

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 "The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

We've been studying eschatology, future things, in Matthew 24 and 25 for 6 weeks previous.

Of course the chapter and verse designations were added in the 13th century to facilitate study, but they have little or nothing to do with the original flow of dialogue.

So when Jesus was speaking here there was no break between these parables. He simply gave 3 parables contiguously to illustrate different facets of the idea He's supporting which is readiness.

The Kingdom will come with all the surprise of Noah's flood, or a thief who comes in the night while you're sleeping. Suddenly, and in the case of the rapture, without warning.

And we'll see in this little story that like Noah's ark, when the door is shut, the opportunity is over. Forever!

Jesus is giving three illustrations about being ready. What does it mean to be ready? Who is ready and who is not. And it's vitally important, because we'll see that in each case, for those who are not ready, when

the event occurs, there is no redress. No fixing the problem.

And the resulting punishment in every case is eternal torment. So these simple stories are imperative for us. We can't get this wrong. We can err in other things perhaps, cessation of miracle gifts, prophetic interpretation, other secondary doctrines, but not this.

The end result in each of these cases of not being ready, is hell. Salvation and eternity are at stake here. We cannot get this wrong. It's too important!

Thus we can employ some deductive reasoning concerning these three parables and say, the problem here is salvation. The 2 slaves pictured last week, the five virgins this week, and the one out of 3 slaves we'll look at next week, if the Lord tarries, all have something in common.

They were hanging out with the other slaves, or in the story today, the other virgins, they were in the right crowd, in fact from outward appearances, they are all completely indistinguishable from their peers.

The problem was inside. Some are saved. Some have had a real salvation experience, and some are not. And we can't tell by looking, although in the cases of the different slaves, we might have some reasonable doubts.

This is a common theme in Jesus teaching. We've seen this over and over and over again.

In the parable of the soils, the seed falls the same on all 4 soils, one is blown away in the wind or eaten by birds, two spring up, but never reach maturity, and likewise disappear, and one of four soils takes root and grows to maturity and bears fruit in it's kind.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the farmer sows good seed, and an enemy sows dandel seeds, and the two plants grow up side by side. Dandel, tares are very close in appearance to wheat. But they are worthless. Good only for burning.

Even in the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, the unseen element is all of the other treasure hunters and pearl buyer's who did not recognize the value of the treasure and the pearl. Most look at both things and say, I'll just keep what I've got. Too much trouble. Too costly to give up everything I already have, in order to have the real prize, and they move on.

The entire book of Hebrews has at it's inner core, a message to people in the churches who are short of a real salvation. It's a challenging book, but some day it might be useful to mine those truths out. In chapter 2, 4, 6, and 10 there are re-curring warnings to folks who have fallen short.

In the letters to the seven churches, in Revelation, all but 2 have an element, part of the group who identifies with the church, who are told, if they do not repent and change, they'll be excluded in eternity.

1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

*He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for **I have not found your deeds completed** in the sight of My God.*

Ever get your homework back with a red letter word at the top, incomplete. When it comes to eternity you can't afford . . "incomplete."

The warnings aren't for people outside the congregation. That would be less scary. These warnings are all for people who are part of a group, who are indistinguishable at first on the outside from anyone else in the group, but who have stopped short of salvation, and thus, they are **not ready**.

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins,

The kingdom of heaven? Where did that come from. This is something new in the dialogue. But it isn't. The authority of God to reign as opposed to Satan who now reigns and who will be deposed and locked up for 1000 years when Christ returns, the kingdom of God, or for the

jews comfort, the kingdom of heaven, is interchangeable with the coming of the Lord Jesus.

We'll see it here, and by inference, the pronoun *it* in the next parable refers back to this statement here. The disciples, you'll recall didn't mention the kingdom in their questions that He is answering.

They asked “*Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*” and the term kingdom appears here interchangeably with all the other definitive terms in the discussion. The question was about kingdom authority, and the answer is about kingdom authority.

A time is coming when Satan's rule is over. He will be deposed. Defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ and sent to his place. The resulting rule of Christ on His throne forever, is the Kingdom of God. The authority to reign of God.

We've said it before. The Kingdom of God is the story of the Bible. Earth given to man to rule and reign over it. Lost by Genesis chapter 3 as a result of sin. Satan usurping that rule. Men born in bondage to him because all have sinned.

For us, now, the kingdom is any heart where Satan has been deposed and the ownership of that heart has been redeemed back to being ruled by God.

This book is the story of God, redeeming fallen men back to Himself, and eventually, in His time, deposing Satan and setting up a righteous Kingdom on this earth. The events that lead up to the cataclysmic events of that second coming are part of the over all definition of God's kingdom.

