is it at His second coming? Perhaps this little excursion into the Word will help us to decide the matter in our own minds. It is important to know, however, that when it happened is not of any great significance; it is the message it conveys in either case that is of relevance. My personal view is that it is a pre-rapture event. The Parable uses 10 virgins as the medium through which to develop the allegory. The word virgin in Greek is *pathenia*. It means maiden, unmarried daughter, or virgin. In the culture of the day, all translations would apply to almost every such young woman, because an unmarried maiden would also be a virgin.

Here we have 10 such young girls going out to where it has been told they could meet the coming Bridegroom. These words coming from Jesus in the context of the kingdom of God mysteries, makes it evident that He is speaking of Himself as the Bridegroom, with the bride being the raptured church. The question previously mentioned centers around whether this is His coming for the church, that is, His rapture coming, or whether He is coming with His bride after the tribulation.

In either case, these girls apparently reach the place where He is expected, and have to wait quite a while, not knowing just when He will come. After a while, they all fall asleep. Jesus tells us that five were wise and five were foolish, because the wise brought oil for their lamps while the others did not. Throughout the Scripture, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Scholars like to create impressive names for such things. They call this the Principal of Expository Constancy, when Scripture uses such symbolism repeatedly and consistently. Oil is the fuel, which brings forth light, God's holy light, which is His Word. Only the genuine saved believer has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and is, therefore, capable, through the light, which the Holy Spirit provides, to understand the spiritual messages found in God's Word, the Holy Bible.

Suddenly the Bridegroom appeared, that moment they had been eagerly awaiting, the moment when they could join Him in whatever was His plan. They immediately got up and trimmed their lamps. Lamp is *lampas* in Greek and can mean a light, lamp or torch. If these were torches, then the oil would be carried in a separate container to be added to

the torch, as it was needed. I prefer to assume that they had lamps because they did exist at that time, and they would be the more likely choice of light source for young maidens as compared to a torch. Oil lamps consist of an oil container into which a long wick is submerged. The outer end of the wick extends out of the container and is held in place just above it. Capillary action draws the oil up to its outer end. The wick probably was made from a piece of twisted or woven cloth, which could be ignited and would continue to burn with the oil being continually drawn up serving as fuel. Without the oil, a lighted wick will burn up quite quickly and become a worthless char. When there is oil, the wick is only slightly charred at the end as long as the oil continues to flow and remains the source of fuel.

Before lighting the lamp it is desirable to “trim” the lamp, that is, the wick. This is to remove the small amounts of char from the previous burning so that the flame will be brighter and more efficient. All ten did this and lighted the wicks. It is then that five of them discovered that the flame was short lived and that only the wick burned because there was no oil in their lamps. Perhaps it was only when they saw that the other five had lamps which were burning brightly where theirs had burnt out, did they realize they had a problem. It may have been only then that they realized that oil was needed. Why else would have they brought empty lamps? In the earthly context it is improbable that they wouldn't have known about the need for oil. But remember, this is a spiritual message being expressed through earthly symbolisms.

They asked the five who had oil to give them some, but they wouldn't because they couldn't share it. Instead they suggested that they go where they could get their own. Of course, by the time they got back, presumably, but not necessarily, with some of the right oil, it was too late; the opportunity was gone; the door was shut; and the Bridegroom was compelled to say, “I know you not.” Notice I said the right oil, which could only have been the Holy Spirit.

The message here is quite clear and profound. Word had gotten around that the Bridegroom was going to come sometime soon, and for them to become part of the

wedding party would be a very good thing, a great privilege. Some, represented by the five wise girls, were truly saved believers as revealed by the fact that their lamps were filled with oil, (the Holy Spirit). If we can stretch the analogy a bit, we might say the lamps were their hearts and their hearts were filled with the Holy Spirit, which often expresses His light through the very countenance of the true believers. They were genuine possessors of faith. They couldn't share the oil, the Holy Spirit. We each must seek Him through individual personal faith. The other five were ignorant of the truth, were probably falsely taught or may have been only dabblers in the faith. They saw what these five wise girls were doing and where they were heading and decided that it would be a good idea to join them, believing that the way was easy and that they were "as good as" every one else. They each had heard the "good news" of His coming, gave credence, that is "believed" in their "own way." They were "believers" in that they believed that they were saved! Why else would they have tried to go where only believers were allowed? They had head knowledge, which most likely was the sole source of their belief. They were professors, but obviously not possessors of the faith. To all outward appearances, they were identical to the wise five. The difference was something often not discernable because the oil, the Holy Spirit, is in the lamp, that is, the heart, and not necessarily very evident externally. Often those with "empty lamps" who lack adequate knowledge of the Word, may provide a great deal of many outward expressions of "goodness." This gives them reason to believe that they are saved. Those, whose lamps are full, often express their holiness in quieter, less noticeable ways. Who could tell them apart until the moment that TRUTH arrived? Only God Himself knows who really has the "oil." However, He implores us to repeatedly examine ourselves in the context of His Word so that we may acquire a level of certainty as to our own salvation.

It was not until all ten were assembled at the place of welcoming that the empty ones discovered their emptiness but then it was too late. The wise ones knew the Word, they had already become genuine believers whose lamps (their hearts), were full of oil (the Holy Spirit) and they knew well the purpose of the Bridegroom's coming and what credentials were needed to join His entourage. The others, the foolish ones, probably had observed the actions of the wise and had superficially emulated them. But you might

say it was all in their heads but not in their hearts. They professed very compellingly and even believed that they had all of the qualifications of the wise even though they possessed them not. This is very reminiscent of Matthew 22:11-14, in the Parable of the Marriage feast where one guest is seen to not have on the proper garment and is, therefore, thrown out. The “garment” in that case is also the Holy Spirit. Verse 14 of the same chapter tells us that “*many are called, but few are chosen.*” At this point, I’m reminded of Genesis 7:16, when God shut the door of the ark. For 120 years as Noah built the ark, he was probably reported to be the weirdest weirdo of the century. But how many of those who called him that do you suppose came pounding at that closed door and screaming to be let in when the flood came?

