

The Bridegroom's Return

In this series of articles, we're looking at some passages pertaining to the end times when Jesus returns again to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). At the final judgment, there will be many who are self-deceived, according to Jesus' teaching. Believing themselves to be disciples of Jesus, they show otherwise by their ongoing disregard for the Holy Scriptures. In my last article we looked specifically at three aspects of a genuine, saving faith. Generally speaking, there needs to be biblical knowledge of our innate sinfulness, along with our Triune God's plan to save a people for himself in Jesus Christ. Secondly, this knowledge must be believed. Lastly, true belief will be manifest in an ongoing desire for God's truth and observable, positive change in our lives. We will never be perfect in this life, but scripture is clear that our salvation is inclusive of increasing transformation toward likeness to our Savior (2 Corinthians 3:18). Today, I want to look at a parable of Jesus that deals with this theme of self-deception.

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives (Mt. 24:3) and taught his disciples about some of the events that would happen in the future—both near and distant future—including his second advent and the final judgment. Beginning in chapter 25, Jesus teaches a parable typically known as the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The parable pictures events connected to a Jewish wedding ceremony. As Jesus relays the story, it seems that these virgins all assume that they're invited to the marriage banquet. They're to take their "lamps" and await the signal that the bridegroom and his bride are ready to be escorted to the wedding feast. Some scholars suggest that these women are to escort the bridegroom to the home of the bride for the wedding banquet. Either way, these 10 virgins apparently believe that they're all going to be part of the wedding party and they will, ultimately, participate in the "marriage feast."

One early hint of future tragedy is that five of these virgins are said to be "foolish" as compared with the other five who are "wise." The five "foolish virgins" were designated as such because they had taken no extra oil to replenish their lamps and were, unknowingly, unprepared to meet the bridegroom. As the parable progresses, the bridegroom is delayed. The women become drowsy and fall asleep. But at midnight—an unexpected hour—a cry goes out, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." As the women are awakened and are checking their lamps, the five foolish virgins make a tragic discovery. Their lamps are almost out of oil! Jesus now reveals their desperate plea. "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 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." Now while they were gone, the bridegroom arrives "and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast and the door was shut." Much later, the foolish virgins come to the place of the feast but, tragically, it's now too late—the door is closed. "Lord, lord, open to us. But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you. I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'" In other words, now is the time for preparation. Tomorrow may be too late. We don't know when Jesus will return or even the day of our death. Jesus is highlighting the fact that many people are unprepared for either. Sadly, they're self-deceived, actually believing they're right with God, yet living their lives for themselves.

Recently, from Matthew 7:21, we saw that the people whom Jesus is referencing call him, “Lord, Lord,” which sometimes speaks of an intimate relationship. But, tragically, some of these people are turned away from the kingdom of heaven. Why? They are identified by Jesus as those who do not “do the will of my Father who is in heaven.” By definition, a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This is a person who, by grace, is committed to the Holy Scriptures that teach us the will of our “Father who is in heaven.” The scriptures teach us the truth of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone as well as God’s requirements for our daily lives as we await the return of our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have trusted in Jesus Christ, by faith, Christians are prepared for Christ’s second coming and they look forward to that great day! Are you prepared for the Bridegroom’s return?

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