

A Study on the Parable of the Ten Virgins

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” Mt 25:1

Q: When and to whom does this parable apply?

A: “As Christ sat looking upon the party that waited for the bridegroom, He told His disciples the story of the ten virgins, by their experience illustrating the experience of the church that shall live just before His second coming.”-- *Christ's Object Lesson's*, p. 406.2. Obviously then we are focused on the last of the seven churches mentioned in Rev 2-3, the Laodician church, which is the Seventh Day Adventist church.

“The parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25 also illustrates the experience of the Adventist people. In Matthew 24, in answer to the question of His disciples concerning the sign of His coming and of the end of the world, Chapter 25 opens with the words: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." Here is brought to view the church living in the last days, the same that is pointed out in the close of chapter 24.”-- *Great Controversy*, p 393.2

Q: What do the ten virgins represent?

A: “Clearly, then, the bride represents the Holy City, and the virgins that go out to meet the bridegroom are a symbol of the church. In the Revelation the people of God are said to be the guests at the marriage supper. Revelation 19:9. If guests, they cannot be represented also as the bride.” *Great Controversy*, p. 427.0

Q: What do the lamps represent?

A: “By the lamps is represented the word of God.”-- *Christ's Object Lesson's*, p. 406.2

“And five of them were wise, and five [were] foolish.” Mt 25:2

Q: What characterizes a foolish virgin?

A: “Without the Spirit of God a knowledge of His word is of no avail. The theory of truth, unaccompanied by the Holy Spirit, cannot quicken the soul or sanctify the heart. One may be familiar with the commands and promises of the Bible; but unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed. Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, men will not be able to distinguish truth from error, and they will fall under the masterful temptations of Satan.” -- *Christ's Object Lesson's*, p.408.3

The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form. "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Eze. 33:31. The apostle Paul points out that this will be the special characteristic of those who live just before Christ's second coming. He says, "In the last days perilous times shall come: for men shall be lovers of their own selves; . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3:1-5.”-- *Christ's Object Lesson's*, p. 411.1

“They that [were] foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:” Mt 25:3

Q: What does the oil represent?

A: The oil represents four important things, the Holy Spirit, grace, the righteousness of Christ, and pure unadulterated truth as shown in the following references.

1. "The golden oil represents the Holy Spirit."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 188
2. "From the two olive trees the golden oil was emptied through the golden pipes into the bowl of the candlestick, and thence into the golden lamps that gave light to the sanctuary. So from the holy ones that stand in God's presence His Spirit is imparted to the human instrumentalities who are consecrated to His service. The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate to God's people that heavenly grace which alone can make His word a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zech. 4:6."—*Christ's Object Lesson's*, p. 408.1 (see also 7 BC vol. 5 p. 1099)
3. Now is the time to entreat that souls shall not only hear the word of God, but without delay secure oil in their vessels with their lamps. That oil is the righteousness of Christ. It represents character, and character is not transferable. No man can secure it for another. Each must obtain for himself a character purified from every stain of sin."-- *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 233.2
4. This is the danger to which the church is now exposed--that the inventions of finite men shall mark out the precise way for the Holy Spirit to come. Though they would not care to acknowledge it, some have already done this. And because the Spirit is to come, not to praise men or to build up their erroneous theories, but to reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, many turn away from it. They are not willing to be deprived of the garments of their own self-righteousness. They are not willing to exchange their own righteousness, which is unrighteousness, for the righteousness of Christ, which is pure, unadulterated truth. The Holy Spirit flatters no man, neither does it work according to the devising of any man. Finite, sinful men are not to work the Holy Spirit. When it shall come as a reprover, through any human agent whom God shall choose, it is man's place to hear and obey its voice. "-- *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 64.3
5. "In the parable it was those that had oil in their vessels with their lamps that went in to the marriage. Those who, with a knowledge of the truth from the Scriptures, had also the Spirit and grace of God, and who, in the night of their bitter trial, had patiently waited, searching the Bible for clearer light--these saw the truth concerning the sanctuary in heaven and the Saviour's change in ministration, and by faith they followed Him in His work in the sanctuary above. And all who through the testimony of the Scriptures accept the same truths, following Christ by faith as He enters in before God to perform the last work of mediation, and at its close to receive His kingdom--all these are represented as going in to the marriage."—*Great Controversy*, p. 427.2

Based on items 3 and 4, the following logic can be demonstrated. If

- the oil = the righteousness of Christ and, (TM 233)
- the righteousness of Christ = pure unadulterated truth (TM 64.3)
- then the oil = pure unadulterated truth.

