

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 25:1-13

Verses 1-5

'Then, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins. They took for themselves the lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five thought ahead. The foolish [maidens] who took the lamps did not bring oil with them. The wise took, for their use, oil in their flasks with their lamps. But the bridegroom was delayed so all of them became drowsy and slept.'

Then refers to the time of the end, the subject under discussion when the disciples asked about the events before the end (ch 24 and cf 23:30). As always, the Lord disliked speculation. Though he took the question seriously, he drove home the significance of the end for his followers.

Unmarried girls would meet **the bridegroom** as he came from his parent's home and travelled to the village of his fiancée. The bridegroom often played tricks on the maidens and deliberately **delayed** his arrival to catch them out with his surprise appearance. Therefore, **the lamps** were important in case he came in the evening. Some of the manuscripts mention **their lamps** but the reflexive pronoun emphasizes the girls taking the lamps **for themselves** εαυτου.

So the lamps were important but so too the preparedness of the virgin girls. **The wise** prudently took oil with them (Matt 7:24). As often happened, **the delaying** tactics of the bridegroom meant the ten **fell asleep**. The scene is now set.

Verses 6-9

But in the middle of the night was a shout: "Look, the bridegroom! Go out to meet [him]." **Then all those virgins put their lamps in order. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out. The wise answered, "Perhaps there may not be enough for us and you. Rather, go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves."**

The ten virgins were alerted by someone watching and were told to go out **to meet him**. This was their task. They were to honour him and greet his arrival for he, along with his fiancée, was the principle person.

However, the lack of thoughtfulness of the five foolish virgins became clear. They had not paid attention to the task assigned to them and treated it lightly. The wise had thought ahead and wanted to succeed in what they had been asked to do. Typically for those who are not serious about their roles, the foolish expected the wise to help them out. However, this would have put them in jeopardy of running out of oil.

Verses 10-13

Just as they departed to purchase [some oil] the bridegroom arrived and the ones who were ready entered with him into the feast and the door was closed. Later, the remaining virgins arrived saying, "Master, master, open up for us." But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." Watch, therefore, because you do not know the day nor the hour.'

The foolish virgins did not have what was required, therefore, they had to leave their post, as it were. Not much more oil was required because the bridegroom arrived shortly after they had departed. Immediately **the ready ones** ετοιμοι **joined the bridegroom and together entered and partook of the feast**. They were now in the exciting event and participating in the joy of **the feast** and the occasion of the marriage. The wedding banquet was a favourite image of the kingdom of God for it contained the notion of joy and consummation (Rev 19:7). God and his people were together in bonds of grace and redemption and the children of God could enjoy his love. Because of this, the virgin attendants have a great joy in their master (Jn 3:29).

The door was closed. Not only is there now a physical barrier stopping others from entering but the crucial time has gone (Lk 13:25). Time has elapsed; the bridegroom has arrived and the guests including the five wise virgins have entered the banqueting hall. The time for entry has now ceased.

Of course, **the remaining virgins** attempt to enter but their task was not completed. They had started but had no thought of the time required to complete the task, hoping for just a short waiting. In fact, the truth be known, they didn't really want to give too much time to the task. Their pleas are too late. The locked door will not be opened. Yet, it is not only too late, but the one they call **master** solemnly declares that they are to him complete strangers and not the invited guests. He gives them no recognition at all: **Truly I say to you, I do not know you.** In the theological sense, in the book of life, their names are not listed and they cease to be God's creations (7:23; Lk 13:27). They are no longer the chosen, the elect.

The Lord's warning follows: **Watch, therefore, because you do not know the day nor the hour.** This **watching**, γρηγορεῖτε, is not merely knowledge of Christ's return or a passive attendance at worship. It is rather, like the five wise virgins, an active service of Christ till he appears at the end of the age (Lk 12:35). Temptation overtakes those who do not watch. Watching requires an active resistance to distractions or those things that make one complacent (26:40f). Another aspect of this watching is the fact that believers in Christ do not know **the day nor the hour** (24:42). In fact we do not the year or the century. The days right down to the hours are the very times required in the Lord's service. Serving is not a general notion of serving but something carried out for the Lord in the hours that fill each day. Then, true watchfulness has been achieved.

Some of the components of watchfulness are the following:

- A love for the Bridegroom and a desire to spend eternity with him
- Adequate thought and preparation for a life-time of service
- Serving Christ as one's calling in life
- Seeing him as one to be served in every hour of the day
- Looking to him as the highest source of joy and grace in your present existence
- To enjoy finding new ways to serve Christ
- Knowing that he has redeemed your whole self and therefore giving your entire self to Christ without holding anything back
- Frequent monitoring of one's service to Christ and fighting against allegiances to false loves
- Testing one's faith to ensure that Christ is as real to you as the things of your present existence
- To treat planning for Christ's return more importantly than the effort we put into financial, residential, health and entertainment plans.