

KINGDOM.

LESSON 45

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] DANIEL 2, 3, 4 and 6
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Daniel 2, 3, 4 and 6).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN ROMANS] (18) ROMANS 13:8
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Review two by two.

(18) Romans 13:8. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE TEN VIRGINS
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**“The parable of the ten virgins” in Matthew 25:1-13 is a parable about
WATCHFULNESS IN GOD’S KINGDOM.**

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

There are three parables about watchfulness in God's kingdom:

- the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13
- the parable of the budding fig tree in Matthew 24:32-35
- the parable of the watchful servants in Luke 12:35-40.

A. THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Read Matthew 25:1-13.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The picture of a Jewish wedding. In the Bible, the marriage ceremony was a social and religious festival. Moreover, it was a *public* festival. In the Bible, marriage was never a secret matter; it was always a public event!

In ancient times, “to win a wife”, “to get engaged” or “to pledge to be married” (Greek: *mnésteuó*) was a whole family matter. It included:

- the choice of a marriage partner (Genesis 21:21)
- sometimes, the giving of a compensation gift to the family of the bride (Genesis 29:18, 34:12)
- and the giving of gifts to the bride and the groom (Genesis 24:59,61, 1 Kings 9:16).

The wedding ceremony was a public event. It included some of the following elements. The bride and groom wore wedding garments (Psalm 45:13-14). Bridesmaids and friends of the groom accompanied them (Psalm 45:14, John

3:29). There was a marriage procession (Matthew 25:1-14) and a marriage feast, which sometimes lasted for a whole week (Matthew 22:1-14, John 2:1-10, Judges 14:17). The most solemn part of the wedding ceremony was the establishment of a marriage covenant of which God himself was a witness (Malachi 2:14, Proverbs 2:17, Ezekiel 16:8)! Throughout the centuries, Christians too have conducted their marriage ceremonies publicly in the presence of God, their families, their friends and their Christian brothers and sisters.

Only after the wedding ceremony, the marriage was consummated (Genesis 29:21-23, Deuteronomy 22:13-21; Hebrews 13:4).

The virgins. Who were the virgins? Were they bridesmaids or daughters of friends and neighbours of the bride? Where did the wedding festivities take place – at the house of the bride or the groom? Where were the virgins when the shout came to go out to meet the groom? Were they somewhere outside in the open, along the road or inside a house? Were they at the bride’s house or already at the groom’s house? What was their function? Did they go out to meet the groom and his friends when they came to the house of the bride to fetch the bride and then returned to the groom’s house in a grand procession? Or were they already at the groom’s house together with the bride and all the invited guests waiting for the groom to arrive?

The best Greek texts of the New Testament have nothing whatever to say about the bride being with the groom in the arriving procession. The bride is not even mentioned in this passage. Therefore it is more reasonable to assume that the bride was already at the place where the wedding was to be held. She was either at the home of her parents or at the home of the bridegroom. Since the latter was more usual, we will assume it. Thus, the bride, the invited guests and the ten girls were all gathered at the home of the groom, which was either his own new home or that of his parents. Everything was ready, except that the groom had not yet arrived!

They went out to meet the groom. In verse 1 this is a summary statement of the story, because they actually went out to meet the groom only in verse 10. Although originally all ten girls had the intention to go out and meet the groom, strictly speaking, only the five wise girls went out to meet the groom, because the five foolish girls went out to buy oil.

The lamps. These were usually made of clay. A lamp consisted of a receptacle for oil with three holes on the top: one to pour in the oil, one for the air to escape and one for the wick. When these lamps were used in the procession, they were held aloft like torches by means of wooden poles. The lamps were lit for the first time when they heard the cry that the bridegroom was coming.

The wedding banquet. When the whole wedding procession reached the house, all the guests went in and the door was shut. At this point, the story of the parable becomes much more serious than under normal circumstances. When the five foolish virgins arrived, they were too late and were refused entry. In ordinary wedding banquets, they would not be refused entry. But this is a parable of Jesus with a serious message. In his story, the door was irrevocably shut! And the groom refused to acknowledge that he knew them!

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is Matthew 24:1-23.

It is the same as that of the previous parables: the parable of the budding fig tree and the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servant.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 25:1-12.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Matthew 25:13.

The main message of the parable is to stay alert and to constantly keep watch. Why? Because nobody knows “the day or hour” of the second coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:36,42-44,50)! He will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like “a thief coming in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4).

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

(1) Treating the parable as an allegory (allegorising).