So we can see a very important truth here, the oil represents the Holy Spirit imparting grace unto the human instrument which is reflected in the development of a Christ-like character, which only comes by studying pure unadulterated truth. Only those that receive this imparting of God's grace on a daily basis will be to overcome every sin and flaw of character and, as a result, be able to have a proper understanding and knowledge of truth that will be revealed in the final conflict. How imperative it is then that we daily overcome every besetment and grow in faith of the righteousness of Christ so that we will be able to discern present truth for the hour and not be deceived by Satan's snares.

"But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."--Mt 25:4

Q: Who are the wise virgins?

A: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, [being] the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." Rev 14:4

Q: What does a woman represent?

A: "In Revelation 17 Babylon is represented as a woman --a figure which is used in the Bible as the symbol of a church, a virtuous woman representing a pure church, a vile woman an apostate church."-- *Great Controversy*, p. 381.1

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."--Mt 25:5, 6

Q: What is the meaning or application of the text "While the bridegroom (Christ) tarried, they all slumbered and slept."?

A: In the summer and autumn of 1844 the proclamation, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," was given. The two classes represented by the wise and foolish virgins were then developed--one class who looked with joy to the Lord's appearing, and who had been diligently preparing to meet Him; another class that, influenced by fear and acting from impulse, had been satisfied with a theory of the truth, but were destitute of the grace of God....The proclamation, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," in the summer of 1844, led thousands to expect the immediate advent of the Lord. At the appointed time the Bridegroom came, not to the earth, as the people expected, but to the Ancient of Days in heaven, to the marriage, the reception of His kingdom."-- *Great Controversy*, p. 426-7

Q: What is meant by slumbered and slept?

A: This is a description of the Laodician church revealed in Rev. 3:14-18 after 1844 up to the present.

Q: What was the mistake that the Millerite Adventists made regarding the understanding of "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh,"?

A: They thought this referred to Christ's second coming. In reality it represented the movement of Christ from the holy to the most holy apartment in the heavenly sanctuary to begin the judgment of all those who have died since creation up to the cases of the living. This commenced in 1844. The judgment of the living logically was to begin at a latter point in time. So we can see hear the there is clearly a dual application of this parable, first to the Millerite movement and the commencement of the judgment of the dead and second to a latter message to come which would announce the judgment of the living. This message came later to the church under the subtitle of "The 144,000 of Revelation --Call for Reformation." The preface of this message reads as follows.

"It is the intention of this book to reveal the truth of the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7 but the chief object of this publication is to bring about a reformation among God's people. The truth herein contained is divided into seven sections, giving proof from seven different angles, to prevent any doubt or confusion. This subject is made clear by the use of the Bible and the writings given by the Spirit of Prophecy.

The truth revealed here is of great importance to the church just now because of the foretold danger which God's people are soon to meet. It calls for decided action on the part of the believers to separate themselves from all worldlings and worldliness; to anchor themselves on the Solid Rock by obedience to all the truth known to this denomination, if we must escape the great ruin. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Micah 6:9.

“Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, [Not so]; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.”--Mt 25:7-9

Q: What is the dilemma for the foolish virgins, why can't they get any oil from the wise virgins even though both were sleeping and suddenly awakened?

A: “It is in a crisis that character is revealed. When the earnest voice proclaimed at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," and the sleeping virgins were roused from their slumbers, it was seen who had made preparation for the event. Both parties were taken unawares; but one was prepared for the emergency, and the other was found without preparation. So now, a sudden and unlooked-for calamity, something that brings the soul face to face with death, will show whether there is any real faith in the promises of God. It will show whether the soul is sustained by grace. The great final test comes at the close of human probation, when it will be too late for the soul's need to be supplied.

The ten virgins are watching in the evening of this earth's history. All claim to be Christians. All have a call, a name, a lamp, and all profess to be doing God's service. All apparently wait for Christ's appearing. But five are unready. Five will be found surprised, dismayed, outside the banquet hall.”-- *Christ's Object Lesson's*, p. 412.1, 2

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.”--Mt 25:10

Q: Where does the marriage take place?

A: “They were not to be present in person at the marriage; for it takes place in heaven, while they are upon the earth. The followers of Christ are to "wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding." Luke 12:36. But they are to understand His work, and to follow Him by faith as He goes in before God. It is in this sense that they are said to go in to the marriage.”-- *Great Controversy*, p. 427.1

Q: What does “the door was shut” mean.?

A: “Oh, that the people might know the time of their visitation! There are many who have not yet heard the testing truth for this time. There are many with whom the Spirit of God is striving. The time of God's destructive judgments is the time of mercy for those who have had no opportunity to learn what is truth. Tenderly will the Lord look upon them. His heart of mercy is touched; His hand is still stretched out to save, while the door is closed to those who would not enter.”--*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 97.2

Q: What is the time for God's destructive judgments mentioned in this passage?

