A Study in Matthew 25:1–13 and Luke 12:34–40

The Ten Virgins: Watching for the Bridegroom

We are reading from Matthew 25, beginning at verse 1, followed by Luke 12:34–40.

> *"Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be made like to ten virgins, who having taken their torches, went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were prudent, and five foolish. They that were foolish took their torches, and did not take oil with them. But the prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches. Now the bridegroom tarrying, they all grew heavy and slept. But in the middle of the night there was a cry, Behold the bridegroom, go forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their torches. And the foolish said to the prudent, Give us of your oil, for our torches are going out. But the prudent answered, saying, We cannot, lest it might not suffice for us and for you. Go rather to those that sell, and buy for yourselves. But as they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and the ones that were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the rest of the virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." — Matthew 25:1–13*
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> *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching... And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not." — Luke 12:34–40*

The When of the Then

The word then in verse 1 is a connective: Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened unto this. The then refers back to conditions described in the previous chapter — an evil servant who said in his heart, My Lord delays his coming, and began to eat and drink with the drunken. When such a condition arose in the profession of Christianity, then the kingdom would be in the state described by this parable. Every then in the Scriptures demands the question: what is the when of that then?

The early Christians went forth to meet the bridegroom. The apostles put the saints in that posture: they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10). That waiting, watching, any-moment expectancy was the original posture. This parable is set against the backdrop of what happens when it is lost.

Five Wise, Five Foolish — Oil and No Oil

The ten virgins represent the whole of the Christian profession. Five were prudent and took oil; five were foolish and took no oil. The text could not be plainer: they took no oil with them (verse 3). Expositors who attempt to put oil into the torches of the foolish are working against the plain statement of the Spirit of God. What made them foolish was precisely that they had no oil. The oil is the Holy Spirit — the earnest, the seal, the down payment of the inheritance given to everyone who has truly believed.

Ephesians 1:13 states the principle: In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance. There is no believer whom God has not sealed; there is no sealing without faith. The Holy Spirit is not transferred from person to person. You cannot give your oil to another. Each must go to the source — to God Himself, through the hearing of the gospel and the response of faith.

The five that had no oil are like those described in Matthew 7:22–23, who say Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And the Lord answers: I never knew you. He does not say I knew you once; He says I never knew you. The saying of Lord, Lord is no proof of salvation. Reality must lie behind the profession.

They All Slumbered and Slept

While the bridegroom tarried, they all grew heavy and slept — not just the foolish, but all of them. What did they sleep with respect to? The very thing the parable is about: going forth to meet the bridegroom. The whole profession of Christianity lost the expectation that the Lord might come at any time. They fell asleep to that. It is a fact of church history.

The church stopped expecting the Lord to come at any moment. Plans were made for a long future. Amillennialism interpreted the thousand years of Revelation as a symbolic period and removed the expectancy of a literal coming reign. The evil servant of Matthew 24 said in his heart, My Lord delays to come — and the profession of Christianity has done just that. Ephesians 5:14 calls out against it: Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; Christ shall give thee light.

The Midnight Cry — A Historical Recovery

At midnight a cry went out: Behold the bridegroom, go forth to meet him. This is a cry to return to the original ground — to the apostolic posture of waiting for the Lord at any time. The cry came from no human being; it was the Spirit of God raising this truth again. Historically, the recovery of the truth of the Lord's any-moment coming occurred in the very late 1820s, chiefly through the ministry of J.N. Darby, and spread rapidly through the English-speaking world and beyond.

But the human instrument is not the point. At midnight there was a cry. Who made it? The Spirit of God — the same Spirit who at the beginning put the saints in that waiting posture, now sounding the call to return to it. The end of Revelation gives us the counterpart: The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. The bride desires the presence of the bridegroom. Bridal affections for Christ are what the Spirit was stirring when He made that midnight cry. Come, Lord Jesus ought to be on our hearts each day.

The Door Shut — No Second Chance at the Coming

While the foolish went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. When the Lord comes for His own, the door closes. Those left outside say Lord, Lord, and He answers: I know you not. There is no gaining entrance after the door has shut. It is useless to come after and knock.

The practical lesson for us now is the advice given by the wise: Go to those that sell, and buy for yourselves. That is essentially a gospel message — go to the source, because no one else can get it for you. The Holy Spirit is not obtained from another person. Each must hear the word of truth, believe, and receive the seal of the Spirit from God directly.

Luke 12 — The Moral Condition of Waiting and Watching

Luke 12:34–40 provides the moral counterpart to the parable. It opens with the principle: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Note carefully: the heart follows the treasure, not the other way around. It is not stated that if my heart is in heaven, my treasure will be there. It is stated that where my treasure is, that is where my heart will be. If my treasure is in this world, my heart is here. If my treasure is in heaven — if Christ Himself is my treasure there — my heart will be there.

Then come three elements of the readiness the Lord looks for. Let your loins be girded about — a picture of moral separation from the world; this is not a place of ease and relaxation for the Christian. And your lights burning — a distinct Christian testimony that shines in a dark place. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and

knocketh, they may open unto him immediately — an image of such readiness that one is, as it were, already standing at the door with a hand on the knob.

Verse 37 pronounces a blessing not on those who open the door skillfully but on those whom the Lord finds watching. Watching is more than waiting: it is alertness, wakefulness, the active direction of one's soul toward His return. The word literally means to be awake. And then the remarkable word of the Lord in verse 37: He shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. What a Savior. He comes not only to receive us but to serve us.

The beautiful parallel of Abigail is worth noting. She said to David before he was king: When the Lord shall have dealt well with my Lord, then remember thine handmaid. And she waited. When the servants came to take her to be his wife, she arose at once with bridal affections and said, Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord. She had been waiting, expecting that call, and when it came she was ready. That is the spirit of what our Lord calls for from us.

Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Come, Lord Jesus.