This parable has often been abused by allegorical interpretation. Some interpreters, although they have written other very valuable teachings, have come up with an allegorical meaning of the parable, which cannot be deduced from the context and consequently must be rejected. For example:

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) interpreted the parable as follows. The number “five” represents the soul in the body, because the soul makes use of the five senses. The only way of perception is through the five senses. Thus, anyone who abstains from unlawful seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, gets the name “virgin”. But it is not enough to be just a virgin; one must have “a lamp”, which is the sign of good works. Although both the wise and the foolish virgins had lamps, only the wise virgins had “oil”, which represents love and which according to 1 Corinthians 13 is the best way.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) interpreted the parable as follows. The five foolish virgins were rejected, not because they did not serve, but because they served without “oil”, which represents God’s grace. They served on the basis of their own resources and not by virtue of God’s grace. They sought their own glory, not God’s glory.

Richard C. Trench (1807-1886) interpreted the parable as follows. “The lamp” represents whatever is merely outward in the Christian life, while “the oil” presents whatever is inward and spiritual. Therefore, in the book of Romans, the lamp represents the works of the law, while the oil represents faith that saves or justifies. But in the book of James, the lamp represents the outward profession of faith, while the oil represents the works that are the result of genuine faith.

All these allegorical interpretations must be rejected.

(2) Relevant and irrelevant details.

The ten virgins. They are relevant, because Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven with them! The five wise virgins represent true Christians and the five foolish virgins represent nominal Christians. All ten virgins are still live mixed together in this present world. While nominal Christians are not watchful or prepared, true Christians are watchful and prepared for the return of Jesus Christ at his second coming! The number “ten” is a complete number on earth, but because Jesus does not explain it, it cannot be proved that it represents the complete number of Christians who ever lived on earth.

The lamps. Jesus does not give the lamps any particular meaning. The lamps were devices equipped with oil receptacles, wicks and a hole to add oil and a hole to let air escape to the outside. During the procession, these lamps were held aloft like torches by means of wooden poles.

The oil. Jesus does not explain the symbolical meaning of the oil. We should therefore not speculate or allegorise. Oil was used to anoint prophets, priests and kings and it was used as a medicine to soothe wounds.

If the oil does have symbolical meaning, then according to Isaiah 61:1 it would point to the anointment with the Holy Spirit, through whose transforming and enabling power people are prepared to welcome the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. True (born again) Christians will be prepared for the second coming of Christ, while nominal (not born again) Christians will not prepare themselves for Christ’s return (Zechariah 4:1-6; John 3:3,5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Five foolish and five wise girls. This is very relevant. All ten girls expected the bridegroom to come before another day arrived, but none of them knew the hour he was coming. All of them had lamps and were looking forward to taking part in the wedding festivities. All of them were waiting inside the house, which had its own lighting. All of them became drowsy and fell asleep. But the main difference between them was that only five of them were “wise”, they had prepared themselves well. They were prepared for the sudden and unexpected coming of the bridegroom, they had taken oil with them. The other five were foolish, because they were totally unprepared to meet the bridegroom! They had lamps, but they had taken no oil with them. Their neglect was senseless, short-sighted and inexcusable!

Becoming drowsy and falling asleep. It is clear that the ten virgins fell asleep in the house to which they had come. They did not sleep somewhere outside along the road, because they went out only after the cry that woke them up. The five wise virgins went out to meet the bridegroom, while the five foolish virgins went out to buy oil.

It is tempting to allegorise and say that this represents the weakening of the Christian Church. However, Jesus does not give this detail any particular meaning. Moreover, his explanation or application at the end of the parable points in another direction - not to the weakening of the Christian Church, but to the preparedness of the Christians. Both the wise and the foolish virgins fell asleep. Only the wise can fall asleep without fear, because they are prepared! The foolish live in a false security. They think that they have done enough for their soul, or they think that the moment of divine intervention will not happen so quickly, or they think that there will always be enough time to change and to restore their lost chances in life. How foolish they are!

At midnight the cry rang out, “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” The shout shocked everyone wide-awake. Jesus does not say who did the shouting. It could have been by one of the waiting guests, who remained awake,

or by one of the young men, who accompanied the bridegroom. Nevertheless, it seems that the bridegroom was still a considerable distance away from the house, because the girls first had to trim the wicks of their lamps, pour in oil, light their lamps and walk a distance in the dark night to meet the bridegroom. This is relevant in so far that the second coming of Jesus Christ will take time before he will actually come. It is also relevant in so far that the second coming will come completely suddenly and unexpectedly!

