

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

By Tom Finley

This parable spoken by Jesus is recorded only here in Matthew. It has been the subject of various interpretations by Christian teachers. This article will attempt to analyze the parable by paying close attention to sound interpretive guidelines. Let us remember that interpreting Biblical prophecy is the most challenging exercise of Bible study. Also, since many serious believers can see things lining up for an end to this age and the nearness of Jesus' return, it behooves us to pay special attention to what the Bible teaches regarding the end times. These passages should give us much-needed instruction for believers living in the final days of this age. I hope that the readers will give this explanation consideration.

The matter of context is of top priority in Biblical interpretation. The context of this parable is what is called the "Olivet Discourse" in Matthew 24 and 25. This discourse given by Jesus covers an overview of God's plan and dealings with men related to the period of Jesus' coming. A principal matter of Christ's return is His judgment upon men. We can see this in various places in Scripture but here is a snapshot of this theme:

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!
Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together
before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world
with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psa. 98:7-9)

So, let us be sure that we will see God's judgments upon the world and men in these two chapters. When God judges it can be a positive judgment or a negative one for the persons involved. This is similar to a court judge who can rule whether a person is innocent or guilty (in a criminal case). Or, in a civil case, the decision can be for a positive award or a negative penalty. In considering the verses above in Psalm 98, this means God's judgments will be righteous, fair, and impartial. Some may get positive treatment and others may receive some type of penalty. One common mistake Christians make is to think that everything positive or negative means either "heaven or hell" (eternal judgment). But the Scripture reveals that besides eternal judgment—where a person is either with God in His kingdom eternally or consigned to hell—there are other judgments God can exercise in the temporal realm (the realm of time, before eternity).

The Scriptures also declare that our eternal salvation is purely God's free gift of grace to us, who were fallen sinners with no hope and without God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9). One of D. L. Moody's favorite verses was John 5:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." The judgment concerning the possession of eternal life has passed. Those who believe have eternal life and will not come into a future judgment concerning that.

But other judgments are possible, such as judgments at the Judgment Seat of Christ for our works (2 Cor. 5:10), disciplinary judgments in our lives (Heb. 12:5-8), and end-time judgments, such as in Matthew 24 and 25.

The parable of the ten virgins is also within a narrower context inside the Olivet Discourse and this is significant for interpretation. This narrower context is Matt. 24:36-25:30. The previous section describes general conditions of the period in the future, as well as conditions in Israel in the time nearer the end. Then, following the parable of the fig tree (symbolizing Israel) a new section begins in verse 36 using “but” as a marker indicating a shift in the discourse. Here the discussion regarding the unknown day and hour of the Lord’s return begins. This discussion reviews *the days of Noah as an example of the coming judgments upon the earth*. This entire new section (Matt. 24:32-25:30) has one repeated theme with various connective words: “Who then” (24:45); “Then” (25:1); “For” (25:14). *The common theme in this section is comprised of the judgments of God upon two contrasting parties. One party receives a positive judgment and the other party a negative judgment.* The table below is an overview:

Judgments at the Coming of the Lord

Verses	Subjects	Condition	Result of judgment
Matt. 24:40-44	Ordinary people	Watchful	Taken
		Unwatchful	Left (loss)
Matt. 24:45-51	Servants (slaves) – stewards of a household	Faithful	New responsibilities
		Unfaithful	Harsh judgment
Matt. 25:1-13	Virgins	Wise	Wedding entrance
		Foolish	Shut out
Matt. 25:14-30	Servants (slaves) entrusted with property	Productive	Praise; more responsibility
		Unproductive	Censure; loss of responsibility

Who are these people in this section of Matthew 24:40-25:30?

There have been various answers by commentators. However, I would suggest a simple and sound explanation based on the text. Let us take note of the pronouns used in the passage, and even in verses 36-39 before verse 40. In verses 36-39, Jesus

describes the judgment of the flood coming upon the world in Noah's day. That is the example He sets up before He applies it. He uses the term "they" to refer to the world's inhabitants, apart from Noah's family who entered the safety of the ark. In His application to the future judgments of God, Jesus next uses "two men" and "two women"—ordinary people at work—to show that the coming judgment will create a significant division between two ordinary people. This division is described as "one will be taken and one left." Next, verse 42 reads: "**Therefore**, stay awake, for **you** do not know on what day **your Lord** is coming." This warning is to *you* (plural), persons who have Jesus as their Lord. The language of verses 43-44 then shows us that *not staying awake and alert will result in a loss*:

But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, **he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.** Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour **you** do not expect."

