

Matthew

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Date: 17 February 1992

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- [0 : 00] I'd like to say thank you for inviting me again to your series of lectures.
- I'm asked to speak on the parable of the ten virgins. You find the record in the chapter that was read, Matthew chapter 25. I'm sure I should say nothing new this evening.
- It's a well-known parable. The traditional interpretation of the parable is the one which I follow. And so it's highly unlikely that I shall say things that you haven't heard before.
- I can only pray that God will impress upon us the seriousness of the Lord's teaching in these verses.
- It is that it will be a means of stirring us up spiritually and not only warning us but also encouraging us in a spiritual way.
- [1 : 12] Just one or two general comments which I'm sure will have been made already regarding the interpretation of parables. Firstly, it's always wise to look at the parable and ask yourself what is the main teaching.
- Secondly, it's not wise to try and force into every detail of the parable some specific meaning.
- Parts of these parables are exactly what they are. The parable is the main teaching of the parable and the parable.
- Another thing which I think we ought to remember as we come to look at any part of God's word is that it will be found in a context.
- And it's important to notice the surrounding context of this particular part of God's word. And that's why I ask that the verses in the previous chapter should be read.
- [2 : 47] Because the Lord is speaking this parable in a particular situation and it's surrounded by other teaching.
- And the teaching of chapter 24 is continued really into chapter 25. Of course you know that originally the chapter headings did not appear in the scriptures.
- These have been added to help us to find our places, to find our way through the word of God. So the teaching of the previous chapter runs on immediately into this chapter.
- So that the parable of the ten virgins is all a part of what the Lord has been saying already. What is the main theme then of the context?
- And it seems to me that it is the truth of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember preaching some years ago in a chapel.
- [3 : 58] I forget exactly where it was. But a lady came up to me afterwards. And she said, you know, we hardly ever hear a sermon on the second coming.
- Well, I, thankfully, I had been preaching on the second coming. And it's a theme which I've often preached from. And for a very simple reason.
- It was the truth of the Savior's second coming, which the Lord used in the very earliest stages of my own Christian experience to bring me to a real sense of my sinfulness and my need and the fact that I was not ready to meet the Lord.

That's how the doctrine of the second coming came to me. Very simply, but very powerfully, I knew I was not ready to meet the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I was convinced that he was coming. Well, I wonder whether teaching about the second coming is being forgotten.

[5 : 12] Perhaps there's a reason. Maybe some are avoiding it because along with the doctrine of the second coming, there are all sorts of difficult prophetic interpretations.

And maybe in trying to avoid getting enmeshed in all the complications of prophetic interpretation, people have avoided the doctrine altogether.

Well, it's sad if they have. I just want to emphasize tonight that this is clearly taught. The Lord himself clearly taught that he would come again and that his coming again would be a time of great power, a time when he would appear in his glory.

And his second coming is associated intimately with the final judgment. The second coming of the Lord associated intimately, I believe, with the final judgment of all mankind.

The great judgment day is what we often, what I often think of in connection with the Lord's second coming. And again, that was how it impressed itself upon my own conscience in those early days that the Lord was coming, that I should stand before him, that my life would be assessed, I would be judged.

[6 : 42] And I knew I was not in a fit state to be judged and assessed by the Lord. Well, in chapter 24 and in verse 37, you have a reference to the coming of the Son of Man.

And again in verse 39, the coming of the Son of Man. The second coming then is a theme which runs through these two chapters.

The second point I make about the second coming is that it is clearly taught that the time is not known.

No one knows the exact time appointed by God for the return of the Lord Jesus to this earth. It is certain he is coming.

The time is not known. Verse 42 of chapter 24. Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

[7 : 58] That is a secret in the heart of God the Father. Of course there are indications. This 24th chapter in Matthew, the book of Revelation, gives us many indications of events that must take place before the Lord returns, of events that point forward to that moment when he comes.

But the time is not known. The third thing that is emphasized here is that his coming will be sudden and for the most part completely unexpected.

Sudden and unexpected. It is likened to the coming of the flood in the day of Noah in verse 39 of chapter 24. They knew not until the flood came and took them all away.

So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. Again in verse 50. The parable of the wicked servant.

The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him. And in an hour that he is not aware of.

[9 : 26] Sudden, unexpected, is the coming of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, there is this emphasis again and again for the need of watchfulness and faithfulness.

Verse 42 of chapter 24. Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

Verse 44. Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh. With the thought of judgment in our minds connected with the Lord's second coming, another thing is emphasized, and that is the finality of the separation that takes place at the time of the judgment.

I still remember my own dear father preaching from verses here in chapter 24. Verse 40.

Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left.

