

## The Parable of the wise and foolish young women

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

**25** The kingdom of heaven is like what happened one night when ten girls took their oil lamps and went to a wedding to meet the groom.<sup>[a]</sup><sup>2</sup> Five of the girls were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup>The foolish ones took their lamps, but no extra oil. <sup>4</sup>The ones who were wise took along extra oil for their lamps.<sup>5</sup> The groom was late arriving, and the girls became drowsy and fell asleep.<sup>6</sup> Then in the middle of the night someone shouted, "Here's the groom! Come to meet him!"<sup>7</sup> When the girls got up and started getting their lamps ready, <sup>8</sup>the foolish ones said to the others, "Let us have some of your oil! Our lamps are going out." <sup>9</sup>The girls who were wise answered, "There's not enough oil for all of us! Go and buy some for yourselves." <sup>10</sup>While the foolish girls were on their way to get some oil, the groom arrived. The girls who were ready went into the wedding, and the doors were closed.<sup>11</sup> Later the other girls returned and shouted, "Sir, sir! Open the door for us!" <sup>12</sup>But the groom replied, "I don't even know you!"

<sup>13</sup>So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen. (CEV)

### Are you ready yet?

Imagine you are half of a married couple that have been invited to an important occasion. It will be a wonderful posh and expensive occasion, that you have been looking forward to for months, and importantly it is a great opportunity to dress up in your finest clothes. However you get in from town much later than planned, just one hour before you need to go out. What is going through the minds of the couple. Probably, and I am gender stereotyping here, the lady thinks 'Oh No – I've only got an hour' and the man is thinking 'Oh good, I've got time to read the paper and do the crossword, before getting changed'. 60 minutes later, the wife is still in the bedroom and the husband asks a question. It starts with the two words 'Are you...' Can you finish the sentence. No – not 'Are you really going to wear THAT dress? Please don't say that. 'Are you an angel from heaven as I have never seen such beauty before on earth?' would be good, but is unlikely. The question is nearly always – Are you ready yet? Have you finished preparing.

**Are you ready?** That is today's question. Have you done your preparations? Are you ready to see Jesus?

### The Wedding scene

Jesus tells this story. A village is hosting a big wedding. As always it is being held during the hot and cloudless summer, and there had been plenty of singing and dancing during the day but the night is now drawing in. The couple have been betrothed for several years since the bride was a small girl. The groom and the father of the bride had signed 'the Kettubah', the agreement document which stated what the dowry (bride payment) should be from the groom. To break this agreement would have required a formal divorce. When the bride was of marriageable age, the arrangements for this special marriage day took place, and a special room and bed had been prepared in the bride's house where they would make love and consummate their marriage.

A crowd is waiting near the groom's parent's house for him to arrive with his bride. It is where the party will be held. They have been waiting a long time. That's not unusual and there is plenty for the guests to talk about, some haven't seen each other for a long time. In the crowd are 10 young women who have all accepted invites to the wedding feast. It is dark. No woman would be out in the dark without her lamp. You can move around easily by moonlight, but it was not the done thing for a woman to walk around in the dark. Her safety may depend on it, and only disreputable women went out without a lamp. To do so would bring shame on her family. Each one carries her lamp up by her face, so everyone can see who she is. The lamps were full of oil when they came out, but there is still no sign of the wedding party.

The groom had arrived at the family home of his bride and gone with her to the wedding bed, especially prepared for the occasion. There they shared their first sexual experience. Presumably they would have taken their time to enjoy the moment and not worried about the waiting guests. Then the groom would have another new experience, waiting for his bride to get ready for the party. Are you ready yet? When she is ready, then he puts her on the back of his horse or donkey and with his exuberant party of friends leads her back to his family home. However he goes the longest route possible, via every side street in the village, so as many locals as possible could see them and cheer them on. It is now getting late. Back at the groom's house, the 10 young women are all looking tired. A neighbour perhaps suggests that they go into his house and rest and he will call them as soon as the bridal party was in sight. So they go indoors, but leaving their

lamps lit ready on a ledge. They are feeling drowsy and one by one the tired young women fall asleep. Then as midnight came, they were abruptly awoken by the shout. "The bridegroom is coming".

The bridal party was now in sight at the end of the road, and urgent activity breaks loose. They must all now go and join the procession. The young ladies awake quickly and are excited. However much time has passed and when they look at their lamps they are dull and smoky. They quickly attend to the lamps and realise that the oil is almost gone, perhaps just a few minutes left before they would have gone out. Five of the young woman, had anticipated a long night, and were prepared with small jars of oil, that they had brought with them. They fill the small oil reservoirs and trim the wicks to a clean point so that they will burn brightly. The other five young ladies had come out without any spare oil. They were not prepared for such a long night. They could not risk their reputation, and shame their families, by going out without lamps.

