

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 16

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

INTRO: This is the third to last parable that we have sought to cover. I am grateful to have had opportunity to give time to these parables. I have had time to study things I have puzzled over for 43 years as a Christian and put together in my own mind some of the details I had not yet settled.

Let me review just a little with a few overhead slides (**Slide 1**). In the first 6 parables, the topic centered around the time of Christ, 2,000 years ago. The last six, to which we added one, center around the return of Christ. We'll go to the second slide now (**Slide 2**). The return of Christ, as I understand the Scriptures, has two phases; the rapture, when Christ comes into the air for the Church; and what we call the second coming, when He comes all the way to earth to set up His kingdom.

As I interpret the parable we had last Sunday, the parable we will look at this morning, and the next parable, they all deal first with those that will be ready when the Lord raptures the Church. The faithful servant of last week's parable, the five wise virgins of today's parable, and the two faithful servants of the next parable speak of those who are ready when Christ returns, and they are caught up to heaven.

The unfaithful servant of last week, the 5 foolish virgins, and the unfaithful servant of the next parable deal with those who were not ready when Christ caught up the Church. The Lord comes to deal with them at the end of the tribulation, and all of that will be dealt with in the last parable Jesus gave.

Now, before we get into the next two parables, I want to point out two important words. There is one introductory word that is very crucial in each of the next two parables. For our pastoral students, take note. In 25:1, it says, "Then..." We have to answer the question 'when', and we will seek to do so later. Then look at the very next parable in 25:14 and it begins with the word 'For...' And again, we must ask, "What for...?" And we will seek to do that in the next parable.

K. The Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13)

1. The Parable (25:1-13)

So, we come to the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 (read).

2. The Setting

The entire setting for this parable is found in 24:36 to 51. But the special and immediate setting is the previous parable. We take note now, how verse one begins. It says, "Then..." And we have to stop there. Our question is 'when'? The answer to that question will give us the immediate setting for this parable. When will the kingdom of heaven be like ten virgins? It will be like it was when one servant was faithful and the other was unfaithful. The five wise virgins are like the faithful servant of the previous parable. And the five foolish virgins were like the unfaithful servant, who, in the end, was appointed his portion with the hypocrites. And I recommend that these five foolish virgins picture the hypocrites.

And before we interpret, let me give the historical setting for a wedding. I understand that usually the parents chose the bride for their sons. About a year before the wedding, father and son would go to potential brides house and there they would complete the marriage contract and pay the dowry price for the bride. Then the young man would promise to go and prepare a place for her and come for her when it was ready.

As soon as they left, the bride would begin to prepare for the wedding. She never knew exactly when he might arrive. It could be at any time. Usually she had about a year. The Bridegroom would go back home, and prepare a place at his father's house for his bride. Then, when the bridegroom was finished preparing the place for his bride, he and his attendants, the virgins of our parable, would go for the bride. When they got near her home, they would shout, and she would be ready. She slept with her clothing and a lamp ready at all times.

After they picked up the bride, they would go back to the bridegroom's father's house and there the private marriage was accomplished. When the private marriage was completed, then the invited guests would come.

Now let me just mention that all of this pictures how it is with Christ and the Church. The Lord Jesus came to the bride's house, earth, and paid the dowry in His own blood and made the contract. He has gone back to His Father's house to prepare a place for His bride. The Church, which is the bride, is now preparing for His return, and she is to have her clothing and lamp ready at all time.

When the Lord comes, He will take His bride back to His Father's house. Now let me point out here, that according to the post-trib view Jesus meets the bride in the air and then takes her back to her home, which is earth. But that is not the picture of a Jewish wedding. The bridegroom takes His bride to His Father's house, and that is heaven (See John 14:1-3). Lightfoot says that the bridegroom might not be intimate with his wife in his father-in-law's house until he had first taken her to his own father's house.

Now, in my view, this parable does not picture the Church as the bride, but as the ten virgins, and I will share why later. The point of this parable is to be prepared for the return of Christ by having truly experienced salvation. The bride's maids must be ready to go with the bridegroom when he comes. There is no time to go back for anything once he comes.

3. Interpretation

So, let us now seek to interpret the parable. We begin then with the word, "Then..." It says, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be likened to ten virgins..." When will the kingdom be likened to ten virgins? Well, when the wise servant of the previous parable was raptured, and the evil servant was appointed his portion with the hypocrites." And what happens to those who are ready, and what happens to hypocrites? I believe that is the main point of this parable.