The warning is given to "**you**" and has to do with "**your Lord**" coming. To accurately determine who the "you" is here, we must consider to whom the Lord is speaking. From Mark 13:3-4 we learn that this Olivet teaching was *given privately to four of Christ's disciples*: "Peter and James and John and Andrew." Therefore, we must conclude that the words of the discourse here, including the warnings, apply to the church. These four were foundational apostles of the church and thus logically point to members of the church. The Bible makes a clear distinction between the church of God, the Jews, and the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). *Throughout Christian history over many centuries, these warnings have been given to the church to watch (be spiritually alert, vigilant) and be ready (rightly prepared) for the coming of the Lord at an unknown day or hour.* This same warning is seen as a concluding word at the end of the parable of the ten virgins: "Watch therefore, for **you** know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13).

We will move on to the parable of the ten virgins, but first, we need to set the stage by explaining the warning to the "two men" and the "two women." This is needed because we will eventually see that "two" people have a connection to the ten virgins. What does it mean that "one will be taken and one left?" In the example given concerning Noah, we see that his family escaped the judgment of the flood by entering the ark. The others were left on the earth to experience the judgment of the flood. It is most interesting that Luke's account of the discourse does not give an account with details on four types of people, but **ends with a strong admonition for believers as follows**:

(Luk 21:34) "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

(Luk 21:35) For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

(Luk 21:36) But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

In these verses, we can see that Jesus is warning His disciples that a day of great trial is coming that will affect everyone on the whole earth. He has noted this terrible time of catastrophe in earlier verses. Importantly, Jesus notes in verse 36 that His disciples can “escape” this coming trial, but to do so a disciple’s heart must be cleared of worldly excesses and cares, and he must be awake and praying to escape being left in the trial. Succinctly, *this trial is the three-and-a-half-year great tribulation* and the escape is rapture (see footnote for more details).¹ In summary, the “two” are both believers but the “one taken” will be taken by the Lord in rapture and the “one left” will be left to be on the earth for at least part of the great tribulation (as a remedial judgment to help him mature in the Lord). The difference in outcome is determined by the disciple’s exercise of holiness and his vigilance and prayer. This “selective rapture” understanding of the rapture has not received much attention today, but it has been held by many godly believers and teachers (see footnote)². There are five basic views of the rapture, and there have been teachings by godly and learned men on each view.³ The Bible’s teaching on the rapture is not easy to fully discern and it is of less importance than other vital issues of the faith. Therefore, it is important for all of us to remain humble concerning our views and to be tolerant towards those who differ. We should bear with one another in love, and be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The “selective rapture” view is presented here for your consideration.

So, the escape described in Luke 21:34-36 is *possible but conditional*. The Bible seems to give only two passages that clearly describe this possibility of escape for the believer from the coming great tribulation. The other passage is the well-known verse often cited by those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture—Rev. 3:10. It should be noted that this verse in Revelation is also conditional. This promise is *only given to one of the seven churches* noted in Revelation chapters two and three. Philadelphia is the only one of the seven churches that received *no censure* and also *had already been fully tested*

¹ See the author’s booklet, *Watch and Be Ready for the Coming of the Lord*, for more details on this rapture view.

² Some names are: Hudson Taylor (The China Inland Mission, 19th century), A. B. Simpson (19th/20th centuries; Christian and Missionary Alliance), Robert Govett (British expositor, 19th century), G. H. Lang (British expositor, 20th century), Evan Roberts (principal leader of the 1904 Welsh revival), D. M. Panton (20th century British teacher; editor of the “*Dawn*” magazine; author of the classic work, “The Judgment Seat of Christ”), George N. H. Peters (19th century American Lutheran pastor; author of the renowned work on prophecy, “*The Theocratic Kingdom*”), T. Austin-Sparks (20th century British teacher), and Watchman Nee (with the “Little Flock” movement in China, 20th century).