"Give us some of your oil." they say to the girls who were prepared. But no, they cannot risk giving away any, in case they need it all themselves. There were polite refusals. The five foolish ones, could not as unmarried women move around in the dark without carrying lamps that would be unthinkable. "You'll have to go and find some-one that you can buy oil from, there will be plenty of people around here still up." With no other options, the foolish women scurry of to get oil before it's too late.

The five wise young ladies excitedly rush off with the others friends and family of the grooms to join the procession. With cheering and singing they follow the procession back to the party venue. They were there for the critical moment of a Jewish wedding when the bride is brought into the house under a canopy. To miss this moment could be seen as an insult to the wedding host, and the bridal couple. With the big moment celebrated, the guests all move indoors where the food and the musicians had been waiting. With the hour late, clunk, the door was closed, and the party began.

A little later there was knocking on the door. Who would arrive at a wedding after the main event, just turn up for the food! Surely no-one they invited would be so rude. It was the other five girls. "Please, please open the door for us, let us in". It is the five foolish women. The host is not impressed. A voice replies through the door "No. I don't know you".

Jesus concludes the parable by saying "So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen".

### **When No is not No**

In middle eastern culture, a 'no' is not the end of the conversation, it is a pause in proceedings. It means there is a difficulty. They would have to have a very good argument if the young ladies were to get past the locked door. But what is clear is that they had not prepared properly, and deserved to be locked out. Did the host or the groom finally relent, we don't know. The end of the parables are often left unfinished, as it makes it more challenging for the listener, who needs to think it over, and think through the actions and consequences of the story.

So that is what we are going to do. Think it over. Am I prepared? Are you prepared? **Are you ready?**

### **End-times setting**

First we will look at the context of the parable. It comes in Chapter 25 of Matthew, late in the book. In the preceding chapter Jesus is prophesying of what is to come, including the destruction of the temple. Then he looks further to an awful time on earth, but one that will bring about his return, the timing of which is kept secret and that no-one will know, until it happens. We call this the 'second coming'. This teaching on end-times carries on into Chapter 25 where we find our parable. Why at this point is he talking about coming again. Because his time is almost up. In the very next chapter, chapter 26 of Matthew, we have an action packed account of the plot against him, his betrayal, the last Supper, Gethsemane, his arrest, his trial and Peters denial. Then in the next chapter he is crucified and dies.

Jesus has placed himself in this parable. He is the returning bridegroom joyfully coming back to his old home Earth; the second coming. He has a warm welcome for all of his guests, those invited into his kingdom, who have been patiently waiting for his return and have prepared themselves for his arrival. They have kept their light (the good in them from God) burning in the darkness, and will now be blessed for their patience and preparation. They were ready? This is a great picture, imagine the excitement of Jesus finally getting to see and meet his faithful people face to face.

The day and the hour of his return is not known. Last year, it was predicted by some that the world would end on September 27<sup>th</sup>, my wedding anniversary. My wife and I are both still here, and so is the planet. We don't know when Jesus will come again. It could be thousands of years yet, but if he comes back tomorrow. **Are you ready?**

## Why Women? Why 10?

So that's the future, but what has the parable got for us today? Lets have a closer look. First off, the stars of this story are all women.

Some translations say virgins, some say young women. Which was it? The debates not really relevant. In the time of Jesus, girls were usually betrothed before their first period, and then married a few years later but still at a very young age. His mother Mary may have been only 13 or 14 when she became pregnant with Jesus. So it was safe to assume that young woman, who were not married, were still virgins. Unlike today where girls marry later, as a result in the UK, at least 75% of women have had pre-marital sex.

This parable is about the readiness of these 10 young women, but why did Jesus choose women for this parable? In a male dominated Jewish society, Jesus was always quick to address the balance and promote the importance of women. The 11<sup>th</sup> century arab writer Ibn-al-Tayyib, who did a commentary on the whole bible, said that it required 10 men for a formal wedding ceremony. So Jesus probably chose 10 women to address the gender gap, it was a very male dominated society, in which Jesus often took the opportunity to honour women, and lift them up.

## The same but different

V1. The parable starts by saying that 'Ten young women took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Beside all being single young women, they have a lot in common.

i) They had all been invited to the wedding, so there was a desire for each one of them to be there, they were all special to the groom. There were plenty in the village who had not been invited.

ii) They had all read their invites, and accepted them. They were all really pleased with their invites, and wanted to go. In other parables that Jesus told there were plenty that were invited to a feast and made up weak excuses not to go.

iii) They all loved the groom. They had put on their finest dresses and wanted to be with him to celebrate his big occasion.

