

## **Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part Ten)**

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Knowing that human nature loses heart over time without God's help, Jesus understood that His church would need encouragement to be watchful while awaiting His second coming. For this reason, He gave the Parable of the Ten Virgins, found in Matthew 25:1-13, to some of the twelve disciples just days before His brutal crucifixion. The parable pictures ten virgins waiting for the Bridegroom's return.

However, half of the virgins are unprepared because they lose heart in the face of their uncertainty, and as a result, they do not prepare and persevere to the end. They did not watch and make themselves ready.

Jesus gives ample warning in His teaching concerning the last days and the need for spiritual preparation for them. But He also realizes that His church would need spiritual focus while waiting for His return. Therefore, He warns that lack of adequate preparation for His coming can be eternally devastating. Jesus makes the purpose of this parable clear in its last verse, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

But before we get into the essence of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, we first need to see it in its proper perspective in relation to some of the other parables Jesus spoke.

Prior to Matthew 25, Jesus effectively warns us several times in parables that we must watch and be ready. And then in Matthew 25, Jesus continues His teaching on the Mount of Olives by adding three more parables that also warn us to watch and be ready. The first is the Parable of Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The second is the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The third is the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Each parable makes its own points, but taken together they intensify and even broaden Jesus' warnings. Instead of speaking of people who are obviously saved or lost, such as those who perished in the Flood or the wicked, careless servant, Jesus seems to speak of people who look like believers and who even think they are, but who will not be ready when He comes.

### **Three Points in Common**

Let us look at how these three parables are connected, but each having a specific teaching. It is helpful to notice that they are also parallel stories and have several important things in common.

There are three ways in which the stories are the same.

1) In each case the return of the Lord is sudden and unexpected. In the story of the ten virgins, the cry in Matthew 25:6, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' comes at midnight, when the women are asleep. The cry awakens them, and they rise suddenly.

In the story of the talents, in Matthew 25:19 the master returns "after a long time" when He is least expected.

In the case of the sheep and the goats, in Matthew 25:31 the decisive moment arrives “when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him.”

This is the essential point Jesus has been making from the very beginning of the discourse in chapter 24. The disciples wanted to know when Christ would return, and Jesus replied that they could not know. They would see many signs that would not be true signs of His coming: false Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy, and false prophets. When He does come, it will be so sudden and unexpected that no signs of it can be given. Therefore, they must be ready.

The story of the wise and foolish virgins is connected to the previous chapter because it ends with words that are a deliberate echo of Matthew 24:42, “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” The parable ends in Matthew 25:13, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats wraps up the entire discourse, drawing on words taken from Christ’s description of His return in chapter 24. In Matthew 25:31, He also speaks of the Son of Man coming in His glory with the angels.

2) In each case Christ’s return results in an unalterable division between two groups of people.

These are stories about the final judgment, and the root meaning of the word judgment is “division.” The Greek word is *krisis*, which we have retained in English with only a slight change in spelling. A crisis is an event that requires us to turn one way or another, to the right or to the left, forward or back.

In this case, the ‘division’ is between those who are ready when Jesus returns, and those who are *not* ready. In the case of the women, five go into the wedding banquet and five are shut out. In the case of the servants, two are commended and one is judged. In the case of the sheep and the goats, the sheep inherit the Kingdom that has been prepared for them while the goats receive final judgment.

3) In each case the people who are lost are utterly surprised at their rejection. This is the most unnerving feature of these stories. The women who are shut out of the banquet can hardly believe that the door has been closed to them. They say, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” But the bridegroom does not. The wicked servant thinks he has done right by burying the talent he was given. He expects to be praised and is astonished that he is rebuked and cast out. The goats do not understand Christ’s disapproval.

**Matthew 25:44** "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'"

When we think about this feature of the stories, we realize that they are not about people who have no use for Christ or His teaching. They are about people who are part of what we would call the visible church. Like in many Christian churches today, these people think they are converted believers, and that they are a ‘shoe-in’ for God’s Kingdom, but they have missed the mark. Is it any wonder, Jesus states His warning to “keep watch and be ready” so forcefully?

