

Matt 25:1-12

1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, **4** but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **5** As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ **7** Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. **8** And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ **9** But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ **10** And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. **11** Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ **12** But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ **13** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

A few notes on the parable

A wedding feast with 10 brides? Jesus is obviously not trying to promote polygamy. He is simply using an that might not be one hundred percent true to life to teach a lesson.

As the ten brides wait the groom is delayed. Why he was delayed is not important. The fact that he is delayed is very important. This is an important part of the parable because this is the difference between the wise and the foolish. The foolish do just enough to slip by, whereas the wise are prepared.

Finding out that they were not prepared the five foolish asked the wise for help. It might seem unloving that the wise don’t share their oil but again this is a parable the point is to teach a spiritual truth. The point is on that day we can’t share our faith. Each will stand or fall on their own.

And so some are shut out and some are shut in. The Lord closes the door. Here we have that absurd part of the parable that we are always looking out for. In the past I’ve told you that the absurd part of the parable is the main point, and usually a wonderful example of God’s grace and love. This parable is the exception. This absurdity is still the main point of the parable but instead of showing God’s grace it shows us the condemnation of God against sin. The Lord shuts the door and those on the outside are left out.

Think back to the time of the Flood, the Lord waited in patience for 120 years, and at any time those wicked men could have entered the ark and been saved, but on the day when the rain started, the Lord close the door, and however much they may have pounded and shouted. Noah could not open the door, and the Lord would not. Whoever was outside was lost.

So what is meant by being prepared?

The whole parable really focuses back then on the difference between the wise and the foolish. That is the crux of the matter. Are we wise and prepared? Are we foolish and unprepared? What is the oil? What is the lamp? What makes one prepared? What makes one unprepared?

This is the central question of the parable. Yet really the parable does not answer this question. The force of the parable is to warn us in no uncertain terms the need to be prepared, but it does not in itself answer the question of how to be prepared.

To answer that we have to go to the rest of scripture. And if we ask the rest of scripture, what makes one prepared for the day of Judgment? The answer is very clear

“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved”

“By faith you are saved and that not of yourself”

“The just shall live by faith”

Unequivocally the scripture tells us we are saved by faith. It is faith and only faith that makes one ready for Christ's return.

And so in the parable, it is quite clear that the lamp (the light) is faith. Those whose faith is burning brightly when our Lord returns are the wise.

Then what is the oil?

But now there is one question left, what is the oil? And again we have to look to the rest of the scripture. There can be no doubt that the light of the lamp is faith. What then is the only thing that feeds and sustains faith? And once again scripture is unequivocal, the Word and the Sacraments. What we call the means of grace. That is the Gospel in word and sacrament.

There is a beautiful picture of this in Zechariah chapter 4, and again the picture is repeated in Revelation chapter 11. The picture is of two olive trees and from the olive trees comes two pipes, which feed seven lamps. And the Lord says these two olive trees are My two anointed ones. The two anointed ones the Lord is speaking of are the priest and the prophet. One who speaks the word, and the one who gives the sacrifices. The Old Testament church was a sacrificial church. It centered around the sacrifices and the Word which gave the forgiveness of sins. We are a sacramental church. The sacrifices looked ahead to the coming of Jesus. The sacraments look back. But both give the forgiveness of sins not because of the ritual but because of the promise of God. Sacrament and the Word these are those things which feed and cause faith to grow and live within us.

It is those who live in the word and the sacraments are who are wise. It is they who have plenty of oil ready and waiting for the Lord's return. It is those who despise the Word and the sacraments whose faith dims and fades. They will find on the last day that their oil was used up and their faith faded away without them realizing.

So am I wise or am I foolish?

In such a parable it is easy to apply the wise to myself and the foolish to others. I'm in church I'm wise. They don't come to church they are the foolish. But it is not me wise, him foolish. It is I foolish, Jesus wise.

How many of these phrases apply to you?

I don't like getting up early every Sunday for church. I don't think I need to bother starting my day with prayer and bible study. I often forget to make devotion a central part of my family's life. I think I already know all that stuff. I think that a church with fun songs and that emotionally lifts me up is more important than a liturgical church that focuses on the word and the sacraments. I think giving back to the community and doing good works is what really makes me a Christian.

I am the foolish virgin. And the foolishness of the foolish virgin is not that she didn't use the word and sacraments. She had some oil. No, the foolishness of the foolish virgin is that she did only just enough, only the bare minimum that she thought she needed. So that when the groom was a little late, the faith dwindled and died.

Christ is the wise virgin, who knows how weak and foolish we are. He gives us the word and the sacraments to make sure our faith is strong and vibrant. Christ gives us the Holy Spirit. Christ speaks the Gospel to us over and over and over again. "My child your sins are forgiven because I died in your place."

I said before that this parable is all law, and so it is on the surface. But a little digging, a little scratching and the glorious grace, love and mercy of our Lord shines out like a brilliant super nova, into the darkness of our sin.

Yes I am the foolish virgin who doesn't appreciate the wonderful gift that God has given to me in the Word and Sacraments. But the Lord has given it to me anyway, and continues to give me His gifts through this means.

And even the background picture of the wedding feast reveals the Love of our Lord. Over and over again the Lord uses this picture for the day judgment. The day of our wedding is the greatest day of our earthly lives. The gift of a companion to walk with us the rest of our days is the best earthly the Lord can give us. The Lord wants us to associate this same joy with that day to come. The wedding feast is a glorious picture of everlasting life with the Lord.

And it will be a joyful glorious day, because He has filled us with the oil we need to remain strong in faith until that great day.

AMEN