

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25: 1-13

Late in the afternoon on Wednesday the thirteenth of Nisan

The one main point of the fourth parable of the ten virgins is be watching and ready for the Lord because He can return for His bride at any time.

In order to understand this parable, it is first necessary to understand the Jewish wedding system that was common in Jesus' day and was still used among the majority of Jews until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Jews who remain in some eastern nations, continue to use this system today. The Jewish marriage system had **four distinct stages**, all of which are to be found in the relationship of the Church as the bride of Christ.

In the first stage, the father of the groom made the arrangement for the bride and paid the bride price. God the Father has already made the arrangement and then paid the bride price. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son (John 3:16a). By giving up His Son and shedding His blood, the bride price was paid and the arrangement was sealed.

The second stage will be the carrying of the Bride. Even as a long period of time could transpire between the first and second stages in the Jewish system, so it has been with the Church. About two thousand years has passed since the first stage was accomplished. Some day the second stage will take place and Yeshua will come in order to take His Bride to His home. This carrying of the bride is referred to as the Rapture of the Church (see my commentary on Revelation By - The Rapture of the Church). Therefore, the second stage will be completed some time before the beginning of the Great Tribulation. God the Father will determine the timing of the Rapture. For no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mattityahu 24:36). In addition, it will only come after Jesus has the place already prepared. In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3).

This parable contrasts Jewish believers and unbelievers. The **ten bridesmaids**, or **ten virgins**, were waiting for **the groom** to return and to start the wedding ceremony. **At that time the kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Five of the virgins were foolish (unbelievers) and five were wise (believers). The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.** This would be a serious problem because you need light in the darkness. It would be really foolish to run out of **oil** at such a critical time. By contrast, **however, the wise virgins** were prepared and even **took extra oil in jars along with their lamps** just in case they ran low (**Mattityahu 25:1-4**). They are the ones who have **the oil**, a common symbol for **the Holy Spirit** in the Scriptures. Because **the Messiah** is already pictured with His bride, **the Church** has been raptured.

It was not uncommon for **the groom** to be **a long time in coming** because it was **his** father who actually announced the start of the ceremony. **The father** would pick what **he** considered to be the most opportune time and with the blast of the shofar, the wedding procession would begin. With great joy **the groom** would travel to the home of **the bride** to fetch, or literally carry **her** to **the father's** house (heaven) for the wedding ceremony. In this parable, the late arrival of **the groom** created a bit of a problem. In fact, **the hour** was so late that **all the virgins became drowsy and fell asleep (Matthew 25:5)**.

But **they** were suddenly awakened. **At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the groom! Come out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6)!** The crisis in the parable is clearly when **the groom** returns at an unsuspecting moment to carry **his bride** back to **his father's house**. This is seen in the chiasmic structure below.

- A Ten virgins went out to meet the groom (25:1)**
 - B Five were foolish and took no oil and five were wise (25:2-4)**
 - C They all became drowsy and fell asleep (25:5)**
 - D At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the groom! Come out to meet him" (25:6)**
 - C They all woke up and trimmed their lamps (25:7)**
 - B Five ask for oil and five send them to buy some for themselves (25:8)**
 - A The groom receives only those who were ready (25:9-12)**
- Epilogue: So keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (25:13)**¹³⁴⁶

Since it was dark outside, **they** needed **oil** in **their** lamps. Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The wise virgins were not caught off guard, as **they** had prepared extra **oil** in case of just such an emergency. However, at that moment **the foolish virgins** realized **their** dilemma. They had no **oil**. It was not that **they** had been unaware of **their** lack of **oil** but that **they** were not concerned enough about it to acquire it before **the groom's** arrival. Perhaps **they** thought **they** could **buy some** any time **they** needed it. Or perhaps **they** thought **they** could borrow **oil** if the shops were closed. So **they** gave that a try. **The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out."** **"No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves"** (Matt 25:7-9). No reason is given for **their** negligence, no doubt because the reason is irrelevant. Because they had ample opportunity to be totally prepared for **the groom's** arrival, nothing could excuse **their** failure. **They** are pictured as the unbelievers and, thus, will be neither watching nor ready.