The story of the ten virgins is a profound and brilliant story. It is realistic in its details and poignant in application, and the deeper a person explores it, the more profound its lessons become. So, let us investigate it more deeply.

Jesus tells about ten young women who are invited to a marriage feast. Five are wise and five are foolish. The wise women show their wisdom by planning for the possible delay of the bridegroom. They take extra oil for their lamps so they will be ready when He comes. The foolish women neglect to do so. While the women wait, they all fall asleep.

Suddenly, a cry goes out that the bridegroom is coming. The wise get up and trim their lamps. The others recognize that they are out of oil and ask to borrow some. So, then the wise reply,

**Matthew 25:9** But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

The women who are unprepared start out for more oil, but while they are gone the bridegroom comes, and those who are ready, go in with Him to the feast. After a while, the foolish virgins return and find the door shut.

**Matthew 25:11-13** "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

### The Called Virgins

Who are these Ten Virgins? The characters of the parable are the "Bridegroom," also referred to as "Lord," who is Jesus Christ Himself, and, of course, "the ten virgins," representing those called by God.

**Ephesians 4:1-6** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The Bride is not mentioned because she represents the entire church, and the church is not presented here in its entirety. By implication, the Bride is represented in this parable more personally in its individual members.

But since the wedding feast could not be held without the Bride, and since five virgins miss the feast, all ten virgins cannot make up the Bride. These ten virgins, then, represent those individuals called into the church at the end time. "The daughters of Judah" are treated similarly in Lamentations:

**Lamentations 2:13** How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is spread wide as the sea; who can heal you?

This virgin daughter of Zion represents members of the church who are suffering the visible church's ruin. When Jesus gave this Parable of the Ten Virgins, the mystery of the church was not yet fully known.

**Ephesians 3:3-5** [H]ow that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

In the parable, the called are seen individually as "virgins," expecting the Bridegroom to come.

In this way, the parable also illustrates that "many are called, but few are chosen."

It is interesting that the apostle Paul refers to the church at Corinth in its virgin character.

**II Corinthians 11:2** I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Virgin character refers to the whole church, but virgins (plural) describe individual members of the body. Jesus makes this parable very personal to highlight the need for everyone's spiritual preparedness.

**Matthew 25:1-13** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps but took no oil with them; the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

### Significant Likenesses

The story's main points are obvious, especially its key point, namely, the difference between the wise and the foolish women. Five were ready and five were not. But it is also worth seeing the ways in which the women are alike.

In the introduction, we see revealed important characteristics about the two groups that obviously describe two different types of attitudes. These traits make the two groups' approaches to the wedding celebration predictable, summarized by the contrasting behaviors of sincerity and superficiality. The two have some interesting similarities that cause them to appear the same outwardly. Both groups were in the same place going to meet the bridegroom. They were all attending the visible church.

The spiritually unprepared Christian may sit right beside the spiritually prepared Christian in Sabbath services, like the state of the tares and the wheat. Let us read that quickly as a reminder:

**Matthew 13:24-30** Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

Let me give you seven similarities between the two types of virgins:

1) All had been invited to the banquet.

Each of these women had received an invitation and was anticipating a banquet when the bridegroom came. This feature singles out the people who have heard the gospel. They are not the unreached who have never known Christ's good news of the coming Kingdom of God.

**Luke 10:23-24** Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

2) All had responded positively to the wedding invitation.

Some may have disregarded it or scorned it, as the townspeople did in the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14. But that was not the case with these women. They had received the invitation and had responded positively, which they demonstrated by waiting for the bridegroom's appearance.

**I Corinthians 1:4-9** I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

3) All were part of what we would call the visible church. They had attended the fellowship of those who were waiting for the Lord.

**James 5:7-9** Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

They both seem interested in the same things and seem to have the same character. Both may diligently give tithes and offerings and serve their brethren. It may only be in a crisis that the real

differences show up, and then attendance may begin to wane, and their monetary support of the church may slow or even stop.

