



Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh,” Matthew 25:13.

Be Ready to Welcome Jesus

Lesson Aim: To urge preparation for Jesus’ coming.

L268. Date: April 1978. **Text:** Matthew 25:1-13. **Topic:** Christ: Return of.

The parable of the ten virgins is one of the most abused passages in the Bible. It is abused by interpreters who do not follow the principles for interpretation of parables.

There is a dispensational interpretation to the parable of the ten virgins. Matthew 25:1 begins with the statement **“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.”** “Then” indicates a designation of time. When is the time to which it refers? The interpreter must look back into chapter 24 to find a reference to time. There are many references to the return of Christ and the great tribulation period. The “then” of the parable of the ten virgins would suggest that it applies to people (Jews) who live in the time of the tribulation and who are alive on earth at the revelation of Jesus as Lord of lords and King of kings.

The same passage of Scripture can have one interpretation and many applications. The comments which follow will approach the parable of the ten virgins in view of its present application. It teaches that the Jews in the tribulation period must be watchful and ready for the Lord's revelation. It also teaches that people in each generation must be watchful and ready for the rapture.

I. THE PRACTICE

Three events carried special significance among the Jews of Jesus' day — birth, marriage, and death. Of the three, marriage was considered the

most important.

An invitation to attend a wedding was the highest honor one could bestow on a friend. An ancient proverb stated, "He who does not invite me to his marriage will not have me to his funeral." To decline an invitation to attend a wedding, on the other hand, was a gross insult. The ten virgins of the parable were doubly honored to carry lamps in the wedding procession and to go in with the wedding party to the banquet.

A betrothal always preceded the wedding. It was a more formal and binding commitment than an "engagement" is in the present culture. Among Arabs today, the betrothal is often the only legal ceremony held. In that agreement the terms for marriage were agreed upon, the dowry was set, and witnesses certified the agreement. God's blessings were asked upon the coming union, even though it may have been consummated months or even years after the betrothal contract.

The betrothal was so binding that a paper of divorce was necessary, if the marriage was not consummated, to allow either party to enter another marriage contract. The betrothal was so binding that sexual unfaithfulness by either partner was called adultery even though the marriage was not yet consummated.

The consummation of the marriage was attended by three great events. (1). There was a wedding procession to bring the bride to the home of the bridegroom. (2) There was a marriage supper, usually in the home of the bridegroom, to which honored guests were invited. (3) There was the physical union of the bride and groom in the nuptial chamber. The first of those three events is emphasized in the parable of the ten virgins.

The procession was usually held at night. There were no streetlights in the ancient towns, so the procession carried lamps with them. The bridegroom would come with his friends from his home to the home of the bride. He would then escort her and her party back to his home. The bride was commonly escorted by close friends and relatives. Mules bearing her furniture and other possessions were led along with the rest. It was often as late as midnight when the procession began.

The procession of friends and relatives accompanied the wedding party to the door of the bridegroom's house. Then they left. The next day they returned to offer their congratulations and share in the joy of the marriage. Only the family and very special guests would enter the house. An Arab wedding rhyme says, "To the bridegroom's door went the torch-lit array, and then like goats they scattered away."

The marriage supper was held in the home of the bridegroom, except on unusual occasions. It was as lavish as the circumstances of the family could

make it. Sometimes the resources of the household were not sufficient to supply all the guests and relatives. (Remember how a wedding party consumed all the wine, calling forth the first miracle of Jesus in which He turned water to wine for them, John 2.) Hospitality was a sacred duty on such occasions, and no less than the best was provided.

There was no formal religious ceremony which accompanied the moving of the bride into the home of the groom. The formal ceremony had been performed at the betrothal. The joining of the couple was an occasion of great joy for them all.

The parable of the ten virgins must be interpreted against the background of the wedding customs of that time. To interpret it otherwise is to do violence to the meaning Jesus put in the parable.

II. THE PARABLE

There were ten virgins selected to accompany the bride in the parable Jesus told. The number ten probably has significance only in that at least ten witnesses were required at official ceremonies. Each young woman carried a lamp to light the way for the wedding party.

The lamp each young woman carried was a round receptacle (like a small bowl) designed to hold pitch or oil. It was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer. That, in turn, was fastened to the end of a wood pole and carried aloft. Each virgin was responsible to take her own lamp (verses 3, 4).

Oil was essential for the wedding procession. To have a lamp without oil was no better than not having a lamp. How is it that five virgins had lamps but no oil? They may have expected to receive oil from a common supply. They may have had no sense of personal obligation to provide oil. They may have thought the time would be longer between the announcement of the bridegroom's coming and the time of his arrival. They may not have realized it would be so short a time between his arrival and the closing of the door. It is evident they made no preparation or investigation on the matter. They were each personally responsible for having sufficient oil. There was no excuse for running out of oil.

Why did the virgins, the wise as well as the foolish, go to sleep on such an important occasion? The day was probably filled with excitement. Last minute preparations were hastily performed. At last, everything was ready. They sat down to wait for the bridegroom's arrival. Hours passed.

As the excitement subsided in the pause, drowsiness set in. By midnight they were in a deep sleep. Then came the cry that startled them awake, **“Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him”**

(Matthew 25:6). Drowsiness was gone. The virgins arose in haste, trimmed their lamps, and prepared to go out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of the “bridesmaids” discovered they had no oil for their lamps. They appealed to the other virgins to share. The request could not be granted. They hastened away to secure oil so that they could share in the procession with burning lamps.

It took too much time. The bridegroom came, claimed his bride, returned to his own home, permitted the relatives and honored guests to enter, and closed the door before the five foolish virgins returned. They were left outside the house and missed the festivities to their great regret.

III. THE PRINCIPLE

What is the central truth of the parable? Jesus stated it: **“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh,”** Matthew 25:13.

A. The Lord Jesus will return.

(1) He promised it personally, saying, **“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory,”** Luke 21:27. His words are so certain that heaven and earth will pass away before His words fail (Luke 21:33). His return is as certain as if it had already occurred.

(2) Angels promised He would come again. **“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”** (Acts 1:11). Angels are the messenger of God, and their words are the words of God. (3) Inspired writers of Holy Scripture promised His return. **“Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation”** (Hebrews 9:28).

B. The Lord Jesus seems to delay His coming.

The seeming delay is due to the fact that **“of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”** (Matthew 24:36). The uncertainty makes it seem long. It could be right at hand the very moment one thinks it is delayed, for it will be as **“a thief in the night”** when He comes (I Thessalonians 5:2).

C. The Lord Jesus commands His disciples to persevere in faith until the time when He does come.

Such perseverance suggests three things. (1) One must be personally prepared for His coming. To be prepared means that a person is saved and sanctified by the Spirit of God through Jesus Christ. No one is prepared to meet Him without that preparation.

(2) One must continue in faith for whatever length of time he may wait before He comes. Every hour must find one ready. Jesus taught **“Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,”** Mark 13:35-37.

(3) One must be prepared to go directly to the Lord himself. There will be no stopovers in purgatory to cleanse one from defilement. The rapture will take each believer directly into the presence of the Lord.