

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #43 ~ Matthew 25:1-13 ~ Foolish and Wise Virgins ~ Scripture

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹ “ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Parable #44 ~ Mark 13:32-37 ~ Servants Must Remain Watchful ~ Scripture

³² “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Parable #43 ~ Matthew 25:1-13 ~ Foolish and Wise Virgins ~ Questions

1. When was a time you were late to an important event? Why were you delayed? Could you have avoided being late? How?
2. Why were some of the virgins described as foolish? What made the others wise?
3. What did the foolish virgins ask of the others? How did the wise ones respond when asked to help the ones who had not prepared? Was this fair?
4. In what ways do you tend to count on more mature Christians or ride on their coattails?
5. How did the bridegroom respond when some of the virgins want to come to the wedding late? (Matthew 25:12) What does the parable teach?
6. What responsibility does each Christian have while waiting? (Matthew 25:13, Hebrews 10:23-25, 13:1-5, James 1:22-25, 4:7-10)
7. Why do we tend to think and act like we have all the time in the world before Christ's return?
8. What are the possible consequences of putting off thinking about Christ and spiritual growth until later? Why is continual preparation for Christ's return better than "last minute cramming?"

Parable #44 ~ Mark 13:32-37 ~ Servants Must Remain Watchful ~ Questions

1. How do you think the disciples would have reacted if Jesus told them he would not return for at least another 2,000 years? What if you were told that today?
2. How might a detailed outline of future events be a hindrance, rather than a help, to our faith in God?
3. What did Jesus say the servants should do to occupy their time until the owner's return? (Mark 13:34)
4. How should we occupy our time as we wait for Christ's return? What specific task(s) do you think God has given you to do as you wait for Christ's return?
5. In what ways do we need to be on guard (13:33) until Christ returns? (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Jeremiah 14:13-15, 23:16, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Ephesians 6:11-12, Titus 2:11-14)

Parable #43 ~ Matthew 25:1-13 ~ Foolish & Wise Virgins ~ Leader's Notes

1. When was a time you were late to an important event? Why were you delayed? Could you have avoided being late? How?
2. Why were some of the virgins described as foolish? What made the others wise?

According to the Jewish Annotated NT, bridesmaids (here called “virgins”) accompany the bridegroom to the house of the bride and then escort both to the house where the wedding and feast will take place. So at this point, the virgins are waiting to take the first step in the wedding process. “The bridegroom was a long time in coming” (maybe he had a long bachelor party) and didn’t arrive until midnight. Five of the ten virgins had taken extra oil for their lamps and five had not.

3. What did the foolish virgins ask of the others? How did the wise ones respond when asked to help the ones who had not prepared? Was this fair?

The five with no extra oil asked the others for some. Now you might argue that the “Christian,” generous thing to do would have been to help out those who didn’t take extra oil, but we’re beyond that point. In earlier parables, that does, in fact happen (the parable of the early and late workers in the vineyard, for example) but now Jesus is at the point where he is saying, in effect, you’ve heard the message from the prophets and me often enough; it’s up to you to listen to and heed the message, just you yourself—no one else is going to do it for you. No one else is going to pull you along—it’s your decision and yours alone.

So that’s what happens here. The ones who heard and heeded the message, the wise virgins, told the others to go buy their own oil. Go back and listen to the message again, and if its too late, tough bananas.

4. In what ways do you tend to count on more mature Christians or ride on their coattails?
5. How did the bridegroom respond when some of the virgins want to come to the wedding late? (Matthew 25:12) What does the parable teach?

This is one of the few times that he shows them no mercy. He says, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

There is no deep or hidden meaning to this parable. The virgins represent people who have heard the good news, the Christian story. The bridegroom is Christ and the delay in his return is the delay until the second coming of Christ. The sudden coming at midnight is the unexpected time of his return (no one knows when except the Father). Those who are properly prepared are welcomed into the kingdom of heaven whereas those who are not are spurned in the final judgement.

Interestingly, in earlier Bible translations such as Tyndale (1525), verse 13 reads, “Look that ye watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor yet the hour, when the son of man shall come.” Exactly why the last phrase is deleted in later translations is a mystery to me.

Some commentators say the oil represents righteousness, good deeds, faith, or the Holy Spirit, but it probably just means that proper preparation of the second coming of Christ is needed.

The Oxford Bible Commentary says the parable teaches three lessons:

- 1) No one know the date or time of Christ’s second coming.
- 2) Those who are faithful and prepared will be rewarded at the end times.
- 3) Those who are unfaithful and unprepared will suffer eternal punishment.

6. What responsibility does each Christian have while waiting? (Matthew 25:13, Hebrews 10:23-25, 13:1-5, James 1:22-25, 4:7-10)

Matthew 25:13 – So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return. [NLT]

Hebrews 10:23-25 – Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. [NLT]

James 1:22-25 – Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. [NIV]

James 4:7-10 – Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. [NIV]

7. Why do we tend to think and act like we have all the time in the world before Christ’s return?

8. What are the possible consequences of putting off thinking about Christ and spiritual growth until later? Why is continual preparation for Christ’s return better than “last minute cramming?”

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1. How do you think the disciples would have reacted if Jesus told them he would not return for at least another 2,000 years? What if you were told that today?
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3. What did Jesus say the servants should do to occupy their time until the owner's return? (Mark 13:34)

First of all, let's clarify verse 32. When Jesus said he did not know the time of the end, he was affirming his humanity. Of course, God the Father knows the time, and Jesus and the Father are one. But when Jesus became a man, he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of all his divine attributes. The emphasis of this verse is not Jesus' lack of knowledge, but rather on the fact that no one knows or can know. It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he chooses.

Secondly, as in the previous parable, early translations of this one include an important phrase in verse 33 missing from later translations, namely, "Take heed, watch *and pray*..." In addition, verse 34 is phrased, "as a man who *has* gone..." [Tyndale] or "a man *already* going..." [Wycliffe]. A subtle change, but actually one that makes the parable more meaningful to later generations. The KJV adds to verse 34, "*For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey...*" That phrase is in the mind of the translator only and not in any original manuscript.

So Jesus said to do the work assigned to you, be on your guard, watch, and pray. And in verse 36 he added, "do not let him find you sleeping."

4. How should we occupy our time as we wait for Christ's return? What specific task(s) do you think God has given you to do as you wait for Christ's return?
5. In what ways do we need to be on guard (13:33) until Christ returns? (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Jeremiah 14:13-15, 23:16, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Ephesians 6:11-12, Titus 2:11-14)

Matthew 7:15 – Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Matthew 24:11 – and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Matthew 24:24 – For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.

Jeremiah 14:13-15 – ¹³ But I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.' "

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to me, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.

¹⁵ Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, ‘No sword or famine will touch this land.’ Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine.

Jeremiah 23:16 – This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.

2 Peter 2:1-3 – ¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign LORD who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Ephesians 6:11-12 – ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Titus 2:11-14 – ¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.