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the groom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. The tragedy, of course, was that there was then no more opportunity to buy the oil (Matthew 25:10-11). Earlier in His ministry when discussing entrance into the Kingdom, **Jesus** said: **Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, "Sir, open the door for us." But he will answer, "I don't know you or where you came from." Then you will say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets. But he will reply, "I don't know you or where you came from. Away from me you evildoers"** (Luke 13:25-28)!

Later when the foolish virgins returned from their unsuccessful search for **oil** and **came** saying, **"Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" But the bridegroom replied** within the house: **Truly I tell you, I don't know you (Matthew 25:12).** Those five were not **virgins** and never belonged to the wedding party to begin with, but managed to dress and act like true virgins. Now the pretense was over, and their sinful, foolish character was exposed.

It will be a moment of sheer terror when unbelievers face a holy **God** and realize with absolute certainty that they are eternally lost. That must have been the feeling of the people of Noah's day when they saw the flood waters rise above their heads and knew **the door** to the ark was unalterably shut.¹³⁴⁷

The conclusion of the parable is short but profound. **Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour of the groom's appearance.** Jesus Christ is the coming **groom (Matthew 25:13)**. On several occasions **He** had taught that only **the Father** knows the exact time of **His** appearance (**Matthew 24:36**). Therefore, the readiness of **His** talmidim was paramount. They always needed to be ready. No one would want to be caught unprepared and lacking what was needed to be invited to the wedding feast of **the Lamb**.

Once again, we must remember that there are three rules of biblical interpretation: context, context, context. And the context to this parable is **the three questions** asked by the talmidim (see **Jh - The Three Questions**). Consequently, **Jesus** used this parable to help **His** twelve apostles better understand the coming events. As **He** is talking about the judgment of Isra'el in the last days, some Jews with **Ruach HaKodesh** will be welcomed into the Kingdom. Yet for other Jews, if they don't have a personal relationship with **Yeshua** through the work of **the Holy Spirit**, then the invitation will be in vain.

The third stage, or the marriage ceremony itself, will take place in heaven just before the Second Coming at the end of the Great Tribulation. **The wedding** announcement will be made: **Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters (Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2) and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! ADONAI, God of heaven's angelic armies, has begun His reign.** The Hebrew Scriptures had long prophesied about **His** future reign (**Psalms 93:1, 97:1**). Then the **Bride** will be prepared: **Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding [feast] of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:6-7 CJB).**

After **the wedding** ceremony will come **the fourth stage, the wedding feast**. Again **Yochanan** was told by an **angel to write**. **He** said: **Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb** because they will experience everlasting celebration (**Revelation 19:9a**)! According to the Bible, the righteous of the TaNaKh are not resurrected with **the Church** before the Great Tribulation, but after it is over (see my commentary on **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**). **John the Baptizer**, who was the last of the prophets, called himself a **friend of the bridegroom**, and did not consider **himself** to be a member of **the bride**, or **the Church (John 3:27-30)**. Thus, the **many** who will be invited to attend **the wedding feast** on the earth will be all the righteous of the TaNaKh (**Mattityahu 8:11**) and the Tribulation martyrs resurrected after the Second Coming.

To summarize, while the wedding ceremony will take place in heaven *just before* the Second Coming, **the wedding feast of the Lamb** will take place on earth *just after* the Second Coming. Therefore, **the wedding feast** will introduce the messianic Kingdom (**Matthew 22:1-14, 25:1-13**). And with it, all **four stages** will be complete.

Parables make one point so one should not press any of the details. In this parable, there is an emphasis on watching and readiness, both of which are accomplished by faith in **Jesus Christ**. Only the wise ones, the believers, will enter **the marriage feast** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fg - Blessed Are Those Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**). The point is clear: **Stay alert, as we don't know the time of Meshiach's return.**