4) All had some affection and even love for the bridegroom.

They were not indifferent participants. This was a happy occasion, and they were happy for the bridegroom. It was their affection for Him that had brought them to the point at which the story begins.

**Matthew 25:1** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

5) All confessed Jesus as their Lord.

The word they used to address the bridegroom is actually the Greek word *kyrios*, which is usually rendered "Lord," meaning 'Master' (rendered 'sir' in the NIV). In fact, it is translated "Lord" later in the chapter (Matthew 25:37, 44).

**Matthew 25:11** "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'

Both groups were carrying lamps, so these vessels are not a sign of who had properly prepared. Similarly, a person carrying a Bible to church does not show that that person has prepared enough by study and prayer during the previous week to overcome sin and produce spiritual fruit. Neither does it show that the Holy Spirit exists within a person.

6) All believed in and, in some sense, were waiting for Jesus' second coming.

This is all highly commendable. Here were people who had heard the gospel invitation, responded to it, professed love for Christ, attended church, acknowledged Jesus as their Savior, and were now waiting for Christ's return.

**Matthew 25:6-7** "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps."

All those virgins were burning their lamps until midnight; but they began to give a dim and obscure light, followed by the oil being exhausted. So, they trimmed them by removing the burnt parts of the linen or the torch, so that they would burn clear. It was also necessary to dip them again in oil, or to pour oil on them.

This vividly represents the conduct of most people as death approaches. They then begin to put their affairs in order so that they may be prepared. They are distressed, anxious, and trembling, and then they ask the aid of others, but often when it is too late.

7) All were alike in that they became drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom's coming was delayed.

Unbelievers sleep, but so do the elect at times. Remember Peter, James, and John in the garden?

**Luke 22:45-46** When He [Jesus] rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

But suddenly the bridegroom came, and immediately the similarities vanished, and the critical difference emerged. Five were ready and five were unprepared.

**I Thessalonians 5:1-11** But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

### **Bridegroom Delayed**

In verse 5 of Matthew 25, Jesus says, "the bridegroom was delayed." In other words, "The coming of the Lord may be delayed." This is an unmistakable inference from the story and one that has bearing on the timing of the events of these chapters as looking forward to a future moment.

**Matthew 25:5** "But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept."

There are several suggestions that Jesus' return may be delayed. Among them Christ's teaching in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then, the end will come.

It also says both groups slumbered and slept. Even the most dedicated and sincere saints may temporarily become mentally lethargic, and even spiritually lethargic. The fact that the Bridegroom delayed His coming is one of Jesus' many hints that His return may be much later than expected. From the perspective of the first-century church, Christ has delayed for almost 2,000 years! Nevertheless, we should not allow ourselves to become lethargic about His eventual return.

Habakkuk prophesies that the Lord would bring the brutal armies of the Chaldeans—the Babylonians—against Judah. It would seem delayed, but it was sure to come because the Lord had ordained it. God controls the political scene and uses nations for His own purposes.

**Habakkuk 2:3** For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

The word "slumbered" in Matthew 25:5 is *nod*, a transient act, whereas "slept" should be sleeping, a continuous act. Thus, we see the progression of lethargy. First, the virgins nodded their heads as if napping, and later, they slept continuously and deeply. Initial weariness is the first step to further spiritual decay. It is vital to catch temporary apathy early to prevent permanent disillusionment.

The ten virgins' service and reverence to God is done perfunctorily. It is more of a habit than a sincere zeal, and this is seen in the lethargic Christians' routine attendance at Sabbath services. They obey God almost mindlessly, developing it into a routine over time. Their lack of emotional maturity and forethought carries them through life in lightheaded bliss, and so, they remain with the church, just filling a seat or attending only occasionally.

Those who follow the Lamb are called "virgins" in Revelation 14:4, symbolizing their spiritual purity, but it appears only half of the virgins in the parable are presented as the Bride to Christ.

