

Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 25:1-13

Ten Virgins

A pastor once pulled up to a gas station that was very crowded. The attendant, who was a member of the church where the pastor served, came to pump his gas. He said, "sorry, pastor. It seems folks always wait until the last minute to get ready for a trip they know they're going on." The pastor just smiled and said, "I know what you mean. I have the same problem in my business."

Preparation is important. We prepare for meals, for trips, for upcoming projects. But what about as we prepare for eternity? Certainly nothing is more important than that. This passage discusses the importance of preparation. Notice, then several truths about this parable.

Notice first the **chronological significance in the parable**. This is summed up in one word; the first word of v. 1 - "Then." When is the then? In context we find ourselves in the middle of what is called the "synoptic apocalypse," a time when Jesus is teaching about the end times. If we go back to 24:3, we find the disciples questioning Jesus about when the end of the age will come. The teaching of chapter 24 describes the end times. Scholars differ as to the interpretation of the details, but I believe Jesus is describing the period we know as the seven-year tribulation time. He ends His description of the tribulation in 24:31 and moves to a series of parables (24:32-41 - the fig tree (plus some commentary); 24:42-51 - the faithful and wicked slaves; 25:1-13 - the ten virgins; 25:14-30 - the talents). Now, while all the details differ in the parables, they all have the same basic meaning - BE READY!

Thus, the chronological significance of this parable is that it is set in the end times. Jesus takes us to the end of the tribulation period. If you know Jesus, it is a time you only know about from reading about it. The church will not be there because it has been previously raptured. But there will be some important believers there - Jewish believers! Note again, 24:31. Who are these elect? These are Jews saved during the tribulation. Scripture describes a time when Israel will turn to their Messiah, and it is during this time.

Realizing this gives added meaning to this parable. It is a parable about virgins. The Bible refers to a virgin no less than 46 times. Many of these are in the natural, physical sense of a chaste woman. But many are also descriptive of God's chosen people, Israel.

Jer. 14:17 - "Speak this word to them: 'Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my virgin daughter--my people--has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow.'

Jer. 18:13 - "Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'Inquire among the nations: Who has ever heard anything like this? A most horrible thing has been done by Virgin Israel.'

Jer. 31:4 - "I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. . . ."

Amos 5:2 - "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up."

And there are many other references as well. Indeed, here we find a parable with specific reference to God's people, Israel. But indeed also, a parable with meaning to us. That meaning we find in the next two things.

Notice then the **coming savior in the parable**. In the parable Jesus is pictured as the coming bridegroom. Understanding ancient wedding customs help us understand what is

happening. First, a bridegroom would go from his house to claim the bride from her parents. Then, they would return to the groom's house for the marriage feast. It seems to be the case here that we find ourselves in that second stage. The virgins are waiting for the return of the groom and bride for the marriage feast. Indeed, if this does picture the end of the tribulation, the groom has come to take the bride. Before the tribulation, the bridegroom (Jesus) will take His bride (the church) away in the rapture.

But what does this mean for us today? The reality of the parable was that the bridegroom WAS coming. Verse five says His coming was delayed and all the virgins got drowsy and began to sleep. We need to realize today that Jesus IS coming. While this parable specifically pictures His return with His church in the glorious appearing, application can nonetheless be made to His return to take His church in the rapture. It seems to me that lately there has been a relative lack of interest in the second coming. When I first entered the ministry, there was much talk about prophecy and the second coming of Christ. Lately, I do not hear much about that. There is still some talk of it, but not nearly as much. Could it be that perhaps we, like the virgins in the parable, have become drowsy? Have we fallen asleep and are we no longer sounding the call?

Maybe the scoffing of the world has simply driven us discouragement. But that scoffing is not anything new. In the Apostle Peter's day, he had to deal with it (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Perhaps the truth is we have just simply become lethargic and apathetic! Perhaps we have become, as Keith Green sang two decades ago, "asleep in the light." Keith Green was one of the most prophetic of voices to appear in Christian music. His life was taken tragically in a plane accident in the early 1980s. Listen to the words to what I consider one of his most indicting songs:

Do you see, do you see, all the people sinking down
Don't you care, don't you care, are you gonna let them drown
How can you be so numb, not to care if they come?
You close your eyes and pretend the job's done.
Bless me Lord, bless me Lord, you know it's all I ever hear.
No one aches, no one hurts, no one even sheds one tear.
But He cries, He weeps, He bleeds.
And He cares for your needs.
And you just lay back and keep soaking it in.
Oh can't you see it's such sin.
Cause He brings people to your door and you turn them away
as you smile and say,
God bless you be at peace.
And all heaven just weeps.
Jesus came to your door - you've left Him out on the streets.
Open up, open up and give yourselves away.
You see the need, you hear the cry, so how can you delay.
God's calling, and you're the one,
but like Jonah you run.
He's told you to speak, but you keep holding it in.
Oh, can't you see it's such sin.
The world is sleeping in the dark that the church just can't fight,

cause it's asleep in the light.
How can you be so dead,
when you've been so well fed.
Jesus rose from the dead
and you, you can't even get out of bed.
Oh, Jesus rose from the dead,
come on get out of your bed.

Do not "sleep in the light" friends - the Lord is coming. Just as sure as He did in this parable, He is coming again to take us home. The real question is, will we be ready - which is what we see finally in this parable.

Notice, then, the **common sense in the parable**. In v. 13, Jesus says, "be on the alert then for you do not know the day nor the hour." Since we do not know, it behooves us to be ever ready. That is, indeed, the most common sensical thing to do.

You will notice in the parable that five of the virgins had oil, and five did not. What is this oil? It is tempting to think of it as the Holy Spirit - oil IS often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. But there are compelling reasons not to see it that way. First, the foolish virgins HAD oil, but ran out. They did not take extra. Can we run out of the Holy Spirit? Also, the foolish virgins went to buy more oil. Is it possible to buy the Holy Spirit? Of course, the answer to each is NO!

I think it is much better to simply view this oil as the oil of inward preparation. Outside, these women were all alike. But inwardly, only five had made preparation. This is very similar to what Jesus had said earlier in this discussion: Matthew 24:37-41.

Understanding that the time is short, the only common sense approach is to get ready. Many intentionally plan to wait until the last hour. Perhaps these five foolish virgins thought there was plenty of time. But the bridegroom came, and only those who were ready went in. And as the end of v. 10 says, "the door was shut." That is a solemn phrase, isn't it? Right now, the door is open. If you need to come to Jesus, NOW is the time! Do not delay thinking there will be plenty of time - maybe there will, but probably there won't! Be sure your end is not like that pictured in vv. 11-12: ". . . the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But He answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'" You say but preacher, Jesus will never tell me he never knew me. I taught Sunday School. I was a preacher. I tithed faithfully. I was always there. But let me remind you of what Jesus said: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt. 7:22-23).

Are you ready today?

A tourist was once traveling along the shore of Lake Como in northern Italy. He knocked at the garden gate of the Villa Ascinati. He was admitted in by an aged gardener who toured him about the place. Noting the beautifully manicured lawn, the tourist asked the gardener where the owner was. "He hasn't been here for 12 years," was the reply! In fact, in the 24 years the gardener had worked there, the owner had only been there 4 times! The tourist replied incredulously, "but the grounds are in such fine condition, just as though you expect owner to come tomorrow." The old gardener hastily exclaimed, "no I keep them ready as though he were coming today."

More important than having a garden ready for an owner is having your life ready for the Lord of Lords. The only way to be ready is to repent of sin and put your trust in Jesus who died the death you should have died. Are you prepared?