

MATTHEW 25 – THE PARABLES OF THE TEN VIRGINS AND OF THE TALENTS



In Matthew 25, Jesus continues explaining what will happen in the end time events with three more parables to add to the two already given. He had just warned His disciples not to spiritually let down and become unprofitable servants. We will cover two of these three parables in this study and they are vital for all believers to take heed--especially those living in the end times.

He begins, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose 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, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Mt. 25:1-13).

This illustration of the wedding feast is based on a typical ceremony in Jesus' day, which was very different from weddings today.

Barclay notes, "The point of this story lies in a Jewish custom which is very different from anything we know. When a couple married, they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week they kept open house, they were treated, and even addressed, as prince and princess. It was the gladdest week in all their lives. To the festivities of that week their chosen friends were admitted, and it was not only the marriage ceremony, it was also *that joyous week* that the foolish virgins missed, because they were unprepared" (*Daily Study Bible*, notes on Mt. 25:1, emphasis throughout).

This wedding feast analogy applies to the Church today—and that means all of us!

The Evangelical Bible Commentary points out, "At the end of betrothal period, it was customary for the bridegroom to lead his friends *to the bride's home*, thence to escort her and her friends (the virgins) *to his home for the wedding festival* (see Mt. 22:1-14). The lamps are actually torches—long sticks wrapped with rags soaked in olive oil and set afire for the bridal procession. At news of the bridegroom's approach, all ten virgins pour oil on their torches; but only five have reserve jars of oil needed later in the festivities. Were they to share their oil, there would soon be no torches at all. For their negligence the foolish virgins are *banned* from the banquet" (notes on Mt. 25:1).

In the Bible, oil is typically a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) while a lamp represents God's Word (Psalm 119:105). So these ten virgins would represent the "spiritual virgins" or members of God's Church in the end times (see 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 14:4).

Expositor's Commentary adds, "Normally the bridegroom with some close friends left his home to go to the bride's home, where there were various ceremonies, followed by a procession through the streets--after nightfall--to his home. The ten virgins may be bridesmaids who have been assisting the bride; and they expect to meet the groom as he comes from the bride's house... Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch would be assumed to be party crashers or even brigands. The festivities, which might last several days, would formally get under way at the groom's house" (Notes on Mt. 25:1).

Now we can understand the purpose of this analogy: Jesus Christ is warning the Church members to be spiritually ready for His coming. Just as there were ten virgins waiting to be invited to the wedding feast, members are awaiting the Bridegroom's invitation. Although all dozed off, signifying at the end times members would not be as spiritually alert as they should be, only five had spiritual reserves, while the other five had neglected their spiritual life and their spiritual level

had dwindled to below the minimum. When the end time trials came, they did not persevere.

So this is a parallel of what will happen to the Church at Christ's coming. His Bride, the Church, awaits Him here on earth, and He comes from His Father's house in heaven, along with the heavenly host to receive the Bride in the clouds and then make His home with her on the earth in His new Jerusalem (see Ez. 47). In a sense, they will then have a spiritual honeymoon—not for a week, as these festivities lasted, but for 1,000 years!

Further, when Christ reaches the earth's clouds, the trumpets will sound, and those faithful who are alive and those who died "in Christ" will be raised to eternal life in the first resurrection (1 Thes. 4:16-17; Rev. 20:4). But some members will not have spiritually prepared themselves, and will not be resurrected—to their shame (see 1 John 2:28).

Jesus will defeat the nations coming against Him and then land on the Mount of Olives (Zec. 14:4; Acts 1:11-12). Satan will be put away, and the Wedding Feast will take place. Christ, the Bridegroom, will rule the earth for a thousand years with His Bride—the Church.

The next parable is also a lesson for the Church at Christ's coming—of our responsibilities now.

Jesus said, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'

"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Mt. 25:14-30).

Here Jesus Christ focuses on the need for a member to be spiritually active and serving when He returns. What He has given His servants is His Holy Spirit, with each given a measure of it along with differing gifts—but none of these gifts are supposed to be "showy," if used correctly.