### Decisive Differences

So far, we have identified the ten virgins and analyzed the similarities of the two groups of five virgins. Next, let us analyze their decisive differences. Remember, the Parable of the Ten Virgins pictures the members of the church as virgins waiting for the bridegroom's return. They all carry oil-filled lamps to light their way while waiting through the darkness of night.

**Matthew 25:6-7** "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps."

However, half of them are unprepared; these foolish virgins have no reserve oil to refill their flickering lamps. While they are gone buying new oil, the bridegroom comes and the door to the wedding is shut. This pictures some losing heart during the bridegroom's delay and not persevering to the end. We must be careful not to become weary in well-doing.

Jesus points out two main differences between the two types of virgins: One deals with the description of the groups and the other with their diligence.

Jesus describes one of the groups as wise and the other as foolish. The wise virgins are intelligent, practical, and careful, but the foolish are dull-minded, unrealistic, and careless. "Foolish" is translated from the Greek word *moros*, from which we derive the English word "moron." Their conduct warranted their uncomplimentary description—after all, are we not known by our fruit or the lack of it? All Christians are fully aware of the principle.

**Matthew 7:17-20** Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

The major difference between the wise and the foolish is found in their attitudes. Their moronic attitude is spiritually poor, blind, and naked because it has no true vision of the future, even though God and His Son have plainly set into motion their wonderful plan of salvation.

The foolish virgins do not recognize the presence of any sin in their lives. David realized he had sins he did not see, and so, he humbly asked God to show them to him.

**Psalm 19:12-13** Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.

The foolish virgins are spiritually lukewarm.

**Matthew 25:3-4** “Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

There is a strong contrast in the diligence of the two groups. One takes sufficient oil with it, but the other does not. Since the procession is at night, and the lamps have only a small oil reservoir, they have to replenish the oil periodically. The wise virgins prepare by carrying extra oil for when the lamps run low. This pictures their readiness for future needs, which requires forethought, planning, and dedication.

The foolish virgins do not prepare, content to carry only enough to appear wise. They carry out God's instructions with the least amount of effort while they deceive themselves into thinking they can get away with it. They did not have a good work ethic.

**Ecclesiastes 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

The foolish are not concerned about their spiritual future, but the wise are, even though they must carry the extra weight of an oil container. However, this extra preparation gives them the hope and faith they need to meet the bridegroom successfully and enter the marriage feast.

If the wise virgins are Christians, why do they refuse to share with the foolish?

**Matthew 25:8-9** “And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'”

It was midnight, and the lamps were needed for the procession and the rest of the night. The reserve oil supply was only enough to supply oil for the lamps of the five wise virgins. So, the inability of the wise to provide oil for the foolish illustrates that no one can give to another what he has done to add works to his faith.

**James 2:14** What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

**James 2:17-23** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

Our faith must be our own through Jesus Christ; it cannot be borrowed. Moral character or spiritual gifts cannot be transferred from one person to another. To delay submission and obedience to Christ is to risk missing out on eternal life. Therefore, to delay preparation for His return is nothing short of spiritual negligence.

**Matthew 25:10-12** “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'”

To human reasoning, the closing of the door to the wedding feast does not seem fair. The door is shut with finality. The verb tense says the door is shut to stay shut. Therefore, at that point, no one's repentance, prayer, or pleading can change that fact.

Noah's ark having its door sealed shut is a similar vivid illustration of its finality. Just as for the wedding feast, the door was shut to stay shut throughout the Flood.

**Genesis 7:16** So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him [Noah]; and the Lord shut him in.

God did the shutting of the door both times. All the pleading in the world would not open the ark's door to others after it was shut.

Once Christ has come or we have died, our opportunity to be among the firstfruits of the Kingdom will have been decided. The door's closing is fair because everyone has ample time to prepare for the bridegroom's coming. He does not come early in the evening but late. He is even delayed, giving extra time to be ready. We have our whole lives—all the years of Christ's longsuffering and patience with us—to prepare. Therefore, it is just and fair that the door is shut when our last hour comes.

