

## The Ten Virgins | Matthew 25:1-13

*The phrase “kingdom of heaven” often refers to God’s glorious kingdom in the world to come. But the term is also used to refer to God’s kingdom on earth where he graciously rules by faith in human hearts and lives. In the following parable, Jesus teaches how the members of God’s kingdom on earth will prepare themselves for the end of this world.*

<sup>1</sup> [Jesus said,] “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup> “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ <sup>7</sup> Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> ‘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.’ <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ <sup>12</sup> But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ <sup>13</sup> “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour”

In Jesus’ day, “there was a religious ceremony of betrothal which legally bound the couple together as man and wife. Weeks or months later the bridegroom went to the house of the bride in order to bring her to his home. The bride’s attendants, the virgins, went out to meet the groom and escort him to the bride. They took their lamps to light the way and to provide festive lights for the happy occasion.”<sup>1</sup>

1. In what ways were the ten virgins in Jesus’ parable alike? Although similar in many respects, what made five of the virgins “foolish” and the other five “wise”?

2. The five foolish virgins were not allowed to enter the wedding banquet because

- they were not as pure as the wise virgins.
- they were absent-minded.
- they were too cheap to buy their own oil.
- they were not prepared.

3. In Jesus’ parable, whom do the bridegroom and the virgins represent? What do the wedding banquet and midnight represent?

4. What is the “oil” that makes one prepared to enter the heavenly wedding banquet? Why can’t this oil be shared?

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<sup>1</sup> (NPH, Sermon Studies on the Gospels: Series A, page 339).

5. After reading the following passage, explain the words of Christ, the omniscient Bridegroom, to those without oil: “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” “[Jesus said,] ‘Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before me, I will disown him before my Father in heaven’” (Matthew 10:32,33).

6. The Greek word used here for “keep watch” literally means *keep on watching*! Why do Christians today, two thousand years later, need this encouragement? How do we stay watchful and prepared?

7. Many people who are expecting Christ’s return and who feel prepared for that return will, like the foolish virgins, be completely surprised by Jesus’ words “I don’t know you.” Explain.

8. Why is it important to remember the following truth? “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise [regarding his return], as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

9. Why did Jesus use a wedding banquet (rather than a business meeting, for instance) as a picture of the Last Day? How does this make you feel? What does this lead you to do?

**Helps:** (1) In outward ways, the virgins appeared to be the same—all were expecting and waiting for the bridegroom and all became drowsy and fell asleep. Five, however, in their shortsightedness and failure to prepare, showed themselves to be foolish. The other five were wise, having prepared for the bridegroom’s arrival whenever it might be. (2) The five foolish virgins did not enter the banquet because they were not prepared. (3) The virgins are those on earth who profess to be Christians and who expect the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, to return. He will return at “midnight,” that is, when he is least expected, and will welcome his people into his eternal, heavenly “wedding banquet.” (4) The “oil” is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Faith alone saves. While we can share our faith by witnessing about Christ, we cannot believe for another. (5) Because of God-given faith, Christians are known intimately by God. They belong to him and receive everything that is his. Because unbelievers have rejected him as Savior, Jesus will not acknowledge them as his own. (6) Humanly speaking, “the bridegroom [is] a long time in coming” and the temptation to become “drowsy and [fall] asleep” is very real. The Holy Spirit keeps us faithful, watchful, and prepared through the gospel in Word and sacrament. The Lord answers our prayers for strengthening and uses the fellowship of the church to support and encourage us. (7) Many people who have lost their faith become self-deluded, finding confidence for the Last Day in their good works, in a Christian lifestyle, in an outward religious profession, in the fact that they were once baptized, or even in mere membership in a Christian church. Without true faith in Jesus, they will be excluded from the wedding banquet, yet because of their self-delusion, they will be surprised by this. (8) After two millennia, we may be tempted to think that Christ has forgotten his promise to return. Yet the Lord is demonstrating his loving patience, wanting and waiting for more people to believe and be saved. In his time, he will keep his promise to return. (9) A wedding banquet is one of the most festive and joy-filled events we know. Likewise, heaven is a place of joy—pure and unending joy in God’s presence, where we will experience eternal pleasures (Psalm 16:11). This truth fills us with excitement, longing, and anticipation and moves us to stay watchful and prepared by placing our trust in Christ alone for salvation.