Expositor's Commentary mentions, "This parable goes beyond the first three (Mt. 24:42-25:13) in that it expects the watchfulness of the servants to manifest itself during the master's absence, not only in preparedness and performance of duty, even if there is a long delay, but in *an improvement of the allotted 'talents'* till the day of reckoning....Slaves in the ancient world could enjoy considerable responsibility and authority. The man going on a journey entrusts his cash assets to three of his slaves who are understood to be almost partners in his affairs and who may share some of his profits...the parable lays intrinsic emphasis on the principle "to whom much is given, from him also shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

It is important to note this parable of the talents is similar to the parable of the pounds in Luke 19, but there are important differences.

A talent of silver is much greater than a pound of silver. While a pound of silver in that day was the equivalent of 100 denarii or 100 days of paid labor

for an average worker, a talent of silver was the equivalent of at least *sixty times* as much, or 6,000 days of paid labor—an enormous sum. In today's wages these would be the equivalent of \$10,000 for the pound of silver and \$600,000 for a talent of silver. Also, the parable of the talents, as also of the pounds, deals with wealth in the amounts of weights and does not strictly have to do with what we call talents today.

"This parable focuses primarily upon the useless servant," *The Preacher's Bible Commentary* explains. "Gifts that are not used are lost. The title 'talents' is unfortunate, in that in our language we use the word 'talent' to refer to natural aptitudes or abilities that people have. The talent in this story was a weight of value...and talents [of cash assets] were given to the several men according to their 'abilities'...This is a parable on responsibility" (notes on Mt. 25:14).

So, while in the parable of the talents, *differing* amounts of "talents" (spiritual) gifts to serve Christ were given according to the ability of each member (which includes, for instance, how one uses his wealth), in the parable of the pounds, each believer was initially given *the same amount* of God's spirit to develop. There is equity in both parables, since in the parable of the talents, each person only had to duplicate his initial amount to receive the same commendation, while in the parable of the pounds, each has the *same* amount at the start and only later is seen how each multiplies those fruits of the Spirit (although they don't receive the same reward—one receives 10 cities and the other 5 cities in the Millennium).

Expositor's mentions the first two servants began immediately to see how they could multiply their master's money. It says, "'At once' relates to the servant's promptness to put the money to work. The point is that the good servants felt the responsibility of their assignment and went to work without delay...They set up some business and worked with the capital to make it grow. But one servant, unwilling to work or take risks, merely dug a hole and buried the money.

"The accounting begins 'after a long time,' the implication being that the consummation of the kingdom will be long delayed...The first servant, who doubled his five talents, is praised, especially

for his faithfulness, and given two things: increased responsibility and a share in his master's *chara* (Greek for 'joy').

"The third servant accuses his master of being a 'hard' man. The servant is saying that the master is grasping, exploiting the labor of others, and putting the servant in a perilous position. Should he take the risk of trying to increase the one talent entrusted to him, he would see little of the profit. If he failed and lost everything, he would incur the master's wrath. Perhaps, too, he is piqued at having been given much less than the other two; so, in a rather spiteful act, he returns to his master what belongs to him, no more and no less. What this servant overlooks is his responsibility to his master and his obligation to discharge his assigned duties. His failure betrays his lack of love for his master, which he masks by blaming his master and excusing himself. Only the wicked servant blames his master. The foolish virgins failed from thinking their part too easy; the wicked servant fails from thinking his too hard. Grace never condones irresponsibility; even those given less are obligated to use and develop what they have. The master condemns the servant on the basis of the servant's own words, which prove his guilt. If the master was so hard and grasping, should not the servant have put the money where it would have been relatively safe, earn interest, and require no work....

"The talent entrusted to this wicked servant is taken from him; the relationship between master and servant is severed. It is given to the man who now has ten talents, following the kingdom rule Jesus had already taught in Mt. 13:12. Moreover, there is O.T. warrant for this pattern: on this basis the kingdom of Israel was stripped from Saul and given to David. The wicked servant is 'worthless,' for to fail to do good and use what God has entrusted us is grievous sin, which issues not only in the loss of neglected resources but in rejection by the master, banishment from his presence, and tears and gnashing of teeth. The parable insists that the watchfulness that must mark all Jesus' disciples does not lead to passivity but to doing one's duty, to growing, to husbanding and developing the resources God entrusts to us, till 'after a long time' the master returns and settles accounts." We do well to heed this lesson!