

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 25 (PART 1)

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he has used parables to teach important truths. Parables are stories from real life which have a deeper meaning for those who are hungry to know the truths of King Jesus. As a result they often separated the casual hearer from the true disciple. They are also a powerful teaching tool as they allow the disciple to really grasp understanding at a greater depth. Matthew 25 contains three parables to call the disciple of Jesus to alert and prepared faithfulness as they wait for his return.

Matthew 25:1-13 - Parable of the 10 Virgins

Q – What stands out to you in the story? What similarities and differences do you notice about the two groups?

Wedding Tradition - When Jesus tells the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, He is drawing on a wedding custom that His listeners would have immediately recognized. Understanding the flow of a typical first-century Jewish wedding helps the story make much more sense. Most Jewish marriages in the time of Jesus unfolded in three main stages, often separated by significant time.

1. Betrothal (Kiddushin) - This was much more serious than modern engagement. The couple was legally committed to one another, often arranged by families. From that moment forward they were considered bound together, though they did not yet live together. Breaking a betrothal required formal divorce. (This is why in Matthew 1 Joseph considered “divorcing” Mary even though they had not yet married fully). This stage could last about a year.

2. Preparation period - During this time the groom would prepare a place for his bride, often adding a room to his father's house or preparing living space for the new family. Meanwhile, the bride prepared herself and gathered her attendants. Many scholars believe this cultural background helps explain Jesus' words in John 14:2-3: “I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and take you to myself” which would have sounded like a bridegroom returning for his bride.

3. The wedding procession and feast (Nissuin) - When everything was ready, the groom would go—often at night—to bring the bride to the celebration. This is where the imagery of Matthew 25 becomes clear. The groom would arrive unexpectedly, sometimes announced by a shout. Friends and attendants would gather with lamps or torches to join the procession as the couple was escorted to the wedding feast. The celebration could last several days.

Lamps - Most of these processions happened after dark, partly because the celebration often began in the evening. The attendants needed lamps or torches because the streets were dark, the group traveled through the village and also because the lights were part of the joyful celebration. Torches typically required extra oil or rags soaked in oil, which is why bringing additional oil mattered. Without it, a lamp could quickly burn out. This explains the tension in the parable:

some of the attendants prepared for the possibility that the groom might arrive later than expected.

Delay - In the parable, the groom is delayed (25:5) which is a detail that fits the cultural setting. Several things could delay the procession including final negotiations between families, last-minute wedding preparations, the groom gathering his own friends for the celebration and perhaps even an element of drama as it became tradition to arrive suddenly. So attendants waiting outside with lamps was not unusual.

Doors Closed - Once the procession reached the wedding feast, the doors were closed to begin the celebration. This protected the event from uninvited guests, disruption and people wandering in late. When the door was closed, the celebration had officially begun and to open the door again would have resulted in the celebration to stop.

“Once he arrived and went in, the door was shut, and there was no possibility of late access. So the foolish virgins will have missed the whole week, not just one supper, in being shut out.”
(Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, pg 260)

Matthew 25:10 says “and the door was shut”. If you arrived after this moment, you were too late. That’s a sobering reality.

There are a number of Scriptures which use this wedding imagery. Here are a few:

Jesus Is Called the Bridegroom:

John 3:29 - (*John the baptist speaking*) He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

Matthew 9:15 - And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

The bridegroom goes away, prepares a place, and comes again for his bride:

John 14:2-3 - “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

Waiting for the Bridegroom / Lamps Burning

Luke 12:35-36 - Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.”

The Kingdom Described as a Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:2 - The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

The Bridegroom's Return Announced With A Shout/Cry

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

The Final Wedding Celebration

Revelation 19:7 - Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

Jesus is saying that the kingdom is like a wedding procession. The bridegroom will come, but the timing is uncertain. The wise prepare while they wait; the foolish assume there will always be more time. Here are some observations about this parable.

1. All ten virgins expected the bridegroom - This is important. They all had lamps, they all went out to meet him, they all even fell asleep during the delay. The difference between the wise and foolish is not so much *expectation* but *preparation*. To speak plainly about Jesus' teaching point here, the issue is not whether someone knows Christ will return, it is whether they are ready when he does.