Now, I think it is a common error, in seeking to interpret this parable to liken the bride to the Church. Since the parables have to do with a wedding, and the bridegroom pictures Jesus Christ, it is most naturally assumed that the bride is the Church. For me, that runs into questions that I cannot consistently answer. For example, in this parable, if the bride is

the Church, who are these bride's maids? And if you say, "Well, they are those who are invited to salvation in the tribulation", you run into this problem; the bride's maids are not picked up after the bride is. And furthermore, does Jesus come unexpectedly for the bride, and later He comes unexpectedly for the bride's maids too? For the post tribulationist, if the bride pictures Christ, who are these bride's maids? I take it then the Jesus uses the picture of the wedding, not to picture the wedding between Christ and the Church, but because of some element in the Jewish wedding that suits to the purpose of the truth He is seeking to teach. We will look at that purpose later.

Let us now read the rest of verse 1 (read). I want to recommend one difference between the unfaithful servant, and the five foolish virgins. The unfaithful servant, who was a believer to start with, but got discouraged because it took too long until the Lord returned, missed the catching up and found himself meeting the Lord with the unbelievers and hypocrites at the end of the tribulation. But I want to recommend that the five foolish virgins were not truly believers in the first place, but were hypocrites. And as hypocrites, they meet the Lord with the servant who was unfaithful and with the unbelievers at the end of the tribulation. If you should happen to disagree with my interpretations, I would be happy to hear your views.

In our parable, the virgins are waiting for the bridegroom to appear. So let us read 25:1 (read). One must establish whom the virgins and whom the bridegroom represent. Now as I see it the bridegroom pictures Christ, and His return at a time that cannot be precisely known. The time His return cannot be precisely known is when He comes for the Church. So, in this parable, the ten virgins, as I see it, picture true believers mixed with professing believers. The Church is not pictured as the bride in this parable, but as the five wise virgins.

But, one might now ask, if this parable speaks of true believers as the five wise virgins, why would the picture be changed from the usual picture of the Church as the bride? I see as the central point of this parable that of being ready for Christ at any time by being truly born again. Many think they are ready, when

in fact they are not even born again. In the picture of the Jewish wedding, two parties had to be ready at any time; they were the bride and the bridesmaids. So why would Christ use the picture of the bridesmaids here instead of the bride? I propose the answer to be this: Christ wants to picture here those who profess to be Christians mixed among those who truly are. Now listen carefully: the true bride of Christ is not made up of true believers and those who profess to be Christians! And the picture Jesus wanted to give here is that of all those who 'profess' to be believers but many are not. This He could not do if He pictured the Church as the bride.

I learned something from Paul Washer some years ago about the church. Let me quote him in his message, "Ten Indictments." He said, "Now let me say this about the Church. I want you to listen well. There is not a remnant of believers in the Church. We all know about the remnant theology, you know, that throughout all the course of Israel there was Israel the people of God and a remnant of true believers. That is not true about the Church. There is not a remnant of believers or a small group of believers inside a larger group called the Church. The Church is the remnant.

And I want to say this. If pastors have ever come to close to blaspheming it is with regard to this. I hear theologians, itinerant teachers, pastors, this and that saying these sorts of things. "There is just as much sin in the Church as out of the Church. There is just as much divorce in the Church as out of the Church. There is just as much immorality and pornography in the Church as out of the Church." And then preachers say, "Yes, the Church is acting like a whore."

I want you to know this. You ought to be very careful calling the bride of Jesus Christ a whore. I will tell you what the problem is. Pastors and preachers don't know what the Church is. I want you to know that the Church of Jesus Christ in America is beautiful. She is frail at times. She is weak. She is buffeted. She is not perfect, but I want you to know she is broken. She is humbly walking with her God. The problem with you is you don't know what the Church is.

Today because of the lack of biblical preaching the so called Church is filled up with carnal, wicked people identified with Christianity. And then because of all the goats in the midst of the lambs, the lambs are blamed for all the things the goats are doing and then the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of us."

What Washer is saying is the people you and I see who profess to be Christians are not all part of the Church. There are many who profess to be part of the Church who are not Christians at all.

I believe it is because of that reason, believers are pictured as the bridesmaids, and not as the bride. The true bride is not made up of true and false believers. The Church we see here on earth is made up of both, but I have no fear of true contradiction, that many baptized church members right in our very own community are not members of the true Church at all.

