

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13)

The Parable of the Ten Virgins, found in Matthew 25:1–13, is one of the many teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom of Heaven and in this particular parable emphasises the need for readiness. It appears within the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus speaks about future events, judgment, and the coming of the Son of Man. The parable describes ten virgins who go out to meet a bridegroom, but only five are prepared for his arrival. The main focus of the passage is the importance of being ready for an event that is certain but whose timing is unknown.

The parable begins with the statement: “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”¹ This shows that the story is meant to explain a spiritual truth. The virgins represent people who are waiting, and the bridegroom is generally understood to represent Christ.² The difference between the two groups is simple but important: the wise virgins take extra oil with them, while the foolish ones do not. The oil is necessary for their lamps as they prepare to meet the bridegroom in the darkness.

One important part of the story is that the bridegroom is delayed. While waiting, all ten virgins fall asleep. This shows that the problem is not the waiting itself, but the lack of preparation. When the cry comes at midnight announcing the arrival of the bridegroom, the wise virgins are ready, but the foolish ones are not. They realise too late that they do not have enough oil. When they ask the others for help, they are told to go and buy for themselves.³ This shows that readiness cannot be shared or borrowed from someone else.

The most serious moment in the parable comes when the foolish virgins return and find the door closed. The bridegroom says, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”⁴ This statement shows the finality of the situation. There is no second opportunity at that point. R. T. France explains that the parable teaches that the time to prepare is limited and cannot be delayed indefinitely.⁵ The closed door is a strong image of separation and judgment.

This parable also reflects a wider issue in early Christianity, especially the question of delay. Many believers expected Christ to return quickly, but as time passed, they had to learn how to live in that waiting period. Craig S. Keener notes that such teachings encourage believers to remain watchful and faithful even when the fulfilment seems delayed.⁶ The focus is therefore not on knowing the exact time, but on maintaining a constant state of readiness.

The parable ends with a clear instruction: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”⁷ This final statement summarises the message. The emphasis is on being alert and prepared at all times. The story itself is simple, yet its meaning is serious.

In conclusion, the Parable of the Ten Virgins teaches the importance of readiness in light of an uncertain future. It highlights personal responsibility and the need to be prepared in

advance. Within the Gospel of Matthew, it forms part of a wider teaching on judgment and the coming Kingdom. Its message remains relevant, as it calls for a steady and prepared response rather than last-minute action.

Footnotes

1. Matthew 25:1 (KJV).
2. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 948.
3. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 595.
4. Matthew 25:12 (KJV).
5. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 952.
6. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 596.
7. Matthew 25:13 (KJV).

Bibliography

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Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)

The Holy Bible, King James Version