2. The delay of the bridegroom is assumed - 25:5 says: "As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept." This reflects the reality Jesus has been describing in Matthew 24 that "no one knows the day or hour (24:36)" and that Jesus' disciples need to be prepared for their master returning later than they might expect. This likely would have been an important point for the earliest Christians who experienced a tremendous amount of significant things happening in the first century. For us, we have the opposite temptation. We might think that because it has been so long since his ascension, it's going to be a long time for his return. But the point is we don't know the day or hour.

3. The oil represents preparedness - The key difference between the two groups is the extra oil that the "wise" five had with them. They were prepared in case of delay. On the other hand the "foolish" five look prepared at first, but they run out when it matters most.

4. Readiness cannot be borrowed - The foolish virgins are unable to borrow what they need to be prepared for the wedding feast. It is something that they needed to provide for themselves. This isn't implying that the wise virgins were selfish or stingy, but that they could not simply transfer something to someone else. No one can borrow someone else's faith, obedience or relationship with God. While we certainly help each other in this life, our friend, spouse, or pastor can't loan you some of what they have.

Q - What are some things in the Christian life that cannot be borrowed from someone else? Is it a temptation at all to over-depend on others?

5. The closed door is final - I am well acquainted with being late, hoping for more time, asking for an extension, having a "legitimate" reason why XYZ didn't happen. In some cases, extensions are granted, offers are extended and grace for a habitually late procrastinator is extended. Other times it is not. "And the door was shut" is probably the most sobering moment of the parable. The

foolish virgins say: “*Lord, lord, open to us*” but (similar to Matthew 7:21-23), the bridegroom answers “*Truly I say to you, I do not know you (25:12).*” The message is that the time for preparation eventually ends.

Q - How do we live a life that is prepared for the coming of Jesus?

- 1. Don't delay obedience** - When Jesus calls us to follow Him, the wise response is to obey promptly rather than putting it off. Spiritual readiness grows out of daily obedience to the things God has already revealed to us. Delayed obedience often becomes disobedience over time. (John 14:15; James 1:22; Matthew 7:24)
- 2. Don't delay repentance** - A prepared disciple keeps short accounts with God. When we become aware of sin, we turn back to the Lord quickly rather than allowing sin to harden our hearts. Readiness for Christ's return includes a life marked by ongoing repentance and humility before God. (1 John 1:8–9; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 3:12–13)
- 3. Don't delay forgiveness** - Unforgiveness can quietly poison the heart and damage relationships. Jesus repeatedly calls His followers to forgive others just as they have been forgiven by God. A disciple who is ready for Christ's return seeks to release bitterness and pursue reconciliation whenever possible. (Matthew 6:14–15; Ephesians 4:31–32; Colossians 3:13)
- 4. Don't get distracted by things that don't ultimately matter** - It is easy to fill our lives with activities, worries, and pursuits that consume our attention but have little eternal value. Jesus warned that people can become so absorbed in everyday life that they lose sight of God's kingdom. A prepared disciple keeps the kingdom of God as the primary focus of life. (Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:15–21; Colossians 3:1–2)
- 5. Don't isolate yourself from the people of God** - God designed the Christian life to be lived in community. Fellowship with other believers strengthens faith, provides encouragement, and helps guard against spiritual drift. Remaining connected to the church helps believers stay alert and faithful while waiting for Christ's return. (Hebrews 10:24–25; Acts 2:42; Ecclesiastes 4:9–10)
- 6. Don't neglect prayer** - Prayer keeps our hearts connected to God and reminds us of our dependence on Him. Through prayer we seek guidance, confess sin, and align our desires with God's will. Jesus often connected spiritual watchfulness with prayer, encouraging His followers to remain alert as they wait for His return. (Luke 21:36; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- 7. Remain faithful over time** - The parable assumes that the bridegroom may be delayed, reminding disciples that following Jesus requires endurance. Readiness for Christ's return is not about a moment of enthusiasm but about long-term faithfulness. The prepared disciple continues trusting and serving the Lord even when the wait feels long. (Mt. 24:45–46; Heb. 10:36; Rev. 2:10)

A prepared life is a life that responds to God quickly. The wise disciple doesn't keep putting off obedience, repentance, forgiveness, or devotion to God, because we recognize that the bridegroom could come at any time.