[10 : 55] The finality of the separation is clearly taught not only here, but in many other parts of the Scripture record.

The next point I want to make is the obvious one and the very solemn one, and that is that there is an awful difference between the two groups who are separated in that last day.

An awful difference. Noah and his family were safe within the ark. The rest of mankind perished. In verse 46, you read in chapter 24, verse 46, Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

Happy, blessed. And yet in verse 51, the other servant, is going to be cut asunder and appointed his portion with the hypocrites.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In that great day then, there are those who are amazingly blessed, and there are those who are solemnly cursed.

[12 : 28] we are very close then to the parable itself, but I just want to emphasize the two obvious facts.

One is that the Lord is actually speaking to his disciples, and this is clear in verse 3 of chapter 24, as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying, and this is what he is saying to them.

So it is disciples who are being immediately addressed. a very serious thought, isn't it? I know that one reason would be that the Lord would have his disciples teach these truths to others.

But, we do need to take this to heart if we profess to be his disciples. He was speaking to his disciples in this solemn way.

Also notice that the immediately preceding verse to that of the parable that we consider tonight speaks of hypocrites in contrast to those obviously who are not hypocrites.

[13 : 59] The genuine, the real, on the one hand, the false, and the hypocrite on the other hand. Well, so much then for the background.

Let's look in a little more detail at the parable itself. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.

There have been those who have tried desperately to distinguish between the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, all manner of difficult discussions and arguments.

My own view is that when you read of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, it's likely that it's referring to the same thing. And yet there are different aspects of the truth referred to in these phrases.

Clearly there is a future. There is a kingdom which is yet to be. There is a kingdom which is glorious and there is a kingdom which is cleansed of all sin.

[15 : 17] There is an eternal kingdom into which God's people will one day enter. Rightly, you may describe that as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

It is that glorious future in which the Lord Jesus will be seen in his glory as king. but there is obviously reference to the situation here in the world's history.

Jesus came and preached the kingdom. He obviously was pointing to himself as the king. He was clearly teaching that those who were brought to submission to his teaching and to his rule and recognized him as king and worshipped him as king were part of that kingdom.

He and others clearly taught that repentance and faith was the pathway into that kingdom. kingdom. So, I take the phrase here the kingdom of heaven to refer to the way in which we see God's work here in this world.

Especially in connection with the church. The professing church. All those who openly and plainly acknowledge the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16 : 58] Now, whether they are real or hypocritical in their confession is what we're going to be thinking about later on. I take the phrase here to include all to include all who openly and publicly confess their relationship as we might put it their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who claim to be part of that kingdom who claim to be the subjects of the king of that kingdom.

To put it very simply I believe then that the Lord is speaking about the professing church on earth and especially in the period that leads up to his second coming.

So the professing church is likened unto ten virgins ten young women and we need to notice the similarities the similarities first of all.

They were all virgins there is no distinction here in this parable at the beginning they were ten virgins they all had lamps they all intended to be involved in the wedding festivities they all intended to go out and meet the bridegroom and surprisingly they all slumbered and slept and although some have tried to distinguish between slumbering and sleeping I should not do that tonight I think it is just an expression it means that they were all asleep so there are the similarities and I think as you consider the similarities you must be both surprised and alarmed surprised and alarmed there are so many similarities they do look so very much alike now clearly there is a distinction and we're plainly told there is a distinction five of them were wise and five were foolish and yet there are so many similarities it seems to me that certainly looking at them in a superficial way you would never have known that there was that kind of difference often our folly is hidden and often true wisdom is hidden it may be that the five wise knew who the five foolish were but the parable doesn't say that and

I think it's highly unlikely because of this word hypocrite in verse 51 of the previous chapter a hypocrite if he is a if he is a real hypocrite can very cleverly cover over the fact that he is foolish a fool utters all his mind but then a fool may learn that that is a silly way to behave and so keep quiet and then people don't know that he's as foolish as he really is yes there is a distinction yes the Lord is teaching us to be discerning there is true wisdom the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but I'm sure the foolish virgins would have claimed the fear of the

[21 : 50] Lord the Lord knows the difference five of them were wise and five were foolish the difference became apparent it became apparent that again is an indication to me that probably initially there was no recognition of who were the five foolish ones not until the midnight cry was heard not until their lamps had gone out the next point I just want to remind you of is that there was a waiting time the bridegroom tarried now

I know there have been all sorts of discussions about the details of Jewish wedding traditions the way weddings were celebrated and so on but there are so many disagreements about exactly what did happen and exactly how we interpret this parable in the light of those traditions that I've chosen really to say very little about it what we do know is that there were ten young women and they were waiting for the bridegroom to come they were obviously waiting for the marriage there was then a waiting time and it's clear that the waiting time was in many ways a sad time and I think if you read through the