With their lamps ready, and all looking as wonderful as they possibly could, they stood in the anticipatory buzzing crowd of the other invited guests waiting for their first site of the bridal party as it emerges at the end of the street.

V2. "Five of them were foolish and five were wise". From the outside they all look the same in that there are 10 excited young women, looking wonderful, and excited about seeing the groom who they all felt deep affection for. Any differences were not visible at this stage, because the differences were within. These are girls who seem not to make the same effort to learn like the wise girls, perhaps they ignored their parents when advice was on offer. 'Now Racheal, don't you forget to take a spare jar of oil, you could be waiting a long time'. "No way, If I had to carry that jar all night it will make a bulge in my dress and make me look silly" "No it won't, you need to take it, do as your told" "Yeah, yeah whatever". When her Mum is gone, she leaves the jar of oil behind anyway'. Her Mum knows what is best for her daughter. It is foolish not to take her advice.

## Your own preparations

So we've got 10 young ladies, five think more about what they are doing, than the other five. But what is Jesus trying to teach with this intriguing parable. The focus of the parable is on 'being prepared'.

The foolish women wanted to borrow oil, to make up for their lack of preparation, but it wasn't happening. Preparation is important if you are going to be ready for an occasion, whatever the occasion. Whilst you may get assistance it is you that needs to be prepared, to do your own preparations, **you don't borrow someone else's preparation!**

- I am going to sit an important exam, I have not revised myself, but my sister has spent hours studying the text books for me.

- I am running a **marathon** tomorrow but I have only ever run round the block for, but never mind my best friend has been training for it on my behalf for many weeks now, and he's got really fit.

You can borrow many things from each others as believers and help each other in many ways, but there are some things that you need to prepare yourself for. No-one can do that preparation for you.

*No-one can make a personal commitment to Jesus for you.  
No-one can do your discipleship for you.*

**Are you ready?**

### **Personal Commitment**

Anybody been to a palace to meet Royalty? If you have then you will have prepared for it, and even been coached in the etiquette of the occasion. The bible tells us that Jesus is the King of Kings, the ultimate in Royalty, Gods son putting all others into the shade! It also says that one day we will have to meet him face to face, but we won't know the day or the hour. If that was today, would you be ready?

Because of our sin, we can not go into the presence of Jesus and meet him face to face unless we have been transformed internally by his love and grace and had our sins forgiven. This happens when we recognise Jesus as Lord and King, we realise we are nothing without him. We say sorry for all that we have done, we ask for his forgiveness, and we ask him into our hearts, to change us from the inside out. We commit our internal lives to him, and choose to follow him.

When we do this and mean it, then we are transformed whether we feel any different at the time or not. Externally we will look exactly the same, but internally we have been transformed by God in a state that is acceptable to Jesus. Our preparation is to make this important decision and give our lives over to Jesus. He then comes in and transforms us, so that we are ready to be with him, we are in a fit state to enter his presence, be in the company of the King of Kings

Imagine Gods promises come to you as a seed which lands in your heart. Nothing will happen to that seed unless we want God to transform it into new life and start growing with in us. We have to decide that is what we want, but it is only God that can turn the seed into new life.

You can walk into any Church or Christian gathering of any kind up and down the country, and scan everyone that is there. Look at all their external details, but you cannot tell just by looking, who is ready to meet Jesus and who is not.

The 10 young ladies in the parables all looked like they were ready. They were in the right place, at the right time, with the right people. But 5 were ready and 5 were not. The question each of must ask today is quite simply – Am I ready. I'm in the right place, at the right time, and I am surrounded by other Christians. Have I made that personal commitment myself to Jesus, has he transformed me so that I am fit to be in his presence for ever. If not, then we need to do that, before we do anything else.

**Are you ready?**

### **Discipleship**

If you go to a posh event, you don't just want to be accepted in to the event because you meet the minimum dress requirements, but if you love the host, you want to look your very best. You want to do more than the minimum.

Accepting Jesus into your heart is the minimum required of us. But being be prepared is not just about a one off decision, but is about becoming a disciple and becoming more like Jesus. And again, no-one else can be a disciple for us. We can not enlist a surrogate. Imagine if you could pay some-one to do all the good stuff on your behalf, whilst you live a lazy and self-indulgent life-style. It wouldn't work.