The wise virgins lit their lamps, but the foolish virgins realised that they were not prepared. This detail is not explained, but enhances the central point or main lesson of being prepared for the second coming of Christ! At the shout at midnight, all the virgins awoke, trimmed and lit their lamps. A wick that is not yet completely dry can burn brightly for a few seconds. But without oil in the receptacle, the lamp will soon begin to flicker and sputter and die down. It was at this point that the foolish virgins discovered that they did not have any oil. They realised that they were totally unprepared! With agony they begged the wise virgins to give them some oil.

The wise virgins refused to give their oil to the foolish virgins. This detail is not explained, but enhances the central point or main message of being foolish or wise. The wise girls refused to give some of their oil to the foolish girls, not because they were heartless, but because they needed all the oil themselves. Wedding processions moved very slowly and the distance was considerable. It was midnight and dark. The task of the virgins was to go out to meet the bridegroom and then escort him back to the house with their lamps still burning brightly all the time. Their refusal was very reasonable. It proved that the wise virgins had thought ahead and had prepared well for their task. The foolish girls had to discover for themselves that trying to buy oil at midnight on the marketplace was a completely futile attempt. It was too late for the foolish girls to prepare!

The door was shut. This was contrary to reality, because an earthly bridegroom would never exclude guests! There is now still opportunity to repent and enter the kingdom of God!

But this is a parable about the heavenly Bridegroom and his second coming! The door is shut and is not opened again! This is a relevant detail! There comes a time when the door to the kingdom of God is definitely shut!

Before the second coming of Jesus, the door to the kingdom of God is open day and night (cf. John 10:7-9). It is still the time of grace. The people in the world are still called to get prepared for meeting the bridegroom, that is, to repent and believe in Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18-19; 13:1-5; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

But *at the second coming*, there will be no more opportunity to be converted or to be saved (Isaiah 61:2ab)! On the final judgement day Jesus Christ will exclude everyone who by then is still not converted. It is to them that he will say, "I do not know you!", that is, "I do not recognise you as belonging to those whom I am pleased to call my own!" (1 Corinthians 8:3; 2 Timothy 2:19).

After the second coming the gates of the New Jerusalem on the new earth (that is the kingdom of God in its final phase) will never be shut. The believers in Jesus Christ of all nations will bring their splendour (glory and honour) into it (Revelation 21:24-27).

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (the central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. *A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make.* Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 teaches about "watchfulness in God's kingdom".

The main message of the parable is the following. "Christians must prepare themselves for the second coming of Jesus Christ and constantly stay watchful and ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly for everyone!"

The emphasis is not on the person coming to Jesus during his life, but on the event of the second coming of Jesus. The moment of final divine intervention in history will be sudden and unexpected! The final call (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16), the final harvest (Revelation 14:15-16) and the final judgement (Revelation 14:18-19) will be quite sudden and unexpected!

Only those who live their lives in dedication to Jesus Christ will enter with him into God's kingdom in its final manifestation of "the new heaven and new earth"! Those who are not prepared, that is, who have not surrendered their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, will be excluded!

Watchfulness and preparedness are two of the basic characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom are well prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ. They are not complacent. They do not delay to make

preparations. The first step to get prepared is to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (John 1:12-13). Thereafter, Christians are constantly watchful and ready to meet Jesus Christ at his second coming. The people of God's kingdom know that once Jesus Christ has returned, the door of grace is irrevocably closed! You are only really prepared when you are ready to meet Jesus Christ at any time, when you are not ashamed of your conduct in the present time and when you are not standing with empty hands at his second coming.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach compare to what the parable of the ten virgins teaches?

Luke 13:22-30. Jesus urges all people to leave their wickedness and to accept him as Saviour. They must earnestly strive, that is, wrestle with all their strength, to enter into God's kingdom. They should fight against their sinful nature, worldliness and Satan and also against complacency, procrastination and negligence. Everyone who strives and struggles, in obedience to Christ's command, will definitely enter! Salvation is however not the product of human exertion, but of God giving people the grace to do his will (Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 2:12-13).

Matthew 7:21-23; 8:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:19. Jesus warns people that association with the Christian Church or Christian activities does not guarantee entrance into God's kingdom. What is important is that a person is born again by Christ's work in him and that Jesus Christ acknowledges him as his own child

B. THE PARABLE OF THE BUDDING FIG TREE

Read Matthew 24:32-35. See supplement 16.