³ These five views are: 1) Pre-tribulation. This view teaches that all believers are raptured before the last seven-year period. 2) Mid-tribulation. This view holds that all believers are raptured at the mid-point of the final seven-year period. 3) Post-tribulation. Those who hold this view see the rapture as happening near the very end of the seven-year period. 4) Pre-wrath. This view teaches that believers are raptured out just before God pours out His wrath upon the earth, starting at the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17). The view holds that believers live through the great tribulation (the fifth seal per this view), which begins at the mid-point of the seven years. 5) Partial, or selective rapture. This teaching holds that there is more than one rapture, as explained in this writing.

and found faithful. The Lord's promise to Philadelphia: "**Because you have kept my word** about patient endurance, **I will keep you from the hour of trial** that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." We see that this assembly in Philadelphia met the condition of faithfulness and thus received the promise of escape.

The "selective rapture" view sees this escape as a special privilege for those believers who have lived devoted lives to the Lord and have grown to spiritual maturity. This conditional rapture, occurring sometime before the great tribulation begins, is not the only rapture, but is the early, or "first fruits" rapture. At least one later rapture occurs in which the remainder of the later ripened Christians are gathered to the Lord. This later, or "general harvest" rapture, is pictured in 1 Thess. 4:13-17 and Rev. 14:14-15.⁴ Those who teach this understanding of rapture believe that it occurs in line with the principle of harvest in the Bible that crops are gathered when they mature (Mark 4:26-29; see also Exo. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:39).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'

¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

⁴ Since most believers think in terms of only one rapture, they identify the passage in 1 Thess. 4 as describing that single rapture. The alternative view of a selective earlier rapture understands 1 Thess. 4 as describing *a rapture of the remaining saints* on the earth following the first fruits rapture. The idea of some believers remaining on the earth after the first fruits rapture may be indicated by the unusual phrase "who remain," or "who are left" to further describe those alive at the time of this final gathering. This phrase is used twice and seems redundant, unless the Holy Spirit is including it specifically for clarity. Two versions (American Standard Version and English Standard Version) translate the word as "left" instead of "remain." In other words, this phrasing may well mean that those who are alive at that time are those who have been left behind on the earth following an earlier rapture. "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, **who are left** until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." (1 Thess. 4:15, ESV) "Then we who are alive, **who are left**, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17, ESV)

In looking at the details of this parable we should remember that most Bible teachers hold that parables are a story with a main point. Since it is a story, not every detail will have an exact meaning, but some details will be key for understanding. When the Lord Jesus gave parables and interpreted them, it should be noted that He assigned meanings to only some key points (see the parable of the soils and the parable of the tares, with the Lord's explanations).

To understand this parable, we must know some truths regarding ancient Jewish marriage customs. Firstly, the future bride and groom became betrothed (engaged), and this agreement for the future marriage was sealed with a gift from the groom to the bride. Then, the bride remained at her house for about a year preparing for the future wedding. That preparation included the making of her wedding garment and her heart preparation to leave her family and begin a new life as a wife. The marriage ceremony itself took place at the house of the groom's father. The groom would often surprise the bride by coming at night at an unknown time to bring the bride to the house of the groom's father. For this reason, lamps (probably torches) had to be ready for the procession back to the father's house. The bride was accompanied by female companions in this procession. Once they arrived at the house, the marriage ceremony would take place. The bride and groom consummated the marriage in private quarters on the first night. Seven days of celebration followed the ceremony.

Verse one begins with "then the kingdom of heaven." The word "then" refers back to the time of the Lord's coming as seen in the prior chapter (see also 25:6). At the time of Christ's coming an aspect of His kingdom is depicted here as His dealing with His believers (virgins) in judgment, determining which believers will go into the wedding feast and which believers will be excluded. As discussed, this judgment of positive or negative results is the recurring theme of this passage (Matt. 24:36-25:30) and the warnings in the passage apply to the church, as represented by the four apostles who hear these warnings applied to them ("you").