Christian maturity comes from the long haul, it is not a flash in the pan. There is no instant discipleship or instant maturity on your walk with Jesus, in you finding fullness of life in the kingdom of God. It needs planning and preparation. The wise and thoughtful young woman had worked out that it could be a long

night. If they were going to guarantee a place with the bridal party, then they needed to make sure they could stay the distance however long it took, so they made their preparations accordingly.

- If you are going to have an *intimacy with God* and *feel his presence* in your life, then it is **you** that needs to spend time with Jesus in **prayer**.
- If you are going to *understand his promises* for your life and *be encouraged by his words*, then it is **you** that needs to read the **bible**, to listen to sermons, and to hear testimonies.
- If you are going to *exercise spiritual gifts* and *see other blessed by you* through his power, then it is **you** that must be pressing into God for his blessings, and be **stepping out** of your comfort zones and take risks in reaching out to others.

If you want to be obedient to Jesus, and do the best for himself and yourself, by being as much like Jesus as you can, then no other believer can do that for you.

It is **your** faith, **your** walk with God and **your** discipleship. You can not loan these things.

The seed of Gods promises landed in your heart, you prayed for new life, and God transformed you and brought and started growing from that seed of faith in you. Your prayers, bible study and Christian service help grow that faith to grow strongly within you.

Each believer plays his or her part in Gods commission with his or her own resources. Built up by his love and his grace, but it is your preparations and not some-one else's which will determine how you play your part when the occasions come to make a difference in this world. Your Dad might have been a mighty pastor, you're best friend might have become a famous missionary, you might even be a descendant of Billy Graham and hang out with the most exciting and anointed of Christians, but it is you and your relationship with Jesus that matters.

**Are you ready?**

### **Why is the ongoing preparation important?**

So we recognise that in the Christian life we do our own preparations, but what are we preparing for. The temptation is to convince yourself that once you have made a commitment to Jesus, that **all will be well**, and he will provide your every need, at every moment, forever. Because you don't know what your future holds anyway, there is **no need to prepare!** The foolish women had accepted their invitations to the wedding feast, but they still missed out, because they weren't prepared.

All of sudden as they were sleeping, the cry rang out 'The Bridegroom is here'. The foolish young women were taken by surprise and they weren't prepared.

Our trials are like that. They often come and take us by surprise and as Christians not only are we not immune from them, but the bible tells us that we should expect them.

**1 Peter 4v12.** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

**John 16v33.** In the world you will have trials. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

**James 1v12.** Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

**James 2 v1-4.** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

It was once said that we **only have the amount of faith that is there in a trial**. In other words, we can feel full of faith in God, when things are going well, but what is there when we are in financial dire straits, or we are fighting a serious illness, of facing the loss of a family member. How strong is our faith then.

However if we know that there will be hard times and trials ahead of us we can prepare for them. We can plan for them. We can make sure that our faith is strong enough so that when the trials come, we can withstand them. In fact as scriptures say, the trials should actually make our faith stronger.

We must be careful in taking the attitude that all will be well with our faith once we have accepted Jesus into our heart. We could be in trouble if we just accept Jesus into our lives and do not strengthen our faith, by doing what it takes to put our roots deeper into Jesus. In the great commission, Jesus promises his disciples that through his spirit, he will be with them always to the end of the age. He is speaking here to his disciples, who have proved their loyalty to him over the previous 3 years. They have done the preparation and put their roots down deep in him. But there are plenty of warnings for those starting out with Jesus who have not yet put their roots down.

The seed of Gods promises landed in your heart, you prayed for new life, and God transformed you and started growing from that seed of faith in you, the first signs of new life. But then you did nothing about it, you carried on doing your own things in the old way. You don't make the effort to pray and read your bible or serve others. Your roots are shallow. The parable of the Sower, describes those plants whose roots are shallow, and get burnt up in the sun when the heat of oppression comes over them, they give up and wither away.

For others the soil around them has not been prepared and weeds have been allowed to grow up and choke the plants. Perhaps the temptations from old life-styles resurface and drag you back down away from Jesus.

These two examples point to those who say yes to Jesus, but don't do the preparations. They don't try and clear out their old life distractions and habits, and change their ways, so they are soon choked of their new life and go back to their old ways. Others don't make the effort to go deeper with Jesus, to learn more about him, to be more like him. Then when a trial comes, they have nothing in reserve to cope it, blame God and lose the little faith they had.

What about you. **Are you ready?**

### **Preparing for faith in a trial**

The five wise young woman in the parable, had listened to advice, and had prepared themselves properly for the evening. They had taken small jars of oil as backup in case they were needed. No doubt there were other ways they had prepared themselves. Nothing was going to stop them having a great night.

What is it in us that we are preparing, so that we can have sufficient faith in a trial to see us through? What is our oil?