C. THE PARABLE OF THE WATCHFUL SERVANTS

Read Luke 12:35-40. See supplement 16.

D. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN MESSAGES OR LESSONS OF THE PARABLES ABOUT WATCHFULNESS IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parables concerning watchfulness in God's kingdom? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people must know what God or Jesus Christ is like.

The second coming of Jesus Christ will be sudden and unexpected. The prophecies of Christ concerning the things that will happen during the period between his first and second coming, will certainly happen. This fact should stimulate Christians to be watchful and prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ!"

(2) Christians must know what they should be like.

Christians must be constantly prepared and ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Only those who live their lives in dedication to Jesus Christ will enter with him into God's kingdom in its final manifestation of the new heaven and new earth! Those who are not prepared, that is, who have not surrendered their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, will be excluded!"

(3) Genuine and nominal Christians are both alike and different.

All people who *profess* to believe in Jesus Christ are alike in many ways. Both are on their way to meet the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

However, some Christians are wise. They are genuine Christians. They have turned away from their old life towards Jesus Christ and believe in him as their Saviour and Lord. They are convinced that they need to be prepared for the second coming by living lives in trust and obedience to Christ's teachings.

Others who call themselves "Christians" are foolish. They are called not genuine Christians (or nominal Christians or cultural Christians). Although they participate in all kinds of Christian meetings and activities, they can still be excluded

from entering the kingdom of God. Why? Because Jesus Christ says in Matthew 7:21-23 to them. “I never knew you!” What is important is not that you are baptised, participate in the Lord’s Supper (or the mass), or participate in Christians meetings and activities, but that Jesus Christ knows you personally (cf. John 10:27-28) and that he calls you to follow him as his disciple (cf. Luke 9:57-62)!

At his second coming, Jesus will exclude all people who are still not genuinely converted (that is, who do not believe in him). he says, “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again!’” (John 3:7; cf. John 1’12-13; 3:5,16,18,36). He will not recognise them as belonging to those he is pleased to call his own. Such people may “have the form of godliness, but deny the power of being godly” (2 Timothy 3:5). They are unprepared on their way to meet their Judge!

(4) There will be a long time span between the first and second coming of Jesus.

Although some Christians throughout the centuries have expected “the imminent return of Jesus Christ”, Christ himself said that his second coming would take a long time. During this long period the gospel will be preached to every nation in the world (Matthew 24:14), there will be many persecutions against Christians (Matthew 24:9), Christians must put their talents to work to spread the kingship of Christ (Matthew 25:16,19) and disciples of Jesus Christ must be made in all the nations (people groups) of the world (Matthew 28:18-20)!

(5) The second coming of Jesus will be sudden, unexpected, visible and audible.

There will be no two second comings (the first so-called “rapture of believers or Church” before the Great Tribulation and the so-called “revelation of Christ” at the end of the Great Tribulation). There will be no secret (invisible and inaudible) second coming of Christ! Although the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ will be sudden and unexpected (Luke 12:40; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15), it will be visible and audible to all people in creation (Matthew 24:30-31; 25:6; 26:64; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 1:7)!

(6) Preparedness is not transferable from one person to another.

The wise Christians cannot transfer their preparations to the foolish Christians. Every person is personally responsible for his own sin (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18) and is personally responsible to give an account to Jesus Christ. Every person is responsible to convert and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5). Even people who have never heard the gospel or have not understood the gospel remain responsible for their response to God’s revelation in the creation (Romans 1:19-20), in their hart and conscience (Romans 2:14-16)! In summary, that means that every person is personally responsible to be prepared and ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ (Mt 25:7-9; Ps 49:7; Prov 9:12).

(7) There will be no second chance for those who are not ready.

For those who are not ready, that is, the unsaved before they die as well as the unsaved at the second coming of Christ, there will never be another chance to be saved (Matthew 25:10-12; 10:32-33; 24:37-42; 25:34-46; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Galatians 6:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). (1 Peter 3:18-22 refers to the ascent of Jesus Christ into heaven and NOT to a descent into Hades!)

(8) Watchfulness and preparedness is required from all Christians.

Because the day and hour of the second coming of Jesus Christ is completely unknown, all Christians are required to be constantly watchful and prepared (Matthew 25:13; Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Peter 1:5-11).

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group *to pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study “the ten virgins” together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Daniel 7, 8, 9 and 12** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (19) **Romans 13:14.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **Romans 15:1-33.** Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God’s kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.