Isaiah recognizes man's tendency to procrastinate:

**Isaiah 55:6** Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

The foolish Laodicean attitude dictates that one needs nothing else spiritually, but such a one will be rudely awakened to realize his terrible unpreparedness. This attitude is bankrupt of vision and foresight. It sees no need to prepare for the eventualities of life either physically or, more importantly, spiritually.

Opportunities come and go throughout life, and no opportunity is so greatly lost than that of the foolish virgins. They fail to realize that the bridegroom would probably come later than expected. They lack faithful perseverance in thought and action.

The lesson Christ emphasizes in this parable is to be prepared for the future, namely, the coming of Christ. The prophet Amos expresses this powerfully in, Amos 4:12, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

Humans have little trouble preparing for anything, except meeting God. The last verse of the parable (verse 13) makes its purpose ring in our ears, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." Simply put: Keep watch and be ready!

## **What It Means to Be Ready**

The setting of these chapters is the time leading up to Christ's return. So, we must conclude that there will always be people in the church who have heard the gospel invitation, have responded in some sense, and may even have some affection for Jesus, but who are not ready for Christ's return.

But what does it mean to be truly ready? A great change must happen in you, far beyond any power of yours. Then, you can go in with Christ to the marriage.

You must, first, be renewed in your nature, or you will not be ready. You must be cleansed from your sins, or you will not be ready. You must be justified in Christ's righteousness, and you must put on His righteous wedding garments, or else you will not be ready. You must be reconciled to God, you must be made like God, or you will not be ready.

Or, as in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, you must have a lamp, and that lamp must be fed by faith with works and righteousness produced by use of the Holy Spirit, and it must continue to burn brightly, or else you will not be ready.

No child of darkness can go into that place of light. You must be brought out of the world's darkness into God's marvelous light, or else you will never be ready to go in with Christ to the marriage.

Which brings us back to the pressing question of these chapters: Are you truly ready, or are you among those who only seem to be prepared?

## **A Time of Crisis**

Notice, that the difference between the wise women and the foolish women was revealed by the coming of the bridegroom. That is, it was revealed in the crisis moment.

During the days before the wedding or the night leading up to the start of the feast, few would have noticed that five women had adequately prepared for the bridegroom's coming and five had not. But suddenly the bridegroom came, and the difference was immediately disclosed. The same will happen when Jesus Christ returns.

Many who have considered themselves true children of God will be shown they are not, and many who have perhaps not even been regarded as his children will be revealed as firstfruits.

How are we to know whether we are in one group or the other? The answer is whether you are faithful in serving God and your brethren in His church for the right reason and in a truly humble attitude.

But there is another answer here. If the return of Christ and the division it will cause will bring out the true condition of those who profess Christianity but are not born from above, is it not also the case that their true condition may be revealed by present day crisis experiences now? If this is so, you can anticipate the results of the final judgment by the way you react to the problems that come into your life day by day.

Is there anything that will more correctly reveal a person's character than his facing a crushing and unanticipated crisis? It could be the failure of his plans or the disappointment of all his hopes. It

could be the death of a loved one. It could be his own humiliation by some serious illness which forces him to face his own faults. It could be the loss of employment.

When a man comes to himself—he sees himself for what he really is—he finds out whether he is motivated by unflinching faith in God and sustained by God's Spirit, or whether he has been deceiving himself, by relying on some other support.

We have all had varying degrees of trying experiences in some form or other. Nevertheless, if we are prepared ahead of time because we have already been examining and testing ourselves, we will not stumble or fail because Jesus has already been working in us.

**II Corinthians 13:5-6** Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

The Greek word rendered “disqualified,” or “reprobates,” is *adokimoi*, which according to Barnes' Notes means,

. . . not approved; rejected; that which will not stand the trial. It is properly applicable to metals, as denoting that they will not bear the tests to which they are subjected, but are found to be base or adulterated.” The sense, here, is that they might know that they were Christians, unless their religion was base, false, adulterated; or such as would not bear the test. The simple idea is that they might know that they were Christians, unless their religion was such as would not stand the test, or was worthless.