Something about this little parable, the truths it pictures, are connected to the bigger picture of the Kingdom of God. The bridegroom is coming for His church, and there are people who identify themselves as part of that company, who aren't going into the Kingdom.

1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

A little background helps us see the scenario here.

Jewish weddings were the social event that trumped all other social events. They were a big deal. And they happened in 3 phases.

Phase one was a contract between the fathers. This would happen when the two marriage partners were children. The father of the bride would negotiate a price to pay the father of the groom and they would agree and a contract was made. The kids had no say in who they were going to marry.

Then when they came of marriageable age, earlier than what we consider marrying age now, there would be an engagement. This period could last a year or longer. It was contractual and to break an engagement, even though the marriage hadn't been consummated, took a divorce proceeding.

Then the third phase was the feast, and this was party time. If you were wealthy this could last a week. Only at the end of the feast ceremony was the couple able to consummate the marriage.

Our picture here is an element of the feast. The feast would begin with a procession of young women, friends of the bride, also virgins, and they would proceed around the village or town in a festive procession, a little parade, usually around or after dusk to get the full effect, with torches.

The word for lamps here is not the same as a household lamp to light up a room. These lamps were sort of like the tiki torches that people had in the 1960's. A pole with a torch at the top, all going along in a little parade.

The fact that there were 10 of them indicates status. This was a wealthy wedding. 10 virgins is a big show of force. This is the event of the year!

And so the time has come to stage the virgins where they're going to parade through the streets in this beautiful celebration. You can just picture them, getting ready.

I've photographed a few weddings, and the room where the bridesmaids are getting ready is pandemonium. Am I right? And the wedding planner is like come on, I've got to get you staged where the bride groom is coming because it's nearly dusk. Come on, we've got to go. And so they go to the staging place to wait for the big event.

2“Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.

There's our word again. Phronimas. Wise. And the other word for the not so smart ones has a familiar root. morai. We get our word, moron from this greek root. Stupid.

Five are shrewd, wise virgins, and planned for any future possibilities. Five were foolish and did not.

*3“For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,
4but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.*

Five just grabbed their torches and lit them and went out. After all, it's almost dusk now, and these things are good for hours. But the other 5 wise virgins took a flask with oil in case they might need it. Simple stuff.

5“Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.

They expected him to be there to pick them up in minutes. But the hours dragged on. And on. And onnnnnnnnnnn.....zzzzzzzzzz And their eyelids got heavy. And after a while, there's just a group of virgins, sleeping. It's a sleepover. They told romance stories for a while, trying to stay awake, but some drifted to sleep, and quickly, they were all asleep.

Notice they all went to sleep. The parable, at least this one, isn't about sleeping making you not ready. Our lives are the torches. All of us can think back to times when we weren't burning brightly very well. All 10 fell asleep.

6“But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

That element of surprise is common to all three warning parables. The bridegroom comes with a shout, jolting them awake! The master of the slaves returns from a journey and finds the slaves mid stream of what they're doing. We don't know the day. We don't know the hour. We have to be ready . . . always!

This delay was not planned or seen ahead of time. No explanation is given. Something happened and the bridegroom showed up at midnight instead of dusk.

Nevertheless, the call comes and it's time for action!

7“Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

They all spring to action, but the lamps are sputtering. They've used up the fuel. They need to be freshened. Replenished. Gotta get rid of the dead stuff. Time for this thing to burn.

8“The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

Here we re-visit the difference between the ready and the not ready. The wise, shrewd, virgins who are ready to get this done, and the dopey virgins, who are not.

The foolish girls ask the shrewd girls for some of their oil.

9“But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’

We'll re-attack the symbolism of oil in a few minutes, but for now, suffice to say; Salvation is non-transferrable. Not between husbands and wife's, not between immediate family members, not between cousins and uncles.

Salvation is non-transferrable. Every living spirit must be born again from above. Alone. Their dad can't do it for them. Parents baptizing babies doesn't do it. There's no family plan. Every individual has to have their own oil.

So the wise virgins are like, sorry ladies. You'll have to go to the oil sellers and get your own. We can't give you ours.

10“And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.

The terminology here is not coincidental. It's no accident that Jesus just finished telling His hearers that those days would be like the days of Noah.

*Gen. 7:15 So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life. 16 Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; **and the LORD closed it behind him.** 17 Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth....*

God sealed the door to the ark shut. And the floods came. The virgins who were ready went with the groom to the wedding feast, and what . . . and the door was shut.

Just like the door on the ark. God closed that opportunity, and the flood came. The bridegroom calls, the ready respond, and the door to the feast is shut.

