

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

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[0 : 00] Matthew 25 Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But, verse 6, at midnight there was a cry, Here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. 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.

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. Afterward, the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

[1 : 11] Argyle Street. There's an indoor market on Argyle Street. Have you been to the indoor market on Argyle Street? Up the steps there. You can go in. I was there yesterday. And as you walk around the indoor market on Argyle Street, amidst the recycled inkjet cartridge counter, and the cafe, and the Chinese medicine dispenser, and the clothing stores, there's this room.

You'll see a room. And there's people sat down inside. It's a little bit like a waiting room at a doctor's. People sat down on chairs around the wall.

But they're not waiting for prescriptions, but they're waiting to have their palms read. I was there yesterday. I wasn't a customer. I was there yesterday. There was five people.

Looked interesting. I walked in to the waiting area, and I looked around on the walls. There were some rhymes on the walls. I read those. I was interested how much it costs to have your palm read. But there was no price anywhere. I asked one of the customers, 20 pounds, she said. It's amazing. Five people waiting. That's 100 pounds in my mathematics. I don't know how long the lady took.

[2 : 20] Kizia, her name is. Cleavoyant and palmist, it says outside. People are intrigued, aren't they, about the future. We're intrigued about the future.

My own predictions are very limited. But I do have a certain ability that not many of you know about. As I stood this morning in the bathroom and looked in the mirror, I was trying to look ahead and look into the future.

And yes, it was underarm deodorant for today. I could see into the future. I used to have a motorcycle shop down in Derbyshire. And I sold it in 1997 to a Mr. Perry Power.

Perry was a derivative manager in the city of London. And I've never yet found out exactly what a derivative manager is. But I know he dealt with vast millions of pounds worth of stocks and also commodities.

But I don't know quite exactly how that works out. But I was fascinated. He worked at Tokyo Mitsubishi Bank. And I talked to him about it. And he said, would you like to visit Tokyo Mitsubishi Bank in the city of London?

[3 : 27] And yes, I did. So he arranged this visit. I went on to the trading floor of Tokyo Mitsubishi Bank and there was rows and rows of screens. You see the sort of thing on television.

On some of the screens on the top there was punch banks. And there was traders there trading, looking intently into the screen. Trying to look into the future. Looking at curves. Trying to see which way they're going.

Trying to anticipate commodity prices and stocks, whether they're going up or down. The word is extrapolate. They're trying to extrapolate the curve. See what's going to happen in the future.

Millions of pounds traded in a day. We want to see into the future, don't we? We're intrigued. Think about this. At the elections, we're involved with that, aren't we? Directing our future and our children's future.

And Glasgow. It's a university city, isn't it? Glasgow. Students very much looking into the future. Thinking about their future careers. Looking ahead. You know, we have a fascination, don't we? [4 : 30] About the future. And the disciples here, they're no different at all. But listen, their interest in the future, well, it isn't their retirement age.

Will it be 60? Or 65? No. It's a massive panorama of cosmic history that they're trying to sort of assimilate into their thinking.

They know Jesus is going to die. They know he's going to be raised from the dead again. They know that he's going to return someday in judgment, chapter 16. They've got sort of those things in place.

Yet they want to know more. It's as if their appetites have been whetted. So chapter 24, verse 3. I'll quote you, the very words. These are the words of the disciples.

They say, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age to Jesus? Anyone ask you such a massive question over coffee at work? It's a big one, isn't it?

[5 : 26] We can chat about retirement, can't we? Chat about who will win the Formula One World Championship. Who will do that? Ferrari have got new cars for next weekend. Will they claw back their deficit?

We can think about those things. We can plan our career. We can get our pension statements. But do we ever extrapolate things into eternity and ask the big one?

Well, the disciples have asked the right person, haven't they? Isn't it good to have the creator of the universe to chat with? Just think about that. No inhibitions, no reserve, bang, when will it be, Jesus? And chapters 24 and 25 are sort of flowing out of that question. Chapter 26, we know Jesus is arrested. Chapter 27, he's dead.

So, can you see this passage before us here? It's really very interesting. It's an interesting section, at least I think it is. And Jesus is talking about the times in which we live.

[6 : 27] The last days, the time before Christ returns as judge. It's 2005. It's speaking into our times, this passage here before us.

