

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

The Setting of the Parable (Matthew 24-25)

Matthew 24-25 is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is entirely prophetic and forms the response of the Lord Jesus to the questions of the disciples (24.3). The nation of Israel and the tribulation are prominent with references being made to 'Judea' (24.16), the 'Sabbath' (24.20) and the Jewish 'elect' (24.22).

The passage can be divided as follows: **24.1-2:** Prediction of the Temple's Destruction (AD70). **24.3-14:** First Half of the Tribulation. **24.15-28:** The Great Tribulation. The remainder of the passage (**24.29-25.46**) speaks of the events that will take place at the return of the Lord Jesus (Second Advent) and contains a number of 'parables' to illustrate how God's people should act in the light of this great event.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE MATTHEW CHS. 24-25					
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!
What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?					
PREDICTIONS 24.1-44			PARABLES 24.45-25.30	PREDICTIONS 25.31-46	
TRIBULATION vv.4-14	GREAT TRIBULATION vv.15-28	TRIUMPH vv.29-44	FALSE PROFESSORS	DIVISION OF THE NATIONS	
Deception v.5 <i>Take heed that no man deceive you</i> Destruction v.6 <i>Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars</i> Disasters v.7 <i>There shall be famines, pestilences and earthquakes</i>	The faithful see v.15 <i>When ye . . . shall see the abomination of desolation</i> The faithful flee v.16 <i>Flee into the mountains</i> The faithful pray v.20 <i>Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter</i> The faithful wait v.23 <i>If any . . . say . . . lo, here is Christ . . . believe it not</i>	The cosmos is shaken v.29 The Conqueror appears v.30 The call goes out v.31-32 The conditions on earth v.33-44	The parable of the faithful and the evil servant 24.45-51 The parable of the ten virgins 25.1-13 The parable of the talents 25.14-30	Execution of His justice 26.31-33 Entrance to His Kingdom 26.34-40 Expulsion from His presence 26.41-46	
ALL THESE ARE THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS		TRIBULATION, SUCH AS WAS NOT SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD		BE YE ALSO READY; FOR IN SUCH AN HOUR . . .	
			AND BEFORE HIM SHALL BE GATHERED ALL THE NATIONS		

Two Kinds of Virgins (Matthew 25.1-5)

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. The word 'then' (v.1) connects the parable with the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' of 24.51. This phrase always relates to judgment preceding the establishment of the millennial kingdom. This is further confirmed by the fact that the virgins 'went forth to meet the bridegroom'. Some ancient manuscripts add 'bridegroom and bride'. An understanding of the Jewish custom of marriage is helpful here: *'On the wedding day, the groom would leave his home and go to the bride's home to fetch her. As the groom returned to his own home with the bride, this would lead to a bridal procession such as the one found in Matthew 25:1-13 (see also Psalm 45.14).* Here then, the virgins (representing the nation of Israel) are awaiting the return of the Bridegroom (Christ) and His bride (the church) in order that they might join in the festivities of the marriage supper which pictures the millennial kingdom (v.10). The clear interpretation of the parable concerns the faithful (wise) and unfaithful (foolish) of the nation of Israel as they await the return of the Son of Man (Messiah) in coming tribulation days. There is, however, an obvious and challenging application to be made to believers today who await the return of the Son of God and the rapture of the church. This is the whole heart of the parable. How are we waiting for Christ? Do we believe His coming is imminent? Are we prepared?

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. In many respects, the virgins were outwardly very **similar**. They all professed loyalty to the bridegroom, they all had lamps (vv.3-4), they all slumbered and slept whilst waiting for the

bridegroom (v.5), they all went forth to meet the bridegroom (v.7). The vital **difference** was that the wise took oil in a separate vessel (v.4) whilst the foolish 'took **no** oil' (v.3).