The bride (a single corporate entity) is not specifically mentioned because Jesus *used the parable to teach the individual believer's responsibility to be prepared*. The ten virgins, close companions of the bride, represent believers in the church who may or may not be positively rewarded in the coming time of judgment (see the important footnote).⁵ In his monumental work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim writes:

If the union of the Ten Virgins for the purpose of meeting the Bridegroom, and their *à priori* claims to enter in with Him—which are, so to speak, the historical data and necessary premises in the Parable—point to the Church,

⁵ "Concerning the relation of the virgins to the bride, we must bear in mind the analogy of the marriage supper of the king's son and his guests [Matt. 22:1-14]. The Church, in her aggregate and ideal unity, is the bride; the members of the Church, as individually called, are guests; in their separation from the world, and expectation of the Lord's coming, they are His virgins." (*Lange's Commentary*)

the main lessons of the Parable are the need of the individual, personal, and spiritual preparation. Only such will endure the trial of the long delay of Christ's Coming; only such will stand that of an immediate summons to meet the Christ.⁶

The figure of a virgin is used in the New Testament as believers betrothed to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). A chaste virgin is never used in Scripture as a figure for an unbeliever.

The difference between the foolish and the wise virgins has solely to do with the amount of oil they had to give light to their torches for the journey to the bridegroom's house. The difference is not between "true" and "false" virgins, but between the wise ("prudent", NASB) and the foolish. All of the virgins had some oil and produced some light, showing that all were believers. The oil surely signifies the Holy Spirit, especially in the life of a believer to shine out a bright testimony of Christ's life (Ps. 45:7; Zech. 4:1-6; Isa. 61:1; Matt. 5:14-16; Heb. 1:9). Verses three and four indicate that all believers have some knowledge that the bridegroom will come at some time. But not all will be adequately prepared for that day. The question of a believer's readiness to meet the bridegroom depends upon his or her supply of oil. The wise virgins are those who have flasks full of oil—indicating the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Verse five indicates that as the bridegroom delayed, these ten believers became drowsy and slept. This is significant. The Greek word for "drowsy" means to begin to sink into sleep. Sleep in the New Testament can describe a believer's death in Jesus (John 11:11-13; 1 Cor. 11:30). The death of unbelievers is never described this way in the New Testament. This means that as the Lord's coming is delayed, some believers—many in fact—will have died. Note that the matter of a "delay" in the Lord's coming has already been mentioned in this passage (24:48). Therefore, the **ten virgins** here refer to believers **who have died** before the Lord's coming. *The Pulpit Commentary* states that "The [church] Fathers take this sleep to be an image of death."⁷ The ten here will make up the greater part of the church, and when put together with **the two who are living** in Matt. 24:40-41 the result is **twelve, a number associated with the church** ("twelve apostles of the Lamb," who comprise the twelve foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem; Rev. 21:14). We see the number for God's Old Testament people in Scripture as "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Gen. 49:28). This number twelve was sometimes divided into ten and two: twelve spies divided between ten with a bad report and two with a good report (Num. 14:37-38); the kingdom of twelve tribes symbolically torn into twelve pieces by Ahijah the prophet, with ten pieces given to the Northern Kingdom and two belonging to the Southern Kingdom (1 Kings 11:29-31).

Verse six describes the announcement of the arrival of the bridegroom at the bride's house, signaling that the time has arrived for the wedding procession to go to the house of the groom's father.

⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), vol. II, p. 454.

⁷ *The Pulpit Commentary* (e-Sword edition).

Verse seven tells us that all ten virgins arose, meaning here that they were aroused from the “sleep” of death. At that point, all of the virgins checked their torches and their supply of oil for the journey to the father of the groom’s house for the wedding. The foolish virgins then realized that they were unprepared for the occasion of the wedding due to a lack of oil. *This signifies a shortage of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the foolish virgins.*

The next two verses show us that *the oil that is needed must be bought*. The wise virgins had already bought enough oil. The foolish virgins were unprepared because they had not bought enough oil. Our eternal salvation is a free gift, costing us nothing, but costing Christ His death on a Roman cross (Eph. 2:8-9). However, after believers receive the free gift of salvation they should then begin the pathway of discipleship, which involves following Christ in obedience. Following Christ in discipleship is costly. In one of the passages on discipleship, Jesus stated that His disciples would have to hate their own lives (be willing to forego their preferences and desires), carry their cross (obedience to God’s will), and be willing to give up all of their possessions to follow Him (Luke 14:25-33).