A: “For the time [is come] that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if [it] first [begin] at us, what shall the end [be] of them that obey not the gospel of God?”--1 Pet 4:17 Here we see that judgment is progressive, first at the house of God (the Seventh Day Adventist church), then for the fallen churches of the world known as Babylon.

Q: Where does it mention in the spirit of prophecy how judgment will first begin at the SDA church?

A: There are numerous passages which clearly show how God will purify His church. Please read the following representative ones. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 80, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 266-7, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 211.1, 2; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 431, 445, *Early Writings*, p. 118, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, p. 380.2, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 197.1, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 228.

“Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”--Mt 25:11-13

Q: Does the hour wherein the Son of man cometh refer to the second coming?

A: This is specifically referring to Christ coming to carry out judgment on the church, i.e., purification of the church, a cleansing of the sanctuary in the final fulfillment of Dan 8:14.

“It was at midnight that God chose to deliver His people (from the purification of Ezekiel 9, not the 2nd coming). As the wicked were mocking around them, suddenly the sun appeared, shining in his strength, and the moon stood still. The wicked looked upon the scene with amazement, while the saints beheld with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Signs and wonders followed in quick succession. Everything seemed turned out of its natural course. The streams ceased to flow. Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. But there was one clear place of settled glory, whence came the voice of God like many waters, shaking the heavens and the earth.”-- *Early Writings*, p. 285.1

From the Comprehensive Index of EGW writings pg. 3190 we read the following explanation.

Events at Midnight: It is mistakenly thought by some that Mrs. White indicated that Christ will come at midnight. A careful reading of the statement in *Early Writings*, page 285, and *The Great Controversy*, page 635, 636, reveals that God’s people are “at midnight” delivered from the death sentence, and events from that hour happen rapidly till, according to *The Great Controversy*, page 640, “Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand.”

□ End of Study □

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**September 17, 1895 Have You Oil in Your Vessels With
Your Lamps?**

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By Mrs. E. G. White.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." Though five of these virgins are represented as wise and five as foolish, all had lamps. They had all been convicted that they must prepare for the coming of the bridegroom, and all had gained a knowledge of the truth. There was no apparent difference between the wise and the foolish until the cry was made, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him;" but the true state of things was then developed. The wise had taken precautions to carry oil with them in their vessels, so that their lamps that were beginning to burn dimly might be replenished with oil; but the foolish had not provided for this emergency, and now they made an earnest, distressed petition to those who were wise. "And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." They had neglected to prepare themselves to meet the bridegroom, and now turned to those who had provided themselves with oil. "But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves."

In reading this parable one cannot but pity the foolish virgins, and ask the question, Why is it that the wise did not divide their supply of oil? But as we make the spiritual application of the parable, we can see the reason.

It is not possible for those who have faith and grace to divide their supply with those who have not. It is not possible for those who have made a thorough heart work, to impart the benefit of this to those who have done but surface work. The parable is designed to point out the peril of doing a surface work. Many profess to be Christians, and for a time their half-heartedness is not discerned. The difference between them and those who are truly pious is not made apparent. This parable should awaken solemn reflections. Considering it we should ask ourselves, Are we doers of the words of Christ? Are we building on the rock? Are we, in our probationary time, making our calling and election sure? We should not soothe our consciences in expectation of heaven, when we are not bearing the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian life. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

All the ten virgins appeared to be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, and yet the test brought out the fact that five were unready. Those who have true piety esteem and revere the law of God. Through the grace of Christ they exemplify the principles of the law in their lives, and will not willfully break any of the commandments of God. They realize that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." They yield to Christ, who leads men to repentance of sin, who pardons the penitent soul, and clothes him with his own righteousness. The converted soul has a hatred of sin; he does not indulge in self-complacency, self-love, self-sufficiency, nor pass on day after day, claiming to be a Christian, and yet bringing dishonor upon Christ by misrepresenting him in character. Those who make this mistake, and pass on filled with self-righteousness, have not in reality made the first step heavenward. The first step toward heaven is conviction of sin, the second is repentance and obedience. True piety never exalts self.

The foolish virgins do not represent those who are hypocritical. They had a regard for truth, they advocated the truth, they were intending to go forth to meet the bridegroom. They are attached to those who believe the truth, and go with them, having lamps, which represent a knowledge of the truth. When there was a revival in the church, their feelings were stirred; but they failed to have oil in their vessels, because they did not bring the principles of godliness into their daily life and character. They did not fall upon the rock Christ Jesus, and permit their old nature to be broken up. This class is represented also by the stony-ground hearers. Christ said: "Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside; and the fowls came and devoured them up; some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth." Jesus explains these stony-ground hearers, and says, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

Many receive the truth readily, but they fail to assimilate truth, and its influence is not abiding. They are like the foolish virgins, who had no oil in their vessels with their lamps. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which is brought into the soul through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who earnestly search the Scriptures with much prayer, who rely upon God with firm faith, who obey his commandments, will be among those who are represented as wise virgins. The teachings of the word of God are not yea and nay, but yea and amen. The requirement of the gospel is far-reaching. Says the apostle, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Practical piety will not be attained by giving the grand truths of the Bible a place in the outer courts of the heart. The religion of the Bible must be brought into the large and the little affairs of life. It must furnish the powerful motives and principles that will regulate the Christian's character and course of action.