Well, that was by way of introduction. So, ten virgins. Well, that means ten unmarried girls in Bible language.

They're ten bridesmaids, aren't they? And Jesus paints this picture of first century marriage etiquette. It can be quite a palaver getting married, can't it?

Nearly, so every day, I cycle past a shop. It sells wedding dresses and what looks like bridal shoes on shelves as I cycle past it. I go past it every single day.

We read articles, don't we? They sort of can tell us how many thousands of pounds it costs. Get married. We can buy magazines, buy books.

[7 : 26] Borders bookshop. So, magazines. Here's one here. Cosmopolitan Bride. David Robry's getting married this year. You can, where is he?

There you are, David. You can have this afterwards. And it would be the same in the first century, you know. I suppose if they printed Cosmopolitan Bride in the first century, it was a Borders bookshop somewhere.

You could get it down off the shelf and you'd be able to read about the best wedding dresses and the finest lamp oil. Trouble is, in this parable, we're on tenterhooks.

Jesus has introduced a division. Listen, and this division, it's Glasgow. And yes, even this church building, there's two groups. You'll see verse 2. Look. Can you see?

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. Well, where are the foolish, we ask? Verses 3 and 4 is the answer. Look. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them.

[8 : 28] And the contrast, verse 4, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. Do you see the difference? No oil, flasks of oil, reserve of oil.

It's like there's a little tiny teacup full of petrol in a chauffeur-driven limousine compared to a tank overflowing and full to the brim.

Do you see the difference? It's all right. It's all right unless, well, unless the chauffeur gets lost or there's some traffic detour or the Kingston Bridge is closed.

And then verse 5, look down at verse 5, what happens. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. Bliss. What a lovely picture, isn't it?

Ten bridesmaids sleeping, the anticipation of it. It's like the days of Noah. Some are ready and some are not. It's Buchanan Street. Here we are.

[9 : 26] We're all here, united around God's Word. It's a busy day in the city. Here we are. We're asleep with the bridesmaids. Cuddled up. Indistinguishable until, that is, Christ returns.

Verse 6. But at midnight, there was a cry, here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him. It's Christ's return, isn't it? It's going to be a massive, cosmic event when Christ returns.

Not something local. Not like the earthquake that's just happened in Indonesia. It's going to be massive, global. Isaiah paints the picture of Christ's return.

He says that the mountains and hills will burst into songs. The trees will be clapping their hands. It's a massive, cosmic thing and even the creation seems to be celebrating as it sees its saviour coming.

Verse 7. Then all those virgins trimmed their lamps and the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out.

[10 : 33] Help! That's what's happening, isn't it? But on judgment day, there's no bargaining. No piggyback rides into eternity. No osmosis of salvation.

Help! They shout. It's a crisis, isn't it? It's a trauma. The unseen, listen, is suddenly out in the open as Christ appears.

No hiding, no more camouflage within the church. And Christ does that, doesn't he, friends? He exposes. We read his word. He exposes what's going on in our hearts.

Adam covered it up, didn't he? Closed himself. But the appearance of Jesus, it tears all that away. Jesus is saying here, he's saying that we each need to be living lives of readiness.

Verse 10. And there's a chilling finality about this. They're not my words, they're the words of the judge. To his own bunch of disciples and to us today.

[11 : 36] You see verse 10, look at verse 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, what was it?

Do you see? The end of verse 10. Shut. The door was shut. It's final, isn't it? We can almost hear the noise as it closes. Thuds close. The key turns. The locks clunk into place.

Shut, says Jesus. Verse 11. Afterwards, the other virgins came also. Lord, Lord, open to us. Does that sound familiar? It's a bit like, it's a bit like the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 7 of Matthew's Gospel.

Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father. Lord, Lord, open to us.

They're saying, the disciples must be shocked at this point. If we were there, we would be looking at each other. Let it not be us on judgment day. Let that not happen to us. Marcus Sloan, he was the Bishop of Sydney in Australia.

[12 : 42] He captures this moment very well. Didn't know Marcus Sloan, but I know Dick Lucas who gave me this book. Listen to this. They stood outside with the urgent appeal, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But the bridegroom himself was constrained to declare, I know you not. Those words mark their ultimate exclusion. They stood without, huddled in the darkness, their lamps useless, their cries wasted.

