

Topic: The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

Subtopic: Preparations for having our lamps filled with oil.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/xtl8zlD60UQ>

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins is a beautiful illustration of God’s kingdom lifted from the marriage customs of first-century Palestine. It vividly depicts Jesus’ return as the divine/human bridegroom. In the parable, the bridegroom is attended by bridesmaids, who “have oil lamps.” Their job is to light the way through the darkness so that the bridegroom can safely make his way to the wedding feast.¹ In those days, there were no streetlights or electricity, so being prepared and ready with oil was crucial. Unfortunately, as the parable illustrates, only half of the bridesmaids were prepared because five were without oil. Therefore, when the bridegroom came, only those ready went with him into the wedding banquet.” Then when the “door was shut,”² the foolish bridesmaids were left out in the dark. Being a bridesmaid was a great honor; to be insultingly unprepared would be the epitome of foolishness. In the book of Proverbs, the fool is pictured as one who despises advice and instruction and, consequently, is easily deceived and “fooled.” A foolish person is pictured as one who wastes opportunities and has no strategy for living circumspectly.

Preparation for the time of Christ’s coming, was the theme in the previous chapter of Matthew. In it, Jesus explains the signs that will occur before the close of the age. When the disciples asked him, “When will these things be?”³ Jesus only said that we must stay awake for the time was near. “But concerning the day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”⁴ Those who are wise will take these words to heart.

¹ Edersheim, Manners and Customs in the Bible.

² Matthew 25:10

³ Matthew 24:3

⁴ Matthew 24:36

In the New Testament, Paul urges Christians to “Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”⁵

There was a story about a conversation that a father had with his son that was passed around on Facebook this past week. In it, his father asked his son how things went that day for him at school. Each day, the dad heard the same answer, that things were okay, so he decided to give his son a challenge. Therefore, he said, “Son, life is meant to be more than just okay. It is intended to be a bold and exciting adventure. How about you bring some light into your drab world by doing something that will make a difference in someone else’s life?

His son took that challenge seriously, and life from that point on took on a whole new meaning and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a word that means “filled with God.” In our parable today, the oil the virgins carried was a “symbol of being endowed with the Holy Spirit.”⁶

In the Book of Acts, the Lord clarified that after the Holy Spirit came upon them, “They would be his witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”⁷ Therefore, the source of this lamp-light procession is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who fills our lives with the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.”⁸

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he urged them “to be filled with the Spirit.”⁹ This command is in the continuous tense as if we need constant refilling. Every Christian who has been baptized has the Holy Spirit if they take their faith seriously. But we need a continual filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives because we have a fundamental problem (as one person put it): we leak. This is why Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”¹⁰ Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”¹¹ The experience of being filled

⁵ Ephesians 5:9

⁶ Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, Topic of “Oil”, Vol. 2, p. 1246

⁷ Acts 1:8

⁸ Galatians 5:22

⁹ Ephesians 5:19

¹⁰ Matthew 5:6

¹¹ John 7:37-38

with the Spirit is enhanced when we address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” These joyful expressions show evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence that is exuberant, and it flows out of a believer’s life in ways that refresh others.

The oil used to fill their lamps represents an inward spiritual reality of faith at work in the believer’s heart when God’s word, which is Spirit and life, is acted upon.

If the definition of sin is missing the mark, then the five foolish virgins missed what life was about. Being identified as virgins meant that they had characteristics that associated them with the beloved company of Christ. But genuine spirituality has to go further than mere association. The foolish virgins were deceived into thinking it didn’t matter if they were ready. They believed they would always have time to prepare at the last minute. But it wasn’t true.

Many voices in our culture would tell you the only person who matters is you. What you desire and want to do with your time and talents is about you. But it is only a half-truth. Sure, you matter so much that Christ died for you. But obeying Christ and putting God’s will above your own matters most.

Let’s face it: our culture does not help us hear the message of warning this parable offers. It prefers the comfortable illusion that everyone will receive a passing grade but purposefully ignores the warning that the door will be shut one day. Therefore, life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse, are set before us so that we may choose the way of life carefully. The work of staying awake spiritually is never easy, but nobody else can do it for you.

Therefore, the personification of wisdom cries out: “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Forsake your simple ways, and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.”¹²

For, “If you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—

¹² Proverbs 9:5-6

indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.”¹³

All ten virgins in this story received the invitation to the wedding feast, but not all made proper preparations.

In the Book of Revelation, when the Apostle John was told to write a letter to the church in Sardis, he said something similar to the issues we have just been discussing. In this letter, John said, “You have a name, and you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. ‘So remember what you have received and heard. Keep *it*, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.”¹⁴

So, let’s “stay awake and hold fast to what we have until he comes.”¹⁵ A crown and reward await those who are faithful. Let’s be prepared by “letting our light so shine before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.”¹⁶ Amen.

¹³ Proverbs 2:1-5

¹⁴ Revelation 3:1b-3

¹⁵ Revelation 2:25 - paraphrased

¹⁶ John 5:16