A key feature in the parable is the contrast between “wise” and “foolish.” Ephesians 5:15-18 instructs believers to walk in a wise way: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as **wise**, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be **foolish**, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled [controlled by] with the Spirit.” In this passage, we see being **wise** as involving the best use of our time and seeking to understand what God’s will is. What follows is submission to the control of the Holy Spirit for obedience to His will. Being obedient to the Holy Spirit results in light being produced in our lives, just as a torch produces light when supplied with oil. “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever **follows me [obedience]** will not walk in darkness, but **will have the light of life**” (John 8:12). Another passage for disciples that contrasts being **wise** with being **foolish** is Matthew 7:24-27. Wisdom is shown there as obedience to the principles taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Here is one final passage connecting obedience to the resulting light in our lives. “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. **Do all things [obey the Spirit’s working in you]** without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom **you shine as lights in the world**” (Phil. 2:13-15).

Reward According to Works:

At this point, it is important to recognize that two great principles of truth can be observed throughout the New Testament. One principle is: **Eternal Salvation is a Gift** (by grace through faith, apart from works.) The other principle is **Reward According to Works**. Believers, and even Bible teachers, can easily misunderstand Scriptures by not recognizing and applying these principles correctly and consistently. Our eternal salvation is a free gift, received at the moment of initial faith in Jesus Christ and His work

of redemption through His death and resurrection. It has nothing to do with our works. On the other hand, **reward** (better understood as recompense) is based entirely on our works—how we have lived our lives after coming to faith. It is based on our discipleship (following Christ), not initial belief in Christ. Such recompense can be positive or negative. This recompense does not impact our eternal salvation, but it does impact our lives in the next age, the millennium, with some possible effect on our positions and service in the eternal kingdom. God is using our present lives of discipleship to test us and to prepare us for service in the coming ages.

When Christ returns, He is coming to recompense each of us according to our works. In the brief discipleship passage in Matthew 16:24-27, Jesus concludes his words with this statement: “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will **repay** each person **according to what he has done**” (Matt. 16:27). Many believers tend to think of everything in terms of eternal salvation—lost or saved for eternity. But, believers should discern that many Scriptures in the New Testament are not speaking of eternal salvation, but of future recompense according to our deeds since becoming a believer. These comments on reward (the Greek words mean recompense or payment) help us understand God’s dealings with both the wise and the foolish virgins. Recompense at the Judgment Seat of Christ, can vary greatly for believers. There can be great positive rewards or great loss and discipline. Note: Sins confessed and repented of will likely not be held against us at this Judgment Seat.

Verse 10 in the parable tells us that those wise virgins who were ready went into the feast and the door was shut. The foolish virgins, who were not ready, came later and appealed to the Lord: “Lord, lord, open to us.” **The simple truth is that they had not adequately prepared during their lifetimes for the coming of the Lord. It was too late for the foolish virgins to buy the needed oil. When our lives on this earth are over, there will not be an opportunity to make up for such a deficiency.** The result is not being admitted to the wedding feast. That door will be shut. This does not mean that we will never enjoy the companionship of Christ afforded to the bride. We will explain that shortly.

The refusal of the Lord to open the door to the wedding feast for the unprepared virgins is likely connected to the Judgment Seat of Christ. We do not know exactly how the timing of the Judgment Seat works in connection with the wedding feast, but some well-regarded commentators feel that both events are connected with rapture, and the Scriptures show that judgment takes place when the Lord comes⁸.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, each believer will be recompensed for the deeds he has done in his body as a Christian (2 Cor. 5:10). *The major decision Christ will make at His Judgment Seat concerns the approval for entry (or participation) in Christ’s 1,000-year kingdom or disapproval for that reward.*⁹ (See the footnote for the best two books

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*; Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*; Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny*; D. M. Panton, *The Judgment Seat of Christ*; Chuck and Nancy Missler, *The Kingdom, Power & Glory*. Scriptures: Matt. 16:24-27; Lk. 14:14; Lk. 19:15; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; Rev. 22:12.)