It was all a vivid picture of the march of future events, and the final contrast is stark. There will be no time to provide when the midnight summons is heard.

Those whose lamps are burning will go in to share the marriage supper of the great king. The door will be shut as a sign of security and permanence, an untold blessing. But the door that shuts them in will shut all others out.

In spite of frantic appeals, the stern declaration, I know you not, will toll the end of all false hope. I guess that will toll into eternity, won't it?

[13 : 46] So you remember how it started? It was a little innocent question, wasn't it, by the disciples. When will it be, Jesus? And Jesus is saying, don't work up to a date.

I want your whole life, every moment, take up your cross and follow me. This parable, Jesus is wanting us, listen, to harmonise our lives now, today, with what is objectively true, now, and in

eternity.

It's becoming, listen, it's becoming what we already are in Christ. Friends, one day, all of our eyes will close for the last time.

The surgeons shrug the shoulders, they walk away and take their gloves off. And we'll expel our last breath back to dust. On which side of the door will you wake?

Your children, which side of the door do you want them to be? What are we doing about it? It's foolish or wise. An elderly lady, she once lent me £10,000.

[14:57] I used to have a business and I'd got myself into a cash flow problem. I knew this lady quite well and I told her about my problem. She lent me £10,000 and I used to visit her house quite regularly.

I got to know her quite well. She used to take me out and feed me. I became a Christian along the way. She wasn't a Christian but I never actually explained the gospel to her.

Looking back, I suppose I was a little bit like her son. The problem was she committed suicide in 1996. Her name was Anne Beverly and she was the mum of punk rock singer Sid Vicious.

You might have heard of Sid Vicious. So I was living like a foolish virgin not caught up with the priorities of eternity. I simply never sort of bothered explaining the gospel to her.

I never explained how she could be saved. Another day I thought it's like the days of Noah. Eat, drink, marry and giving in marriage. A wise life or a foolish life?

[16:07] That's the option. Here's the question then. Are we living like Christians in these last days? Or as God looks on can he see incompatibility, incoherence, a sort of disjointed Christian life?

We're sort of, you know, we're not quite at home in the waters of eternity. Not living like we're saved. Not sort of caught up in this new creation that Christ brought in with his resurrection from the dead.

Friends, we need to discard our old ways to become like Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

But listen, made himself nothing. Taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself to become obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross, the apostle Paul writes.

Did you hear that? Were you listening? Unlike each of us, unlike each one of us here, Jesus lived a life of total obedience.

[17:21] Listen, a wise life, and that wise life took him to the cross. Friends, you know, if we're honest with ourselves, we know really that we deserve to be shut out.

I certainly do. Shut out with the foolish virgins knocking on the door. Perhaps there's someone here. You think that could be you. You know, there's a certain uncertainty about that day.

And you've maybe found your way in today. You'd like to make sure. Listen, as Jesus died, this is important, as Jesus died, he was a little bit like a foolish virgin.

God shut him out. Lord, Lord, verse 11, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He said. Verse 12 of our parable, truly I do not know you.

Jesus on the cross, the sky went black as God closed the door on him. Friends, trust this Jesus and he'll deal with all that would otherwise lock you out.

[18:29] He'll do that for you. He'll take that horrible experience for you. And remarkably, listen, this is wisdom. It's true. It's amazing.

Isn't it amazing? The foolishness in us. Well, he takes it and we become wise. And here, we're sort of touching the heart of the gospel.

So the question is, as we finish, are we caught up with this? Caught up so that we can also be raised with Jesus Christ into resurrected glory and live for all of eternity?

Do our lives, do they look like we're caught up with this good news? Wise, living wise lives and not foolish lives. Our decisions, how we use our time, the time that God gives us, wise or foolish?

How are we living? Our money. Do we have the priorities of eternity with our money? Wise or foolish? foolish. Here it is then.

[19:31] And Jesus, well, he leaves us with a verse. It's a verse to take to work with you, a verse to take home with you, maybe a verse to put on the fridge. It's verse 13.

Have a look with me at the end there. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Shall we pray? Dear Father, we pray that you'd forgive our foolishness.

You'll deal with that through your Son on the cross. And we pray, Father, that you'd help us to live as your children in these last days. Help us to radiate your wisdom into this foolish world. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and for all of eternity. We ask in Christ's name.
Amen. Amen.