Human nature is depraved, and is justly condemned by a holy God. But provision is made for the repenting sinner, so that by faith in the atonement of the only begotten Son of God, he may receive forgiveness of sin, find justification, receive adoption into the heavenly family, and become an inheritor of the kingdom of God. Transformation of character is wrought through the operation of the Holy Spirit, which works upon the human agent, implanting in him, according to his desire and consent to have it done, a new nature. The image of God is restored to the soul, and day by day he is strengthened and renewed by grace, and is enabled more and more perfectly to reflect the character of Christ in righteousness and true holiness.

The oil so much needed by those who are represented as foolish virgins, is not something to be put on the outside. They need to bring the truth into the sanctuary of the soul, that it may cleanse, refine, and sanctify. It is not theory that they need; it is the sacred teachings of the Bible, which are not uncertain, disconnected doctrines, but are living truths, that involve eternal interests that center in Christ. In him is the complete system of divine truth. The salvation of the soul, through faith in Christ, is the ground and pillar of the truth. Those who exercise true faith in Christ make it manifest by holiness of character, by obedience to the law of God. They realize that the truth as it is in Jesus reaches heaven, and compasses eternity. They understand that the Christian's character should represent the character of Christ, and be full of grace and truth. To them is imparted the oil of grace, which sustains a never-failing light. The Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer, makes him complete in Christ. It is not a decided evidence that a man or a woman is a Christian because he manifests deep emotion when under exciting circumstances. He who is Christlike has a deep, determined, persevering element in his soul, and yet has a sense of his own weakness, and is not deceived and misled by the Devil, and made to trust in himself. He has a knowledge of the word of God, and knows that he is safe only as he places his hand in the hand of Jesus Christ, and keeps firm hold upon him.

Character is revealed by a crisis. When the earnest voice proclaimed at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," the sleeping virgins roused from their slumbers, and it was seen who had made preparation for the event. Both parties were taken unawares, but one was prepared for the emergency, and the other was found without preparation. Character is revealed by circumstances. Emergencies bring out the true metal of character. Some sudden and unlooked-for calamity, bereavement, or crisis, some unexpected sickness or anguish, something that brings the soul face to face with death, will bring out the true inwardness of the character. It will be made manifest whether or not there is any real faith in the promises of the word of God. It will be made manifest whether or not the soul is sustained by grace, whether there is oil in the vessel with the lamp.

Testing times come to all. How do we conduct ourselves under the test and proving of God? Do our lamps go out? or do we still keep them burning? Are we prepared for every emergency by our connection with Him who is full of grace and truth? The five wise virgins could not impart their character to the five foolish virgins. Character must be formed by us as individuals. It cannot be transferred to another, even if the possessor were willing to make the sacrifice. There is much we can do for each other while mercy still lingers. We can represent the character of Christ. We can give faithful warnings to the erring. We can reprove, rebuke, with all long-suffering and doctrine, bringing the doctrines of Holy Writ home to the heart. We can give heartfelt sympathy. We can pray with and for one another. By living a circumspect life, by maintaining a holy conversation, we may give an example of what a Christian should be; but no person can give to another his own mold of character. Let us duly consider the fact that we are to be saved, not as companies, but as individuals. We shall be judged according to the character we have formed. It is perilous to neglect to prepare the soul for eternity, and to put off making our peace with God until upon a dying bed. It is by the daily transactions of life, by the spirit we manifest, that we determine our eternal destiny. He who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much. If we have made Christ our pattern, if we have walked and worked as he has given us an example in his own life, we shall be able to meet the solemn surprises that will come upon us in our experience, and say from our heart, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

It is in probationary time, the time in which we are living, that we should calmly contemplate the terms of salvation, and live according to the conditions laid down in the word of God. We should educate and train ourselves, hour by hour and day by day, by careful discipline, to perform every duty. We should become acquainted with God and with Jesus Christ whom he has sent. In every trial it is our privilege to draw upon him who has said, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." The Lord says he is more willing to give us the Holy Spirit than parents are to give bread to their children. Then let us have the oil of grace in our vessels with our lamps, that we may not be found among those who are represented as foolish virgins, who were not prepared to go forth to meet the bridegroom."--RH, September 17, 1895