Interpretation: The lamps speak of outward Christian testimony and profession. Our testimony is **guided** by the word of God which is a lamp in an age of moral and spiritual darkness (Psalm 119.105, 2 Peter 1.19). Our testimony is **demonstrated** by conduct or speech (Matthew 5.16, Philippians 2.15-16). However, no light of a lamp can be sustained without a source of oil (the Holy Spirit). The five 'foolish' virgins were therefore mere professing Christians. They represent those who anticipate Messiah's coming, but are spiritually unprepared. Their lives had a form of godliness (outward profession) but no inward reality (2 Timothy 3.5). *'This is the simple clear truth of holy Scripture - oil first, and then the lamp burns. Salvation first, God's free gift, then a holy life. Oil for light, not light for oil. Christ for a holy life, not a holy life, for Christ. This is the immense difference betwixt the truth of Scripture and the lie of darkness. It is written, the 'foolish took no oil with them.' Yet they took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. How common this is in our day! It is quite enough to belong to some religious society; a name to live, but dead. Perhaps, a beautiful lamp; but no oil, and no light.'* The **wise** speak of those who anticipate and prepare for Messiah's coming. They had a personal experience of the life-giving power of the Spirit of God and as such were able to shine the light of testimony brightly for Him. This is much like those who waited for the first advent of the Lord Jesus. At this time there were many (Pharisees and Sadducees) who had a form of godliness but no inward reality. There were also a faithful few (Simeon and Anna) who patiently and expectantly waited for Him (Luke 1-2). *Luke 2.25: And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.*

Application: There are many who profess to know Christ, but are 'none of His' (Romans 8.9). We might also liken the 'foolish' to believers who profess that Christ is coming at any moment, but show no reality or conviction of this truth in their outward testimony. This can only become reality through a constant supply of oil. We must seek to live our lives in the power and strength of the Spirit of God, and not on our own! Let us 'walk in the Spirit' (Galatians 5.16), 'live in the Spirit' (Galatians 5.25) and be 'filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5.18).

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. Whether wise or foolish, they **all** 'slumbered' ('nodded off') and 'slept' (suggests a period of time). This indicates the potential of every believer to fall into spiritual slumber. Do we really appreciate the truth of the return of Christ? 1Thessalonians 5.6: Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. Romans 13.11: Why all this stress on behaviour? Because, as I think you have realised the present time is of the highest importance—it is time to wake up to reality. Every day brings God's salvation nearer than the day in which we took the first step of faith. It is time for believers to wake up **at once** from lazy, Christian living. We should be flinging away works associated with darkness, sin and immorality and living clean, righteous lives. We **must** live as if all men can see what we are doing. We **must** live as Christ's men from head to foot.

The Coming of the Bridegroom (vv.6-12) & The Practical Challenge (v.13)

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. The announcement of the impending bridegroom goes forth. This likely relates to Matthew 24.29-30 when, just prior to the return of the Son of Man there will be great disturbances in the heavens before His 'sign' appears. In anticipation all the virgins arose and 'trimmed their lamps'. By application, we can be sure that the return of the Son of God is imminent. That is, the return of Christ could happen at **any** moment. There is **nothing** else in Scripture that **must** take place before it happens (Revelation 22.7, 12, 20). For the church today, therefore, the cry has already gone forth. There are **no** further prophecies that **must** be fulfilled before the rapture. Moral conditions point to the imminent return of Christ (2 Timothy 3.1-9). The political conditions in the world suggest His return is near. How do we respond? Are we **trimming** our lamps? *Lamps were trimmed by removing the burnt parts of the linen or the torch, so that they would burn clear. It was needful, also, to dip them again in oil, or to pour oil upon them.* There are two thoughts here. **One**, are we removing the dross in our lives to allow the light of testimony to burn brighter? **Two**, in the tabernacle, the removal of ash from the wick on the lampstand took place every morning and caused the light to shine more brightly (Exodus 30.7). The ash was preserved in the snuff dish. *'The day is coming when we shall be confronted with each day's shining. At the Judgment Seat of Christ our daily shining will be assessed.'*

Verses 8-12 remind us that no-one can dispense the Holy Spirit to another. Although salvation cannot be purchased, the Scriptures use the literary figure of buying salvation without money and without price (Isaiah 55.1, Revelation 3.18). The door (v.10) provided security and bliss to those inside and a sense of loss and gloom to those outside (cf. Genesis 7.16). By application we note that lazy, carnal believers will lose reward which might have been theirs. The challenge is clear: 13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. We are to WATCH! As those who watch we have our eyes open, looking for Him. Watching helps us to avoid temptation's fall when it is combined with praying (cf. 1 Peter 5.8, Matthew 26.41, Colossians 4.2).