

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the ten virgins** in Matthew 25:1-13. This is a parable concerning WATCHFULNESS IN GOD'S KINGDOM. Please read Matthew 25:1-13.

(S) Matthew 25:1-12 says, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish one's took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' '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.' 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. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you'."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable.

The picture of a Jewish wedding. 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, "the pledge to be married" was a binding contract. It was a *whole family matter*. It included the choice of a marriage partner (Gen 21:21), sometimes the giving of a compensation gift to the family of the bride (Gen 29:18, 34:12) and the giving of gifts to the bride and the groom (Gen 24:59,61, 1 Ki 9:16). The wedding ceremony was a *public event*. It included some of the following elements: The bride and groom wore wedding garments (Ps 45:13-14). They were accompanied by bridesmaids and friends of the groom (Ps 45:14, Jn 3:29). There was a marriage procession (Mt 25:1-14) and a marriage feast, sometimes for a whole week long (Mt 22:1-14, Jn 2:1-10, Judg 14:17). The most solemn part of the wedding ceremony was establishing a marriage covenant of which God himself was a witness (Mal 2:14, Prov 2:17, Ezek 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 (Gen 29:21-23, Dt 22:13-21; Heb 13:4).

(S) The virgins and their going out to meet the groom. 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?

The fact that the best Greek texts of the New Testament has nothing whatever to say about the bride being with the groom in the arriving procession, it is possible that the bride was still at her parent's home and was waiting with her bridesmaids to be taken in a procession to the groom's home for the wedding feast. Another possibility was that the bride, the bridesmaids and the invited guests were all gathered at the home of the groom, which was either his own new home or that of his parents, and they were waiting for the groom to arrive. These details are not relevant. Everything was ready, except that the groom had not yet arrived!

(T) They went out to meet the groom. Verse 1 is a summary statement of the story, because the bridesmaids actually went out to meet the groom only in verse 10. Originally all ten girls had the intention to go out and meet the groom, but strictly speaking, only the five wise girls actually went out to meet the groom. The five foolish girls had gone to buy oil.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of this parable?

The setting of the parable 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.

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

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! (Mt 24:36-50). He will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief coming in the night (1 Thes 5:1-4).

(T) POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.

This parable has often been abused by allegorical interpretation. For example:

Augustine (354-430) interpreted the parable as follows: The number *five* represents *the soul* in the body, because it makes use of the five senses, which is the only way of perception. 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*, and *oil*, which represents *love*.

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* represents 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*.

Although these above mentioned Christians taught many good things, their interpretations of this parable must be rejected. Let us take turns to explain which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant:

(S) The ten virgins are a relevant detail, because Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven with them! They represent both the true and the nominal Christians, who still live mixed together in this present world. While the nominal Christians are not watchful and not prepared, the true Christians are watchful and prepared for Jesus Christ to return at his Second Coming! The number *ten* is a complete number, but because Jesus does not explain it, it cannot be proved that it represents the complete number of Christians that ever lived on earth.

(T) The lamps are not given any particular meaning. They were devices equipped with oil receptacles and wicks. During the procession, these lamps were held aloft like torches by means of wooden poles.

(S) The oil. Jesus does not explain the symbolical meaning of the oil. Therefore we should not speculate about its meaning or allegorise it. Oil was used to anoint a new king 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, who transforms a person and gives him the ability to prepare to welcome Jesus Christ. True Christians will always prepare themselves for the Second Coming of Christ. People who do not prepare themselves show that they are only nominal Christians.

(T) Five foolish and five wise girls. This is a very relevant detail. All ten girls expected the groom 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* for the coming of the groom. They had taken oil with them. The other five were *foolish*, because they were *totally unprepared* to meet the groom! They had lamps but they had taken no oil with them. They were careless, not forward-looking, guilty of inexcusable and senseless neglect, short-sighted, thoughtless!

(S) Becoming drowsy and falling asleep. 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 does not point to the weakening of the Church, but to *the preparedness of Christians*. Both the wise and the foolish virgins fell asleep. Only wise Christians can fall asleep without fear, because they are always prepared! Foolish people live in a false security. Foolish people 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!

