

THE PARABLES OF THE END OF THE AGE
“RUNNING OUT OF FUEL”

Matthew 25:1-13



Theme: True believers will look forward to the Return of the Lord *faithfully* and *preparedly*.

I. THE PROSPECT OF CHRIST'S COMING – *25:1-5*

A. *THE DETAILS OF THE PARABLE – vv. 1-2*

1. The heart of Christ for those who dwell on the earth during the Tribulation Period is once again displayed as He provides the warning to be ready through this parable.
2. He has repeatedly declared that despite the fact that the general time of His return will be provided through the very specific signs and prophecies (*24:32-33*), the exact time of His Second Coming will not be knowable – *24:36, 42, 44, 50, 25:13*
3. We're brought to a second parable intended to teach the absolute necessity of living in a constant state of preparedness at the prospect of the Coming of Christ.
4. This parable begins with the word “*then*” [Τότε] – an emphasis on the events surrounding the actual coming of Christ to the earth at the conclusion of Tribulation Period to establish the Millennial Kingdom, a reference to the same event that is:
 - a. “... *immediately after the tribulation of those days*” (*24:29*)
 - b. “... *that day and hour no one knows*” (*24:36*)
 - c. “... *at an hour when you do not think He will [come]*” (*24:44*)
5. Thus, we know that this is NOT referring to the Rapture, but to the event of the Second Coming – a time when the spiritual preparedness for entering “*the Kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*”
6. The tendency of many is to push this simple parable that teaches

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one simple message into an allegory in which every single detail must have spiritual meaning and mystical significance.

7. The identity of the bride, the location of the wedding, the place where the virgins are sleeping, what type of oil was used in the lamps, etc ... are totally irrelevant to the point that Jesus is seeking to make.
8. Jesus uses an event that would have been well known by everyone in the culture to emphasize the need to be prepared when He returns.
9. It would be helpful to understand the three aspects contained in the Jewish wedding traditions:
 - a. First, was the **engagement** – a *covenant* between the fathers of the bride and groom that committed their children to one another.
 - b. Second was the **betrotal** – a *ceremony* at which the bride and groom exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends after which they entered a variable period of time during which they are considered “married” but not yet consummated.
 - c. Finally was the **wedding feast** – a *celebration* that would begin with the groom coming to the bride and taking her together with her attendants to a festival that would involve the entire community lasting as long as an entire week. At the end of the feast the “best man” would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom everyone would go home and leave them alone to consummate their union.
10. The parable picks up the *wedding* process at the beginning of this last aspect, yet the wedding isn't the focus of the parable – the condition of the virgins is the point: *“Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.”*

B. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE PREPAREDNESS – vv. 3-5

1. The *“ten virgins”* represent professed followers of Christ who claim to be watching for the appearing of Christ, demonstrating a readiness for Him to come.
2. Here is the emphasis of this parable – not all of those who will be

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identified as believers during the Tribulation Period are genuinely “born again” by faith.

3. It is true in every era of God’s unfolding work of redemption that the people of God will be a “mixed” multitude – people who profess Christ as Savior yet fail to truly confess Him as Lord.
4. First, the foolish virgins are described: *“For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them.”*
 - a. Throughout the Olivet Discourse, Jesus has been emphasizing that the one and only way to be prepared for His Coming was to possess a relationship with Him through repentance of sin and personal faith.
 - b. In this sense, the oil represents the presence of a true saving relationship with Jesus Christ
 - c. Even as a torch without fuel is worthless, a profession of faith in Christ Jesus without a saving relationship with Him is even more tragically useless.
5. Second, *“the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.”* – describing the reality of their profession of faith because of the presence of inward relationship with Christ confessing Him as Lord in truth.
6. The *“ten virgins”* appear to be the same – dressed the same, carrying lamps, at the same place, doing the same things – but half of them were fake – possessing a form of godliness but denying its power – cp. *2 Timothy 3:5*.
7. We are told that the bridegroom didn’t come when expected – *“Now while the bridegroom was delaying ...”*
 - a. This “delay” is not from God’s perspective, but from the perspective of those who are in the Tribulation.
 - b. Apparently, “the short period of time that will elapse between the signs of His coming and His actual appearance will cause some people to think the Lord is *delaying* His return.”⁸¹
8. As they waited, all ten of the virgins *“... got drowsy and began to*

⁸¹ MacArthur, p. 88.

sleep.”