The *English Standard Version* correctly has verse 5 ending with, “unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” And, the *ESV* has verse 6 ending with, “we have not failed the test.”

This means that Christ is in you if you meet the spiritual test successfully! In other words, if you are ready! But must we always be ready?

### **Three Reasons for Readiness**

The Parable of the Ten Virgins contains more reasons why we must always be ready! Here are three:

1) The Lord will come without warning.

Therefore, the parable ends with the words in Matthew 25:13:

**Matthew 25:13** "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Peter reminds us that scoffers willfully forget that God's promise is not slack.

**II Peter 3:1-9** Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since

the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this, they willfully forget that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Peter explains that the delay of the second coming is not a long time from God's perspective. He then explains further that the delay is also because God is patient, and He has not quickly brought the present period of history to an end because he does not want any to perish, although some will.

Though Christians long for Christ's return and the defeat of all evil, as long as the present period of history lasts, an opportunity remains for people to turn to God in faith.

2) We must always be ready because being prepared is not transferable.

I do not mean by this that one converted person may not be used by God to bring the gospel to another, because that is how the gospel normally spreads. Paul speaks of the gospel being passed "from faith to faith."

**Romans 1:16-17** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

No one can get by on another's faith. You cannot be saved by the life of Christ in someone else. Many people delude themselves along those lines. They think they will be saved on the merits of their parents or the church group they attend. They do not have true faith in Christ, but they have been exposed to it over a period of years, and suppose that in the time of Christ's judgment they will be able to appeal to God's work in the life of someone close to them.

This helps us understand why the wise women refused to give their oil to the five who were foolish. Their refusal seems uncharitable. The selfless thing would have been for the wise women to share their oil, even if it meant they themselves would have run out.

But the story is not about charity. Rather, the parable reveals that when Christ returns, each person must stand on his or her own. Your mother's faith will not save you. Your wife's faith will not save you. You will not be saved by the spiritual life of your son or daughter. The question will be: "Where do you stand? Is Jesus Christ living in you? Are you ready?"

3) We must always be ready because lost opportunities cannot be regained.

The foolish women set out to buy oil, but the bridegroom came, and they were too late. So, it will be when Christ returns in judgment. Those who are ready will be taken into the marriage feast, and those who are not ready will be shut out.

Do not say to yourself, "I will turn to Christ later. I will repent after I enjoy a few more years of living the world's way of life. There is always time to live God's way of life later." But you do not know that!

Today may be the last time you will hear the Word of God. And even if it is not—even if you do hear it again and again—it will be no easier for you to turn to God later. In fact, the opposite is the case. The fact that you have rejected the free offer of God's grace now will harden you so that you will find it much more difficult to repent later.

## Conclusion

The whole process of salvation takes its beginning from God. It was because God so loved His creation of people that He sent His Son. It is not that God is estranged from man, but that man is estranged from Him. God's message, the message which Paul brought, is an appeal from a loving Father to wandering and estranged children to come home where love is waiting for them.

**II Corinthians 6:1-2** We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Paul implores us not to accept Christ's offer of the grace of God ineffectively and fruitlessly. For the church of God, the acceptable time is now; our time of salvation is now.

**I Peter 4:17-18** For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Let us think of this in human terms for a moment. Suppose that a father sacrifices and toils to give his son every chance, surrounds him with love, plans for his future with care, and does everything humanly possible to equip him for life. And suppose the foolish son feels no debt of gratitude, never feels the obligation to repay by being worthy of all this. And, suppose he fails, not because he does not have the ability, but because he will not try; because he forgets the love that gave him so much. That is what breaks a father's heart.

When God gives us all His grace and we take our own foolish way and frustrate that grace which might have recreated us, once again Christ is crucified and, in a sense, the heart of God is broken.

In contrast, why were the five wise virgins wise?

**James 3:13-18** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The five wise virgins were not in a state of confusion and anxiety as the foolish were; the wise virgins were prepared for the delay in the Bridegroom's coming, and therefore ready, because they had truly counted the cost and they were at peace with God because they reverently fear the Lord.