Now let me point out one matter in verse 1 that is in favor of the view I am presenting that this parable also speaks of being ready for the catching up at the rapture (read). These virgins have all taken their lamps and they all went to meet the bridegroom. At the rapture, believers go to meet the Lord in the air. Now take note of the word that they went to 'meet' the bridegroom. John MacArthur says, "**To meet** translates *hupantēsis*, a noun that literally means "a meeting" and was often used of the official welcoming of a dignitary." Now go with me to 1 Thessalonians 4 (read 16-17). Once more, note the word 'to meet'. It is the same word as in our passage. And here they are caught up to a meeting place in the air.

So, my conclusion on verse 1 is this: The coming of the bridegroom pictures Christ coming for the Church before the tribulation. The bridesmaids picture individuals who profess to be Christians. But many are not. But this distinction between the true and false does not become apparent until it is too late.

We go now to verses 2-5 (read). I want you to notice that these five foolish virgins had every appearance of being true Christians except one. The false can hardly

be distinguished from true believers because of their sameness of profession. They are all virgins. They are not immoral people. They are all waiting for the bridegroom. They all had lamps. They all slumbered while they were waiting at night, and all of this pictures ten true believers. But in this parable half of them are not.

But there is one major distinction but it does not become apparent even when the bridegroom is delayed. Maybe he was coming from 5 or 10 miles away. And then something happened, and he was delayed. And so it took much longer for him to arrive than they had expected. Notes also that while the bridegroom was delayed, they all, all ten, slumbered and slept.

Now it is hard to resist the idea that slumbering and sleeping means they failed to remain spiritually awake. I don't think that is the idea here. Christians and non Christians alike, sleep at night. They got as much rest here as they could. There was nothing to do until the bridegroom arrived. And so, while they waited they got as much rest as they could because they had a long night before them. So I do not think the intent is that there was something wrong with nodding off while they waited. So they all slumbered and slept. That is natural. They had to wait.

But a very important difference is pointed out between the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins. The foolish, it says in verse 3, took no oil with them. Let me deal with the oil question in verse 8. Here we just note that there was one thing that made them foolish. They took no oil with them.

But in verse 6 now, it says, "At midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him.'" It is no wonder then that these bridesmaids slumbered and slept while they waited. Maybe they have been there from 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening already. Then note in verse seven that they all trimmed their lamps. The word is not actually 'trimmed' and we will look at it more closely in verse 8.

Now note verse 8 (read). The foolish said, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." I mentioned earlier that we would deal with the oil

question later. This is one of the most difficult parts of the parable. Let me just mention here that it is not certain what kind of lamps are meant here. Was it those with the longer handled light that had rags soaked with oil on the end, or was it the lamp with the wick (SHOW). Normally, for outdoor lighting they would have used the long handled ones for lighting.

Now the question is, just what is meant by the oil. It is unavoidable that the oil is most significant because it is the one difference between the wise and the foolish. But what is meant by the oil? Does it picture the Holy Spirit, a very natural conclusion to one familiar with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit? Or does it picture salvation?

That brings us to a translation problem. The KJV says, "Our lamps are gone out." Now if their lamps had gone out, it would indicate that before this they were burning. If the oil pictures the Holy Spirit or salvation, then it would seem that at some time before this they were saved.

The NKJV, however says, "Our lamps are going out." The verb in the sentence 'our lamps have gone out' or 'our lamps are going out' is a present tense. Rogers Linguistic Key to The Greek NT says of the present tense here, and I quote, "pictures the action in progress." So it seems better to translate it as 'our lamps are going out'. But this would also indicate that they had had oil up until midnight.

I wrestled for years with seeking to understand this difficulty. My conclusion on the rest of the parable was this: The five wise virgins represent truly born again Christians who are ready when the Lord appears. The five foolish virgins represent professing believers, who give every appearance of being Christians, but one vital part is missing. However, if they had oil for some time, that would indicate they were Christians for some time, but they ran out while they were waiting.

As I studied this one more time I read everything I have on these verses and checked out others on internet. And what satisfies me is what is explained by an article I found that said this: "*Fourth, we need to*

rid ourselves of the false conception that the five foolish virgins ran out of oil. The text is clear on this point; the five foolish virgins never brought any oil with them. A footnote in the NET Bible indicates that the word "extra" is not found in the Greek text, but has been supplied because the context implies it. I don't think so at all. Surely the author is able to clearly supply this detail, so crucial to the interpretation of this parable. But he did not. Why do we wish to think they brought any oil with them? Perhaps it is because we read that the virgins claimed that their lamps were "**going out**" in verse 8. Would they all have been burning their torches for lighting the inside of the house where they all waited and slept? Would there not be the normal lighting in that place? Why would all five run out at the same time, just when they were preparing their lamps?