I can't stress this enough, that people who are surrounded by the gospel, they've heard the good news over and over, and for whatever reasons,

we'll see the main one next week, they stop short of salvation.

William Ernest Henley wrote a famous poem that is considered deep and dark and beautiful. I think I've read it before, because it so perfectly defines the problem;

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

And therein you have it. Sinful man wants fire insurance, but something deep within him says, I can't go all the way. I can't entrust my souls destiny to another. Christ won't get my soul. And so it goes. The multitudes are duped by satan to with hold a soul that doesn't belong to them in the first place.

Last Sunday we watched the movie, PaPa, about Ernest Hemmingway in Cuba. We love to love these bigger than life tough guy sea captain types who are like the proverbial strong man. He was the captain of his soul. It matters not how strait the gate and all the stuff about punishment. He's not about to hand his soul over.

Fools. They don't own their own souls. Someone else does. Someone sinister has duped them.

In this case, they hang out with the church crowd. We can't see into their soul. We give them the benefit of the doubt. We're told not to uproot the tares, or we might make a mistake and uproot wheat along with them. We have to wait for the Master. The bridegroom.

Those that are ready, go in. The door is shut.

11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'

These terrifying words should jolt us, like a familiar song, a few notes and we recognize the tune. This should take us to the same song that is sung in Matthew 7.

It's the second time in two weeks that we've looked back to Matthew 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*

Vs. 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

So, now we understand the elements of the parable, but we want to dig deeper. This is important. Eternity important. Heaven or hell important. So we need to know.

In the parable some have something, and some do not. And it's stated 2 different ways for us, so we won't miss it.

First is oil. Second is relational. The bridegroom says, I never knew you.

In Bible types and symbolisms the Holy Spirit of God is portrayed with different symbols. A dove. The wind. Fire. Rain. A cloud. Wine. And here, and in the old testament, oil.

Each symbol helps our finite brains understand something about God, the Holy Spirit. Oil anoints. And oil is the fuel for the fire. A burning.

In our parable, some of the virgins have the oil, and some do not. And in the end, the ones who have the oil are also the ones who have the relationship with the groom. To the others He says, I never knew you.

The indwelling of God the Holy Spirit is what separates the wheat from the tares, the haves from the have nots.

Listen to how Paul labors to describe this phenomenon. In Ephesians 2:4 - 6 *But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,...*

And again in Colossians, a parallel passage; 2:12 - 14 *And having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses, 14 having canceled the debt ascribed to us in the decrees that stood against us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross!...*

And here, we wander into a discussion of exactly how this is accomplished. What causes this making of dead people into alive people. Where does it originate, and how. We want to get at the cause.

It's the same question Nicodemus asked Jesus. 2 *this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* 3 *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"*

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus says, tell me how to DO this. What are the mechanics of it. How do I accomplish this. What do I do to make it happen.

And Jesus tells him; you don't have anything to do with it. You don't have any more control over this than you do the wind.

George Whitefield preached that men could will themselves into hell, but not heaven. The free will of man can choose hell. But it's God who chooses who will be in the Kingdom.

I took the time yesterday, 56 minutes, to listen to one of John Piper's sermons, on line, free, and the title of it was a play on the familiar book title, The Freedom of the Will, and Piper called his sermon, the freedom of the wind. "*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit*"

This is a tough doctrine to come to grips with. God chooses. Not us. And yet we flip that coin over and there are all of these severe warnings. And Luke records these words of Jesus in 11:11 - 13 *What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"...*

Come to the waters, and drink. The invitation is universal. Is. 55:1 *"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no*

money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. And Rev. 22 right at the end of the book says; 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come, and the one who desires the water of life drink freely.

In the parable of the virgins, some have, and some have not. Life. Oil. The Holy Spirit. And intimacy with God.

I'll finish with the verse that God used to quicken my spirit and make me alive together with Him. Romans 8:9 *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

I was listening to MacArthur preach and this verse was part of his text, and looking back, the light just came on. Suddenly my eyes were opened to the truth. Who's the Holy Spirit. I didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit.

All of a sudden it was crystal clear what all these kids who surrounding me had that I didn't have. I was 19 years old. And I wanted what they had, at any cost. I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my life that night; 46 years ago.

I would urge you all to take an inventory. Do you have the oil that the wise virgins had. Does God the Holy Spirit belong to you, and you belong to Him? Do you have a one on one friendship, alive together with Christ, or will He say, I never knew you. Eternity hangs in the balance. Ask. Seek. Find.

He knocks on the door of your life. Don't be like Ernest Hemmingway or the guy in the poem. Give yourself wholly, to God.