

Five Foolish Virgins

This article on Matthew 25:1–13 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

The story of the faithful and wise servant that Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 24:45–51 reminds us to be ready in case He returns sooner than we have anticipated. The faithless servant boldly sins, believing he can put off changing his ways because he thinks his master will be long in coming (Matt. 24:48–51). A wise servant, however, remains faithful his duties since he does not know when his master will return and he refuses to be caught unprepared. He does not put off loving service to his master because today might be his last chance to do what is right.

In the context of explaining about the end time, Jesus used the parable in Matthew 25:1–13 to exhort us to be ready if He delays longer than we expect. The story is based on a Near Eastern wedding, a scenario familiar to His original audience. After nuptials at the bride's home, a welcoming party escorts the newly-married couple to the bridegroom's house for the lengthy reception. The attendants guide these evening processions with their "lamps" (Matt. 25:3–4), which are likely torches made of olive oil-doused cloths mounted on sticks. Wise members of the bridal party carry extra oil in case their torches need to be relit.

In Jesus' parable, the bridegroom for whom the ten virgins are waiting is the Savior Himself (v. 1). Jesus is here implicitly claiming to be God incarnate; the Old Testament often pictures the Creator as a groom and His people as His bride (Isa. 54:4–8; Hos. 2:14–20). The bridegroom's arrival is clearly taking longer than expected, for all ten ladies fall asleep (Matt. 25:2–5). This reveals that although we cannot know the exact time of His return, the fact that Jesus has tarried 2,000 years and counting is not unexpected.

The foolish virgins are unprepared for the bridegroom (vv. 8–13). They did not count the cost of being in the processional and did not ready themselves for its delay. Like many others, the foolish girls have not understood the price of discipleship; sacrifice and forethought are required to stand in the day of trial and to be assured that one's faith is real (Eph. 6:10–20; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 1 John 5:13). Only the spiritually prepared — the wise virgins — will enter the kingdom.

We cannot trust in the spiritual readiness of others. Being ready to enter the kingdom at our Lord's return or, should He tarry, to remain faithful when our rescue seems long in coming is something that we are responsible for as individuals. We must see that our lamps are being fed — that we are continually growing in the love of God and service to others. Otherwise our oil will run out and we will be revealed as foolish and faithless.