

# THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

## (PART 1)

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In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus teaches a parable of ten virgins. As with the parable of the householder who paid all the laborers in his vineyard a penny (Matt 20:1-16), where the Lord gave the point of the parable both immediately before and after the parable, so also the parable of the ten virgins has its application explained both before and after it. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus foretells the end of the world, and in verse 36, he declares that no man or angel knows when that will be, but only the Father knows. Jesus compares his future coming with the sudden, unexpected coming of the Flood in Noah's day (Matt 24:37-41). In Matthew 24:42, Jesus says, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord does come." Jesus compares his coming to a thief who comes without warning in the night (Matt 24:43), and then says, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man comes" (Matt 24:44). Christ concludes the parable of the ten virgins with these words in Matthew 25:13: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Therefore, as we study this parable, we need to look for lessons that apply to our being prepared for Christ's return.

### **A parable for Christians**

Matthew 24:45-51 adds another point that is crucial to properly understanding the parable of the ten virgins. Jesus speaks about two categories of *servants*. First, he speaks about a "faithful and wise servant" who heeds the Lord's warning to "watch" and "be ready," and who is found busy doing his will when he comes (Matt 24:45-47). Christ will make those servants rulers over all his goods. Then Jesus speaks about an "evil servant" who is not ready for the Lord's return but thinks it will be delayed and then does wickedly (Matt 24:48-51). Jesus says, "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of" (Matt 24:50). Christ will punish those servants where they will weep and gnash their teeth (Matt 24:51). The fact that he labels both of these types as a "servant," and refers to himself as the Lord of the evil servant proves that he is talking about two classifications of Christians. The parable of the ten virgins is immediately given on the heels of these seventeen verses warning Christians to watch and be ready for the coming of Christ, because it could happen at any time. To underscore the fact that the parable continues his warning to watch and be ready at all times for his coming, Jesus introduces the parable of the ten

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virgins by saying “*then* shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins” (Matt 25:1). The fact that he uses the term “kingdom of heaven” (i.e. the church, Matt 16:18-19) once again shows that the parable is exclusively about Christians.

### **Each individual’s responsibility**

In the parable, the ten virgins had a responsibility: “to meet the bridegroom” (Matt 25:1). This responsibility required having lamps, which required oil (Matt 25:1-4). The five foolish virgins did not bring any oil (Matt 25:3), but the five wise virgins *prepared* themselves by bringing oil with their lamps (Matt 25:4). The bridegroom came suddenly, around midnight, while they were all sleeping (Matt 25:5-6). The ten virgins trimmed their lamps (Matt 25:7), but the lamps of the five foolish went out (Matt 25:8). They asked the wise ones for some oil (Matt 25:8), but the five wise virgins refused, because then none of them would have had enough (Matt 25:9). This reminds us that every man must “prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal 6:4-5). We must help others as much as possible (Gal 6:1-2), but in the end, salvation is an individual responsibility. We cannot believe, repent, obey or prepare on behalf of someone else, nor can anyone else do those things for us. “The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezek 18:20). Proverbs 9:12 says, “If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.” That message is brought home in this parable.

### **Make ready**

When the bridegroom came, “they that were *ready* went in with him to the marriage” (Matt 25:10). The bridegroom obviously represents Christ. As the bridegroom suddenly appeared without warning, so the Lord will return at the end of the world. At that time, only those who are *ready* will be received and rewarded by him. For them (hopefully *us*), the reward will be great. Revelation 19:7-9 says, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and *his wife has made herself ready*. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”