We have here within this Parable a very important message for all of us. It’s about a relationship. You may be very comfortable in your belief that you know Jesus, but what is far more important, does He know you? That is the meat of this message. Do you spend time with Him? Enough time? He is always available to us, if we seek Him in prayer and gratitude with contrite, repentant and obedient hearts. He is always standing at the door of our hearts, knocking; His gentle knocking expresses His hoping we will let Him in so that He and we can get to know each other. (Revelation 3:30) The five wise girls knew Him, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit He knew them.

Perhaps when Jesus comes for His own at the rapture, it will be midnight as in the Parable. Of course, it can’t be midnight everywhere at once, but for the sake of simplicity and in order to add another bit of symbolism, let’s assume it is. His quest for His own will be easy; His people will all be visible by the spiritual light provided in each by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Imagine Him looking down from the clouds at the time of rapture. As His eyes peruse the darkness, He will see these many tiny lights, like we see lightening bugs across the landscape. These will be the redeemed, filled with the shining light of the Holy Spirit waving to Him and saying, “Here I am, I’m ready. Take me home”! And He will! But as in the parable, there will be many, many others, not unlike the foolish virgins who will also be waving, calling and believing that they too are chosen, but He will not know them, for again, “*many are called but few are chosen.*”

(Matthew 20:16 – 22:12). One might wonder how many “foolish virgins,” as they represent much of the world at large, might have earlier “*confessed with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believed in their hearts that Jesus was raised from the dead*” (Romans 10:9) and, therefore, believed that they were saved. It seems that for some Christians the head believes, the head believes that the heart believes, because it sensed an emotional moment or two at the time belief came. But that heart belief must be carefully and frequently examined and nurtured lest it turn out to be nothing more than that which affected the “category two” believers Jesus describes in the Parable of the Sower.

Regarding the issue of sleep. Several times Scripture tells us to remain watchful, to not be lax, but to stay alert, because we have no way of knowing when the rapture will occur. This doesn't mean we should not sleep as a normal part of our lives. It means to not be lulled into the sleep of complacency or dullness of our spiritual senses. The wise girls slept along with the foolish ones. However, the wise were ready at a moment's notice. They kept themselves spiritually ready, keeping their lamps filled. The parable makes this very clear, and does not rebuke them for sleeping. It is o.k. to sleep as long as you stay ready and alert for His coming. He merely says in verse 13 to “watch” because no one can know when He will come. (It's this verse that leads me to believe that this symbolizes a pre-rapture event.) In Revelation 3:3 He tells us again through the church of Sardis. “*I will come as a thief in the night and thou shall not know the hour I will come upon thee.*” It doesn't mean that we should spend all our time at the window watching to the extent we neglect our daily duties and responsibilities, as did some in Paul's day. This isn't a threat; it's merely an urging to keep clean, pure and ready, as were the five wise maidens.

One more observation regarding the oil. As observed earlier, the lamp oil in the context of the parable, as well as in many similar Scripture verses, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. There is, however, another application of the word, which can be appropriated, especially in these end times. Satan, the master counterfeiter, has his own brand of oil, which he uses for his own sinister purposes. Is it doing violence to Scripture to suggest such a thing? I believe not. In the very end times, during the 70th week, prophesied by Daniel,

chapter 9, Satan will produce a false, counterfeit Christ we call the antichrist, and also a great false spiritual leader we call the false prophet. He will be Satan's counterfeit holy spirit. Thus he will sell this "trinity" to all "earth dwellers," in those last days. On that basis it seems consistent and appropriate that he has already synthesized spiritual oil, which he uses to fill many hearts, and through which they come to accept his numerous false religions. He even instills it in the form of complacency and a false sense of security in those Christian-like believers who wrongly, through ignorance of God's Holy Word, succumb to the words of seducing spirits. For this oil is nothing more than putrid sludge which cannot be ignited so as to express a flame of righteousness, but can only produce a smoldering hatred for our Creator God and a turning to Satan's numerous substitutes. It can only be used to increase the heat of hell, which is, after all, his intended purpose for everyone he can deceive.

No doubt I've once again used far too many words to express a simple message. In summary, Jesus is telling us here in this parable what is the essence of most of His Kingdom of God messages. That is simply that there will be many who will be tragically deceived in these last days. The ultimate deception is that many will be so deceived as to believe that they have salvation when, in fact, they do not as with the five foolish virgins. This is what bears most heavily on my heart. It is that a great portion of these will be those who believe they are saved because they are calling themselves Christians. But many will have fallen victim to false prophets and false teachers who will sound very "Christian" because they speak of Jesus and quote Scripture. Those will successfully, and some not even intentionally, lead many into blissful, but fatal, ignorance of truth. Jesus warns us of this nearly every time He speaks in Scripture, and the Holy Spirit tells us in 1 Timothy 4:1 that "...in latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." Knowing Scripture is the only way certain to avoid these terminal pitfalls.

KNOW!! Be sure, that you are a possessor of the faith that true Scriptural oil is in your lamp, that you are not merely a professor of the faith carrying an empty lamp.