"I would understand that the lamps were transported without oil in them. If they traveled in the daylight, these lamps would not have been needed on their journey to the wedding place. The reason the wise virgins brought oil was because the oil was carried in flasks and added to the lamps at the time of need. There must have been some residue of oil on the rag or wick of the five empty lamps, which quickly burned out, only moments after being lit. This would explain why all five torches went out at the same time. Perhaps, too, these foolish virgins minimized their foolishness by describing their plight as "running out" so as to look less foolish" (<http://www.gotquestions.org/parable-ten-virgins.html>).

I think some such explanation must be correct. Everything in the parable indicates that we have professing Christians in the five foolish virgins. I believe they were not actually Christians at all. They were professing Christians. You see, all this time there was no apparent difference between the wise and the foolish, including the slumbering while they waited. But as soon as the coming of the bridegroom was heralded, the difference appeared, and it was a major difference.

So, let me draw a picture of what likely happened in this parable. The time for the wedding has come. The bride's maids have been chosen. There were ten. These

bride's maids might have been from different villages and the plan is to meet at the home or village of one of the maids that was close to the path the bridegroom would travel on to get his bride.

It is even possible that they were to meet him during the day, and that they expected to reach their destination before dark. The wise virgins got their lamps, but they took oil with them in case the bridegroom came late and they needed the lamps on the way. Possibly the need for this oil was an unlikely scenario, but to be sure they took oil with them. The foolish brides just took their lamps for which oil would be provided once they got to the bridegroom's home in the evening, but they did not prepare in case the bridegroom came late.

And so they all meet at the planned place and hour after hour goes by and it gets dark and they all slumber and sleep. And suddenly the cry comes, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming!" Now consider verse 7 once more. It says they all trimmed their lamps. Many times in my younger days we used oil lamps with wicks and this was the immediate picture in my mind.

However, the word is not actually 'trimmed'. The original word is 'kosmeo'. We get our word 'kosmetics' from it. It speaks of orderly arrangement or to, 'put in order'. They got their lamps all in order to put out a nice bright light, and the foolish virgins who took no oil, either to dip their torches into or to pour into their lamps, light them, only to find them immediately getting dim. And to their dismay they say, "Our lamps are going out!"

Now, you see, professing Christians who are not Christians are hypocrites. A hypocrite is someone who acts or makes him or herself look like somebody that they are not. Such a person, whether they realize it or not are hypocrites. If they think they are true Christians when they are not, does not change the fact that they are hypocrites. The word 'hypocrite' comes from stage acting, where a person puts on a mask to appear as someone else than who they actually are.

Now, I want you to notice something in our previous parable something in 24:51. It says that this man who

had been a Christian and had rejected the faith because His Lord took too long, in the end will be appointed his portion with the hypocrites. And in this parable we now have the hypocrites.

If there is one common denominator in most commentators on this passage, it is that these five foolish virgins picture, not truly born again Christians, but professing Christians. John MacArthur says, "The **ten virgins** are professed believers in Him, and the **lamps**, or torches, symbolize their outward identity with His church."

Now I propose that in this passage we have those who look like Christians act like Christians, seem to be going to the same place as Christians, but they are hypocrites. And I believe that is what we have here. You do not note the difference between real Christians and false until the critical moment comes, and then you find they are different after all. Now that the crucial moment has come, all of a sudden they are in need of what the real Christian has and now they seriously want it, so look at verse 8 (read).

Let me make out one other note. The virgins were all waiting in one place. Then the call came to go out to meet the bridegroom. When the Lord returns, the believer goes out to meet him. Now notice that these foolish virgins do not go out to meet him, but rather ask for oil from the wise virgins. And the wise virgins respond to the foolish virgins in verse 9 (read). Now look at verse 10 (read). While the foolish virgins quickly went back to buy oil, the bridegroom came and went. And the parable says, "the door was shut." In those days, those who were not with the wedding party when they arrived, no longer could gain entrance. When the rapture occurs, there is no entrance later.

We come now to verse 11. Notice the word that begins this verse, "Afterward..." After the bridegroom had come and gone, these other five virgins appeared as well, having come on their own without accompanying the bridegroom. Now I understand that once the door was shut, after welcoming the bride and groom, there was no more entrance. Yet these foolish virgins tried to get in. And look at what they said. They said, "Lord, Lord, open to us!"

