

# Get Ready to Be the Bride

On the heels of teaching His disciples about the imminence of the rapture in [Matt. 24](#), Jesus shares the parable of the ten virgins in [Matt. 25](#) to illustrate the urgency of kingdom-readiness. He wants all believers to enter into the realm of discipleship, so they will be worthy of inheriting the Millennium. This parable demonstrates what happens to those who choose to submit to discipleship and those who do not.

*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 ([Matt. 25:1-3](#)).*

Parables are metaphors that use everyday situations to illustrate spiritual truths. In this case, Jesus uses the concept of Jewish virgins getting ready for marriage in their culture to get across the utter importance of being ready to be His bride.

We must not read our western cultural traditions regarding marriage into the passage. Rather, we must interpret according to the marriage customs prevalent during Bible times. Following is a brief overview of the five aspects of marriage during the New Testament era:

1. **Betrothal.** The bridegroom-to-be would meet with the father of the bride-to-be and agree to marry his daughter. The result, if they could come to an agreement, was a legally binding marriage transaction. The couple was considered married at that point, but they would live apart for a year while the bride prepared for the wedding and the groom prepared the home.
2. **Processional.** The bride would be transferred from her father's house to the house of her new husband. This would typically happen at night in a torch-lit procession, involving guests. The bride did not know what day the groom would appear, so she had to be prepared for his arrival. A town crier of sorts would come by a little in advance to warn the bride of the groom's arrival.
3. **Festivities.** An entire week of feasting and celebrating with friends would typically precede the wedding ceremony.
4. **Ceremony.** The actual wedding observance would be held toward the end of the week of celebration.
5. **Marriage Supper.** A large concluding supper would be held at the end of the week, after which the groom and his bride would be ushered off to their home to start their lives.

It is important to keep this custom in mind when studying the parable, for it is vivid in the psyche of the Jewish audience Jesus is addressing.

The moral of this story is simple: those who are faithful and ready (i.e., spiritually prepared) at the rapture will be allowed to participate in the

wedding festivities, including the wedding supper, which inaugurate the Millennium. Those who are unfaithful will be excluded from the celebrations. This does not mean they are unbelievers, but rather believers who have not lived righteously. They are *saved; yet so as by fire* ([1 Cor. 3:15](#)). Accordingly, they do not qualify to rule and reign with Jesus in His millennial kingdom.

As stated in a previous article entitled, [The Wedding Garment](#), the necessary preparation for attending the wedding festivities is a proper wedding garment. Contrary to popular belief, the wedding garment is not the imputed righteousness of Christ.

[Rev. 19:8](#) specifies the garment of *fine linen, clean and white* granted to wedding participants *is the righteousness of saints* (emphasis added). The Greek word translated *righteousness* is plural, and should literally be translated righteousnesses (plural). In other words, the garment is the righteous acts of saints! The acts are righteous because they have been imparted by Jesus, as He lives His life through the saints.

Again, this is not a reference to the imputed righteousness of Christ (justification), but rather to a righteous garment Jesus imparts to those He deems worthy at the Judgment Seat, based on their righteous lifestyle here on earth. That is, only those who progress in sanctification to the point of discipleship, according to the will of the Lord, will be suitably dressed – and thereby qualified – to be included in the marriage festivities. Could this be implying that only faithful Christians – as determined by Jesus at the Judgment Seat – will comprise the bride of Christ? Fellow believer, do you understand the significance of your Judgment Seat verdict?

Some would have us believe this passage is referring to saved and unsaved. The five ready virgins are those who are saved, they say, and the five unprepared virgins are those who are unsaved. However, despite the popularity of that interpretation, it is not consistent with the text, as we shall see.

First, all ten women in the parable are virgins. The natural man is never compared to a virgin, which is a picture of positional righteousness and purity. That imagery would be inappropriate for unbelievers, who are dead in trespasses and sins and enemies of God. Furthermore, the apostle Paul said in [2 Cor. 11:2](#), “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” He was speaking to saints at the church of Corinth, not to the lost. His intent was to be able to present them as chaste (pure) virgins, a prospect which is possible for believers because of our position in Christ. However, presentation as a pure virgin at the Judgment Seat is not a given, for it is conditional, based on one’s lifestyle.

Some insist this kingdom parable refers to the Jews rather than the church. They say these are Jews waiting for Christ’s second coming at the end of the tribulation. That is unlikely, for in [Matt. 21:43](#) Jesus had pronounced that the kingdom would be taken from the Jewish nation and given to a “nation” bringing forth the fruits thereof. We understand that “nation” to be the church of Jesus Christ, for in [Matt. 8:12](#) Jesus said “the children of the kingdom” (i.e., the Jews) would be cast into outer darkness – not a reference

to hell, but to the relative darkness outside the realm of Christ's bright presence in the banqueting hall, so to speak.