(T) 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 accompanying the groom. Nevertheless, it seems that the groom was still a

considerable distance away from the house, because the girls first had to trim the wicks of their lamps, light their lamps and walk a distance in the dark night to meet the bridegroom. This is a relevant detail in so far that the Second Coming of Jesus will take a long time before he will actually come and that he will come unexpectedly!

(S) The virgins lit their lamps, but the lamps of the foolish virgins went out. This detail is not explained, but enhances the main message of being completely prepared. 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.

(T) The wise virgins refused to give the foolish virgins oil. This detail is not explained, but enhances the main difference between being wise or foolish. 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 girls had to go out to meet the groom and then escort him back to the house with their lamps still burning brightly all the time. The refusal by the wise girls was therefore not unreasonable. It proved that they had thought ahead and had prepared well for their task. It also shows that the groom is always a higher priority than other people. 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!

(S) The door was shut. This was contrary to reality, because an earthly bridegroom would not exclude such girls. But this is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning and therefore the shutting of the door is very real. This is a relevant detail, because there will come a time when the door to God's kingdom will definitely be shut! Before the Second Coming of Jesus, it is still the time of grace. The preaching of the gospel calls people to get prepared, that is, to repent, to believe in Jesus Christ and to fill their lives with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). But at the Second Coming, there will be no more opportunity to be converted or to be saved (Isa 61:2ab)! Jesus Christ will exclude everyone who was disobedient to the gospel message (2 Thes 1:8-10). Jesus will say to them, "I do not know you!", that is, "I do not recognise you as belonging to those whom I am pleased to call my own!"

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

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 make the right preparations for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and be constantly watchful and ready. Jesus Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly!" The moment of divine intervention, of calling and of judgement is always unexpected! Only those who live their lives in consecration 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 foundational 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 make sure that they have accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. After that, they 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 prepared when your attitude is one of always being ready to welcome Christ when he appears unexpectedly. You are prepared when you do not feel ashamed of how you are living. You are prepared when you are bearing fruit and will not stand with empty hands at his Second Coming.

(S) **POINT 5. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise some more teachings or messages of this parable.

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, because they have turned away from their old life to 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. But other people are foolish. Although they may go to church, read the Bible, sing, pray, confess their faith and even preach Christ's name, they will still be excluded from God's kingdom. Jesus Christ will say to them. "I don't know you!" The important thing is therefore not whether you participate in all these Christian activities, but *whether Jesus Christ knows you personally!* At his Second Coming, Jesus will exclude all people who are still not converted. He will not recognise them as belonging to those he is pleased to call his own. Such people have the form of godliness, but deny the power of being godly (Mt 7:21-23; 2 Tim 3:5). Such people travel into the future completely unprepared to meet their Judge.

(T) 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 Christ, Christ himself said that his Second Coming will take time. During that long time, there will be persecutions, the gospel will be preached to every nation in the world and Christians will put their talents to work (Mt 24:9,14; 25:16,19; 2 Pet 3:9).

(S) The Second Coming of Jesus will be sudden, unexpected, visible and audible. There will be no secret Second Coming! Although the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be *sudden* and *unexpected* (Lk 12:40; 1 Thes 5:1-4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15), it will be *visible* and *audible* to all people! (Mt 24:30-31; 25:6; 26:64; 1 Thes 4:16; Rev 1:7).

(T) Preparedness is not transferable from one person to another. The wise Christians cannot transfer their preparedness to the foolish Christians. Every person is personally responsible for his own sin (Jer 31:29-30). Every person is personally responsible to convert and believe the gospel (Mk 1:15; Lk 13:1-5). And every person is personally responsible to be prepared and ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Mt 25:7-9).

(S) 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. (Mt 25:10-12; 10:32-33; 24:37-42; 25:34-46; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Gal 6:7-8; 2 Thes 1:8-9).

(T) Watchfulness and preparedness is required from all Christians. Because the time of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is completely unknown, all Christians are required to be constantly watchful and prepared. (Mt 25:13; Prov 27:1; 2 Cor 6:2; 2 Pet 1:5-11).

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the sheep and the goats. As preparation, please read Matthew 25:31-46.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".