

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-11 Parable of the Ten Virgins

What happens in a schoolroom full of children when the teacher is called away? Usually one child throws something or another starts to tease his friend. Before long, most of the children are laughing and moving out of their seats. Suddenly, the teacher comes back. Those students who are in their places watching for the teacher, will be praised. Those breaking the rules and not watching, may be punished. In this lesson, Jesus tells a similar story.

The teachings Jesus gave before this parable of the ten virgins will help you understand its meaning. The disciples were looking at the temple and were filled with amazement. This prompted Jesus to tell them about its future. The temple would be destroyed as the prophet Daniel had predicted long before. Believers would suffer persecution and false Messiahs would deceive many. Then Jesus himself would appear in the sky with his angels and gather his children to be with him. Therefore the disciples needed to stand firm in their faith and wait for his return. To illustrate these teachings, Jesus shared a parable about ten young women who waited to attend a wedding feast. The central themes are preparedness and watchfulness.

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. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.”

The setting of the story is a Jewish wedding ceremony. A wedding had two phases. The bridegroom went first to the bride’s home to obtain his bride and observe religious ceremonies. Then he would take his bride to his parents’ home for feasting with their friends. Since no one knew exactly when this would happen, all the bride’s friends brought their lamps. The foolish ones brought no extra oil. They thought they knew the future when they didn’t. When all the maidens fell asleep, the foolish were not prepared. The groom arrived much later than anyone expected, but he did come. Jesus will return to just such a situation.

At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”

Then all the maidens woke up and prepared their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”

“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.”

At a real wedding, merchants were present to sell oil or anything else needed at the last minute. This story uses parable language. Having oil is only symbolic of what each individual had obtained to be ready. It cannot be borrowed or purchased or earned. Salvation is by grace, through faith in Christ’s sacrifice. People must be ready and watching for the return of Jesus, the

bridegroom. When he comes for his people, those who are not ready to meet him will be unable to change their situation.

In Christ's story, while the five foolish virgins were on their way to get oil, the bridegroom arrived. The maidens who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us!"

But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you." Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour! (Matt 25:1-13)

Once the wedding party went into the celebration and the door was closed, the situation became critical for the foolish. At an earthly wedding the door would be opened for guests who arrived late. This was a part of Jewish hospitality. But this coming of Christ would be different! People may call out to Jesus, but will be too late. His response will be, "I don't know you," or in some translations, "I never knew you." Jesus is coming for those who have a relationship with him. He will not take those who have delayed their decision. No one knows the time, but we can be certain about being ready. If we have believed in Jesus as Son of God and Savior, and repented of our sins, we are his children. Jesus will return for his children when people least expect him.

Jesus often used a story to communicate an important truth. Students of the Word must be careful not to ask what each detail of the story means. We should instead ask what overall message Jesus intended. Even scholars disagree about the details of the end time events. The clear teaching of the Son of Man, however, was that he would return. "But about that day or hour no one knows," he said, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.... Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt 24:36, 42). How can we be ready? Each person must come to Jesus by faith and accept him as Savior. This must be followed by faithful obedience to our Lord, until he comes.

This story is **important** because it reminds us to be prepared for the return of Jesus by maintaining our relationship with him.

The **main truth** of this story is that believers should expect the return of Jesus at any time.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What did having oil represent in the parable of the ten maidens?
A. [Pause] If you said that having oil represented individual preparation for Christ's coming, which cannot be purchased, borrowed, or earned, you are correct.
2. What was Jesus' theme in the parable of the ten virgins?
A. [Pause] If you answered, "Watchfulness and being ready to meet the bridegroom whenever he comes," you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say to those who came late, after the door to the wedding feast was closed?

A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After telling the story, ask them this question. “What can you do today to avoid Jesus calling you foolish like these maidens?” The answer is to come to faith in Jesus. Then strengthen your personal relationship with him through prayer, listening to the Word, and witnessing to others.