Furthermore, the context ([Matt. 24](#)) of our text ([Matt. 25](#)) is focused on being prepared at the rapture and not being surprised, like the arrival of a thief in the night. If this were referring to the second coming, it would be predictable. The element of surprise would be missing. Thus, this parable of the virgins and the one preceding it (the parable of the household servant) and the one following it (the parable of the talents) must apply to the church and not to Israel. These virgins represent the saints. In fact, the number ten, according to several Bible commentators, is the number of completion. The ten virgins symbolize the entire church.

The storyline is simple. The ten virgins are preparing for the coming of the bridegroom, but according to the marriage customs outlined earlier, they don't know when that will be. Since the bridegroom will come at night, they have lamps, filled with oil, and the wise virgins have vessels of surplus oil besides. The foolish virgins do not have the extra oil.

Oil in the Scriptures is typically a picture of the Holy Spirit. Another indication that these virgins are all saved is that they all have oil in their lamps – representing the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Those who have surplus oil, we could say, not only have the Spirit's indwelling, they also are filled with the Spirit – they are walking in the Spirit, living the Christ-life.

The wise virgins are like Christians who have renounced the self-life and have let go of worldly pleasures. They are regularly appropriating God's grace by faith to let Jesus live His life through them. They are fruit-bearing, victorious Christians. In contrast, the unfaithful are living for themselves, captivated by the world, indifferent to the Lord's return, not walking in the Spirit.

Since the hour is late, all of these virgins go to sleep. Soon they are awakened by the crier at midnight, who says, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Notice the emphasis on readiness to meet the bridegroom – in our case, readiness to meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat.

They all get up and trim their lamps to meet the bridegroom. This is very likely indicative of the rapture (which is contextual). A picture of the Judgment Seat follows, for while five of the virgins are faithful, being filled with the Spirit and therefore ready to meet the bridegroom, the other five are unfaithful, not being filled with the Spirit and therefore not ready to meet the bridegroom.

In the parable, the unprepared virgins don't have enough oil, so they must go and buy some for themselves. The wise virgins cannot give any of their own, since every person will stand before Christ, accountable only for him or herself. Spirit-filling is a personal thing and cannot be shared with others. Every man (or woman in this case) must be filled, independent of others. The wise virgins are wise because they have been living for Jesus; the foolish virgins are foolish because they have been living for self.

While the foolish virgins are off trying to obtain more oil for their lamps, the bridegroom comes. The wise virgins enter the wedding banquet hall, and the door is shut. The unprepared miss their opportunity to attend the marriage and related festivities.

Incidentally, what door is shut? The door to heaven? Absolutely not! Jesus is not talking about heaven; He is talking about the millennial kingdom. In particular, the marriage of Christ and His church that inaugurates the Millennium.

In like manner, unfaithful Christians are excluded from the marriage festivities, indicating millennial disinheritance, no opportunity to rule and reign with Jesus in His coming Kingdom.

Think of it! Jesus will be the King of the kingdom, and His bride will be the queen, so to speak. The queen will rule and reign with the King throughout the millennial kingdom.

That is why the unfaithful church is not included in the marriage festivities or the marriage itself – because they will not be ruling as Christ's bride (His queen) in the kingdom.

What becomes of the unfaithful Christians (or we could say the five foolish virgins)?

*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 ([Matt. 25:11-12](#)).*

The statement of Christ in v.12, "I know you not," tends to confuse some into thinking these virgins cannot possibly represent Christians. However, a brief explanation of the Greek wording used can clear up any potential misunderstanding.

Jesus is omniscient, and obviously knows everybody, so His statement "I know you not" cannot refer to intelligent comprehension. He is using the term relative to the context.

The Greek word translated "know" in v.12 is the idea of intimate knowledge. Vine says Christ's statement suggests, "you stand in no relation to me." That doesn't mean they are lost and condemned. Relative to the parable and the context, it means they are not fit to be His bride. They are not closely related to Jesus, because of their unrighteous lifestyle that has resulted in broken fellowship. Thus, they are not allowed entrance to the wedding festivities and the marriage, for they do not qualify to enter the banquet hall.

It is as if Jesus is saying, "you five foolish, unfaithful virgins are not worthy to be my bride; my relationship to you is not close. You will not rule and reign in my kingdom as my queen." Immediately following Christ's pronouncement, "I know you not," He admonishes His disciples:

*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh ([Matt. 25:13](#)).*

In dispensational Christianity, it seems the tendency is to assume that *all* believers will inherit the millennial kingdom, *all* will rule and reign with Christ in some degree, *all* will inherit the promises for overcomers, *all* will live happily-ever-after, and *all* will live without sorrow in the Millennium. But it seems to this writer that such theology is not only inconsistent with the Scriptures, but also contributes unwittingly to licentious behavior.

It is high time that saints get ready to be the bride!