9. Nothing more should be made of their sleeping than the fact that it will be difficult to sustain vigilance, eagerness, and excitement as they await during what is perceived as a long “delay” into the night.

II. THE PREDICAMENT AT CHRIST’S COMING – *25:6-12*

A. *THE IMMEDIACY OF READINESS* – *vv. 6-7*

1. We get now to the point – when Christ returns, there will be those who were not truly prepared to meet Him.
2. We are given three principles that cause a problem for those who are not ready, beginning with the fact that when Christ returns, there will be no opportunity to make any adjustments to one’s state of readiness – *“But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.”*
3. To *“trim their lamps”* most likely refers to cutting off old burned portions of the cloth, saturating the cloth with oil and lighting the fire.
4. The emphasis here is that there was no time to make any adjustments, corrections, or additions to one’s preparation – they immediately realized that they didn’t have the needed oil to light their lamps.

B. *THE INDIVIDUALITY OF RESOURCE* – *vv. 8-9*

1. We are told that the foolish virgins thought that their lack of preparation could be cared for by “borrowing” oil from the prudent virgins – *“The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’”*
2. However, *“the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too ...”*
3. They weren’t selfish or mean-spirited, there was simply enough oil to care for one lamp – indicating that a person’s faith is sufficient only for their own soul – we cannot benefit from the faith of another person, not can we give faith to another person.
4. Every person must have their own personal relationship with Christ Jesus – there are no coattails available for anyone to ride into

heaven.

5. The prudent virgins instructed the foolish virgins to *“go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.”*
6. Essentially, their response was to point them back to their own personal responsibility to ready themselves; the “dealers” of the oil would have to refer to God’s Spirit who dispenses the personal faith – having been ignored, or neglected by these foolish virgins when the “oil” would have been available.

C. *THE INTOLERANCE OF REGRET – vv. 10-12*

1. So, *“while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.”*
2. The immediate readiness was rewarded because of the presence of the individual resource of faith and the prepared saints were taken into the wedding feast.
3. However, *“later, the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’”*
4. Their regret was evident – no indication is given that they ever located the oil, most likely not; but that is really beside the point.
5. We are informed that there is no longer any opportunity to qualify oneself – the *“door was shut.”*
6. The response of the Lord is chilling: *“But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’”*
7. This tells what is the essence of being ready for the Coming of Christ – possessing a relationship with Jesus Christ wherein His grace is active in your life energizing an intimacy with Christ that demonstrates the presence of eternal life – cp. *John 17:3*
8. The pretense that had been in place is now exposed – they were sinful, foolish, and lawless and the Lord is intolerant of any regret they would display – cp. *Matthew 7:21-23*.

III. THE PREPAREDNESS FOR CHRIST’S COMING – *25:13*

A. *THE WISDOM OF PREPAREDNESS*

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1. Jesus now comes to the point that He is repeatedly making throughout this section – *“Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”*
2. His counsel to those who would be awaiting His Second Coming during the Tribulation Period is to be ready, or *“on the alert”* for the Coming.
3. The wisdom that Jesus is sharing is this: *“the only way to be ready on that day of Christ’s return is to be ready every day.”*

B. THE WARNING FOR PREPAREDNESS

1. Throughout this section, Jesus seems “stuck” on the desire to warn – pleading with people to prepare for His return.
2. Notice the statement that He had made the day previous – as recorded by *Luke 21:34-36*
3. Throughout the Olivet Discourse as He describes the fulfillment of the 70th Week of Daniel, and providing detail concerning the signs of His Coming, He repeatedly warns those in the Tribulation to:
 - a. Don’t let anyone mislead you – *24:4*
 - b. The one who endures to the end will be saved – *24:13*
 - c. Be on the alert – *24:42*
 - d. Be ready – *24:44*
 - e. Be found faithful – *24:46*
 - f. Be on the alert – *25:13*
4. Although the context of this warning for preparedness is focused on those living during Daniel’s 70th Week, the central truth is applicable to any age – once you are called upon to stand before God, if you have not repented and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, there will be no second chance and the opportunity to be saved will be gone forever!