So, when is this afterward? I recommend that this pictures what will happen when the Lord returns at the close of the tribulation. Just as in the previous parable, the faithful meet the Lord at the catching up of the Church, and the unrighteous meet Him at the end of the tribulation. I want to give further information on that in the next and last parable that I see as having to do with the disciples second question: What will be the sign of Your coming.

Now if this is correct, it leaves something a little scary to consider. Is it possible that professing believers who are not caught up will continue to think they are Christians and will endure the tribulation only to find out in the end they are not Christians at all? Is such a thing possible? Can a person be so deceived?

I read for you what some pastors believed in Germany when Hitler rose to power. Church pastors hailed Hitler as the Messiah of the church! Let me read for you again what they said, "through God's providence our beloved fatherland has experienced a mighty exaltation!" And again, "Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler!" (pg. 30).

We saw in the last message in 2 Thessalonians 2 that when antichrist comes, he will be very deceptive. Let me read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 once more: "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

I ask you a frightening question: Could it be that professing Christians who missed such a major event as the catching up of the Church could continue to believe they are Christians in the tribulation, and in the end still expect the Lord to open to them?

The antichrist will come to those who did not receive the love of the truth before the tribulation, whether

professing Christians or unbelievers with, all power, and signs and lying wonders; and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish. If Hitler was able to deceive the church in Germany with his message, should we expect less of antichrist? And if so, how is it that they could be so deceived? Here it is: Because they did not receive the love of the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness!

Now look at what happens to those who did not receive the love of the truth before Christ comes for the Church according to verses 11-12. Paul writes, "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

4. The Application (13)

In so, the application of this parable, in verse 13, we once more have the familiar warning. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." Watch, wherefore? Just as the wise bride's maids were prepared to meet the Lord at midnight, with oil for their lamps; so we must be ready at any time.

And just as the foolish virgins, after all their waiting, were turned back to get something they had foolishly missed doing, so we might miss out altogether.

CONCL: In conclusion, it may be that the greatest connection between this parable and the previous one is that of the hypocrite. The Christian of the previous parable, who had become a Christian and fails to continue to believe because the Lord took too long for him, will, in judgment day, be apportioned his part with the hypocrites. And what is the life of the hypocrite like? Well, we are shown that in this parable. The hypocrite claims to be a Christian. He or she looks like a Christian. By all external appearance he cannot be distinguished from the Christian. But when the Lord comes, the sham is immediately discovered, because there is one thing missing. And it would not be unbiblical to picture that missing element as the oil representing the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 says that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to God at all.

To have the Holy Spirit residing within requires that one has received the Holy Spirit.

Many who have been Christians long enough to recognize questionable Christians have bemoaned today's Christianity. That includes even liberals such as Billy Graham. I was given a quote on Matthew 25:12 by D. James Kennedy in a footnote in the 'The Evidence Bible'. He said, "The vast majority of people who are members of churches in America today are not Christians. I say that without the slightest fear of contradiction. I base it on empirical evidence of twenty-four years of examining thousands of people."

Ray Comfort mourns what is happening in Evangelicalism. He writes, "As these statistics show, there are many today who name the name of Christ, but who have failed to "depart from iniquity [lawlessness]" (2 Timothy 2:19). They are false converts who have "asked Jesus into their hearts," yet they remain unconverted because they have never truly repented. I cannot put into words the heartbreak of seeing so many spurious converts who have left the Church, and the multitudes of false converts who stay within the Church."

A. W. Tozer writes, 'It is my opinion that tens of thousands of people, if not millions, have been brought into some kind of religious experience by accepting Christ, and they have not been saved.' Tozer is not alone in his conclusion.

May I ask you this morning, "When you visit with people, what is most of your talk about? When you have spare time, what is most of your time spent in? When your mind is idle, what takes up most of the time of your thinking?" May I ask you this morning, are you truly born again?"

I have wondered, when I look over the past 20 years of my ministry, and considering especially the church problems we experienced with not so long ago, how many have I baptized, or how many have I recommended as church members that were never truly born again? It is a most sobering thought. I saw things done I can hardly believe born again believers would do. There were outright lies. There were those who created strife and division. Agreements in a constitution were broken as though they were mere suggestions.

Scripture says, "Make your calling and election sure." May I encourage each listener, make sure you are truly saved! When the

Lord returns, and that may be at any time, it will be forever too late.