⁹ Numerous passages indicate approval or disapproval for participation in the Messianic (1,000-year) kingdom by believers. Here are some of them: Matt. 7:21-27; Matt. 16:24-28; Matt. 19:27-30; Mk.

on the Judgment Seat of Christ in my opinion.¹⁰) This decision is related to participation in the wedding feast and the special privilege of being co-heirs with Christ as He rules in the Messianic age to come. *The Pulpit Commentary* summarizes the exclusion of the five foolish virgins from the wedding feast as follows:

These five virgins had received the grace of God, and used it well for a time, and only failed at the last for lack of care and watchfulness. They had still some love for the Lord, still desired to serve him; it is not conceivable that they should suffer the same punishment as the utterly godless and profane, whose wickedness was perfect and Satanic. Doubtless they were punished; but as there are degrees of happiness in heaven, so there may be gradation of pains and penalties for those debarred from its blessings (see 1Co 3:15). But it is not improbable that **the exclusion in the first place refers to the deprivation of participation in Messiah's future kingdom, whatever that may be, according to the vision in Rev 20:1-15.**, and that the proceedings at the final judgment are not here intended. [Emphasis added.]¹¹

In Matthew 25:11, the five foolish virgins implored Jesus to open the door to the wedding feast. But He says to the five foolish virgins, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." The Greek word for "know" here (*oida*) in *verse 12 is explained in context in the foremost Greek lexicon as follows:*

“(2) **be intimately acquainted with or stand in a close relation to . . .**

- —οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς *I have nothing to do with you* **Mt 25:12.**
- Cp. the formula of similar mng. p 694 by which a teacher excluded a scholar for seven days:
- Billerb. I 469; IV 293.”¹²

In other words, the meaning here of Jesus' words to the foolish virgins is that He is not intimately acquainted with them and thus is excluding them from the wedding feast with a "shut door." The lexicon cites one ancient Greek usage of a similar phrase in Greek literature where a teacher excluded a scholar for seven days from a class. *I would suggest that the lack of a close relationship or intimacy with Jesus is based upon the deficiency*

10:27-31; Lk. 13:23-30; Lk. 19:24-30; Jn. 12:24-26; Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 1 Cor. 6:5-10; 1 Cor. 10:24-27; Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 5:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 2:1-3; Heb 4:1-11; Heb. 6:1-8; Heb. 10:23-31; Heb. 12:25-29; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 1:4-11; Rev. 2:10-11; Rev. 3:26-29; Rev. 3:3-6; Rev. 3:11-13; Rev. 3:15-22. See the following article for an overview of the special privileges relating to the coming Messianic kingdom: <https://seekersofchrist.org/Rewards/Birth/birthright.html>

¹⁰ *The Believer's Payday*, Paul N. Benware. *The Judgment Seat of Christ*, D. M. Pantton.

¹¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* (e-Sword edition)

¹² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 693–694.

of the believer's obedience. Interestingly, Jesus used close family relationships to illustrate His spiritual relationship with people: "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother**" (Matt. 12:46-50). **The intimacy of our relationship with Christ is gauged by our obedience to Him, not just our being born again as children of God.** It is a matter of our **intimate fellowship with Him**, not simply our status as a child of God. **"The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.** We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24).

In the Jewish wedding tradition, the bride is to prepare her wedding dress before the groom comes for her. In the book of Revelation, we read: "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). The wise virgins *prepare* for the coming wedding day by walking in acts of righteousness before God. So, we see that our deeds are a primary factor here, as the Reward Principle indicates. These words are in Revelation 19 *before* the Lord appears openly to wage war with the antichrist and his armies. So, the bride here in Rev. 19:7 is what we might call a corporate overcomer company since she is seen as being righteous in experience, not just by imputed righteousness. Her entry into the wedding feast, picturing special intimacy with Christ, is *a special privilege and blessing* due to her cooperation with the Spirit of God during her lifetime. The wise virgins are part of this overcomer company.