Let me suggest three things that we can help prepare: - our hearts, minds and souls.

#### The Heart

In our preparations for Jesus, we are working on our heart, because we want our own selfish hearts to be transformed to be more like that of Jesus, who shows love and compassion equally for the lost as he does for his disciples. We should be praying for that transformation, asking for Gods love to flow through and out of hearts, whilst at the same time putting it into practice; Each day to love each person that God puts in front of us, being compassionate, doing acts of random kindness. That's the preparation our heart needs. With a well prepared heart, we will be able to demonstrate his love in all circumstances.

#### The Mind

In our preparations for Jesus, we are working on our minds. *Romans 12v2 says " Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect".* What do we allow into our minds. Do we listen to gossip and watch unsuitable films, or do we seek out those things that will benefit our minds, and teach us more about Jesus. Take time to read our bibles, to read Christian books, to listen to sermons, to hear testimonies, and learn off each other. We should pray for wisdom, and for Gods truth to transform our minds. With a well prepared mind, we will be able to make the right decisions and say the right words, whatever our circumstances.

#### The Soul

In our preparations for Jesus, we are working on our souls. The soul is the deepest and most needy part of our being. It is like the King on a chess board, the most important and yet vulnerable piece that needs protecting. It craves God (deep cries to deep), and only finds satisfaction in Him. According to Dallas

Willard, when the soul is well, we live in harmony with our selves. It keeps our will power in check and on the right lines, our minds do what we will, and our bodies do what we decide. Even in a hectic and challenging world we remain calm and are assured of Gods loving presence. We can then say “ I am in the storm, but the storm is not me”. When our soul is damaged by sin and neglect, contentment and satisfaction is hard to find.

We are supposed to have places where we can rest and find peace. The Psalmist says that our job is not to heal our souls but make space for them so that healing can come. He leads me by still water and he refreshes my soul. We need to keep Jesus in focus, and make space for Jesus, spaces where he can refresh and restore your soul.

With a well prepared soul, we will be able to have the peace and presence of God within us to endure with him in all circumstances.

How far have you got? Have you been preparing your heart, mind and soul. Is this part of your routine?

**Are you ready?**

## Summary

The groom loves us, he wants to meet us face to face one day, and has invited us to a party, life in his presence which will go on for ever and ever. How wonderful is that?

The parable is clever because instead of just telling us what to do, he takes us on a journey where we see the consequences of taking both the wrong and the right course of action. If we are lazy, or foolish, such that we are unprepared, then we could miss out on the Kingdom Of God.

1. We could be amongst Christians doing Christian things but have never asked him into our lives inviting him to transform us, so that we can be in his presence.

2. We could have asked him into our lives, but then never made the efforts to become his disciple, to work at it, looking after our heart, mind and soul, and growing in our faith, so like the foolish women we are not prepared, we are not ready for the trials.

3. Or we could work at it. Pray, study, serve, put ourselves outside our comfort zones for Jesus, and see our faith grow. Then when trials come, our faith will stand the test and even be strengthened by the trial. Why. Because WE ARE READY. **Are you ready?**

The American Horatio Spafford lost his son in 1870 to scarlet fever. He invested his wealth in Real Estate and most of it along with his own home was destroyed the next year in 1871 in the Great Chicago fire. He had no insurance. In 1873 he decided to go a Christian

crusade to England and have a holiday there too. He had some last minute issues to deal with so he sent his wife and four daughter ahead of him. The ship collided with another ship and sank, Only his wife was rescued and made the journey there alive. He took a ship out to join his wife, and he sailed over the spot where his daughters had been lost. In that moment he penned the words to a popular hymn:-

*When peace like a river attends my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll,  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
**It is well, it is well with my soul.***

Like Horatio Spafford, **Are you ready?**

He is a God worth preparing for. **Jesus deeply loves you** and with his help and grace he wants to prepare you for the trials ahead, which in turn will lead you into a deeper faith. . I pray that we will, each one of us, become **consumed with pleasing Jesus** and becoming more like him. Then no matter how hard the trial, through him all things are possible. With his love in our hearts, his truths in our minds, and his peace in our souls, the trials and tests can strengthen us. We will run the race, and on out last day, with our faith still strong we will look forward to meeting him face to face, because we spent our life preparing for that day, and we got ready to meet the groom, to meet Jesus. **Are you ready to do that?** Yes. Lets say an Amen to that. Amen

### **Supporting scriptures**

**1 Peter 4v12.** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

**John 16v33.** In the world you will have trials. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

**James 1v12.** Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

**James 1 v2-4.** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.