This does not mean that all the other believers who are "shut out" never experience the bride's intimacy with Christ. They will. When the millennium is over, the bride will be the wife of the Lamb in eternity. All who were betrothed to Him are eventually pictured as the corporate entity in union with Christ, the bridegroom. For participation in the overcomer bridal company *before Christ's return, individual Christians must be diligent in preparing* their wedding garments. But, concerning the bridal company *after the millennium*, in eternity, the text in Revelation declares: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven **from God, prepared as a bride** adorned for her husband" (Rev, 21:2). Here the verb for **prepared** is in the perfect tense indicating that the entire bridal company has been completed for union with her husband: "Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb'" (Rev. 21:9). Full union with Christ *in eternity* is not dependent upon our works, but on God's grace.

Certain persons reign with Christ in the millennium as seen in Rev. 20:4 and 6 below. Those on "thrones" mentioned in the first sentence of verse four are connected to the overcomer bridal company, as explained shortly.

"Then I saw **thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.** Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**" (Rev. 20:4)

“Blessed and holy is **the one who shares in the first resurrection!** Over such the second death has no power, but **they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.**” (Rev. 20:6) [emphasis added]

Some of those who reign with Christ noted above are previously referenced in Rev. 17:14: “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are **called and chosen and faithful**” [emphasis added]. The calling and choosing here does not refer to election in eternal salvation, but to God’s choosing of the *faithful* (who have lived their lives for Him) for the special privilege and reward of being in Christ’s army at His return, and then being given authority to rule with Christ in the millennium. In his massive work on Revelation, Robert Govett points out that, “Warring against foes and judging subjects are the two prime functions of a [Old Testament] king” (note 1 Sam. 8:19-20 and the Savior’s second advent, Rev. 19:11).¹³ These victorious ones are again noted in Rev. 19:8 as those “clothed in fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” The same group is identified again in Rev. 19:14 as “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.” Also, Christ’s army is noted once more in Rev. 19:19: “And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.” Lastly, they are seen again among those given authority to rule with Christ in the millennium (Rev. 20:4a in particular). Co-rulership with Christ is a privilege awarded to the overcomers in the church (Rev. 2:26-27; Rev. 3:21).¹⁴ This co-heirship with Christ is also noted in Rom. 8:17b and 2 Tim. 2:12.¹⁵

The final verse in this passage on the ten virgins is:

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt. 25:13).

Not knowing the day or the hour when Christ will suddenly come, calls us to be constant and persevering in our preparation. He may come today, or He may come after our lifetime is over. Not only is watchfulness needed today in case He comes for us today, but it is also needed over our lifetime in case He comes suddenly many years after we

¹³ Robert Govett, *Govett on Revelation* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1981), Vol. IV, p. 232.

¹⁴ This identification of these overcomers and their reward in Revelation chapters 19 and 20 is not a novel doctrine. The author’s comments on this matter are a composite of ideas from *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary, Revelation 8-22* (Robert L. Thomas), and *The Expository Notes of Dr. Constable*. Dr. Constable writes: “Revelation 20:4 - The purpose of the thrones that John saw was twofold: ruling and judging (cf. Dan 7:9-10; Dan 7:22; Mat 19:28). Those sitting on them are probably the faithful saints who have returned with Christ to the earth (Rev 19:7-8; Rev 19:14; Rev 19:19; cf. Rev 2:26-28; Rev 3:12; Rev 3:21). [Note: Seiss, pp. 457-58; Thomas, Revelation 8-22, p. 414.]” *The Expository Notes of Dr. Constable*, e-sword edition. Quotation used by permission.

¹⁵ Romans 8:17 is more accurately translated with its “*men . . . de*” construction in Greek as follows: “and if we are children, we are also **heirs—heirs on the one hand, of God, and on the other hand, co-heirs with Christ**, if we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him.” (Rom. 8:17, translation by Zane Hodges, Greek professor).

are born again. Then again, if we die before He comes, we must be prepared for the wedding summons of the ten virgins by gaining an extra supply of oil over the long term of our lives. The seeming “delay” of the return of Christ is both a test and an opportunity. It is a test to see if we will remain faithful in our pursuit of sanctification and service, or if we will drift away from this pursuit, like the wicked servant who said to himself, ‘My master is delayed” (Matt. 24:48-48). It is a test to see if we will watch ourselves, and guard against our hearts being weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of life (Luke 21:34). On the other hand, His “delay” is His gracious allowance of time for us to repent from any wrong path, to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), and to deepen our love and longing for our coming bridegroom.

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