New Testament prophetic scriptures particularly you have that impression at least I do that for the church on earth the waiting time is often a time of bitter trial it is often a sad time a difficult time a dangerous time certainly a dangerous time and it was for these ten virgins because they all slumbered and slept again I would certainly not be dogmatic and say that in the period leading up to the Lord's return the whole of the Christian church worldwide will be completely asleep I don't think the parable is teaching that but it is teaching the danger that in the waiting time we become wearied in the waiting time we may become sleepy the scripture speaks in this way awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and the

Lord shall give thee light there is a danger that we shall become wearied in the waiting time and that we shall lose sight of the truth of the second coming of the Lord and we shall be as those who slumber and sleep and I'm sure that personally I am conscious of this very danger there are times of great weariness there are times of bitter disappointment there are times of trial when it's very easy for us to become as it were overwhelmed with a feeling of lethargy and sleepiness but the bridegroom did come at midnight and again the indication is that in the waiting time it got darker and darker until at the point in the night time when we're at our lowest as we say naturally speaking the cry came and perhaps certainly this is how it came to me the cry is sudden and alarming behold the bridegroom cometh go ye out to meet him then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps they needed to the sad thing is that the wise did need to trim their lamps as well the saddest thing is that the foolish found their lamps had gone out and they realized that they had no oil for their lamps the awful difference again you see as we noticed in the previous chapter the awful difference between the two groups eventually becomes apparent some had oil some did not in the hymn that we sang at the beginning and when we began to sing it I thought well there's not a lot left for me to say you can go back and read the hymn and you'll see a lot of what I've said is simply repeating what is found in the hymn the hymn speaks of oil as being grace well

I would accept that as being part of the truth but why is there grace in the heart and life of the wise virgins and I believe the answer is because the Holy Spirit was at work in their hearts and lives and oil in the scripture is often associated with or represents the coming of the Holy Spirit or the work of the Holy Spirit Isaiah chapter 61 and verse 1 the spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound the anointing oil the spirit of the Lord God is upon me the Lord hath anointed me so there is this connection between the oil and the spirit again in the first epistle of John chapter 2 and verse 20

[29 : 20] John says but speaking of believers true believers but ye have an unction from the Holy One an anointing oil has been poured upon you ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things they had a divine infallible teacher the Holy Spirit so I believe that the oil in the lamps must be associated with the Holy Spirit you remember how the Apostle Paul says that if we have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of his the Lord Jesus speaks of giving his Holy Spirit to his children to abide with them forever to be their comforter to be their teacher to be their guide and I believe that the source of true wisdom is the Holy

Spirit himself he is the one who makes us wise unto salvation he is the one who teaches us the way of repentance he shall reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment his work is what distinguishes between the wise and the foolish the wise know the presence and power and blessing and teaching of the Holy Spirit the foolish do not the wise have the Spirit the foolish have not the Spirit and it's clear that the foolish have not the Spirit because they are none of his they are shut outside as we shall see in a moment the next point to remember in this parable is the hopelessness of all attempts to buy oil when the midnight cry has already been heard the foolish said unto the wise give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out but the wise answer saying not so lest there be not enough for us and you but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves and while they went to buy the bridegroom came

I find this difficult I don't know whether you can easily interpret this but I find this rather a difficult part of the parable to understand and to interpret it certainly it tells us that there is a moment coming when it will be too late and it does seem to be a moment before only a little before but it is before the final separation there is a period of obvious consternation an awareness that things are wrong of course the parable is speaking of the coming of the

Lord Jesus does it have any application to us well of course it does even though we don't know what day or hour the Lord shall come clearly it has application clearly the Lord intended this parable to be preached down through the centuries of Christian history knowing full well that the time of his coming was way in the future and so we should ask ourselves in what sense shall have have some awareness of the situation

I don't believe that's the right interpretation at all I believe that there are times when conscience is at work though conscience in the wicked is seared conscience in the hypocrite is seared it is cauterized it is not sensitive as it should be but there are times when fear grips the hypocrite there are times when there can be a sudden awareness of the fact that things are not right and the hypocrite redoubles his efforts to cover his tracks and to present himself or herself in a more positive way as being more like the wise virgins but still foolish and

[35 : 27] I also believe that very very often toward the end of life when death is clearly threatening there are times of deep consternation times of deep awareness that things are not right now that's not universally true we were invited recently to go into a local nursing home and to conduct Christian worship in that home for the old folk who are there and on this last Sunday one of our friends was speaking to them and was trying to emphasize the fact that we are all sinners and that we need God's grace and salvation if we are to go to heaven and immediately after he finished speaking one of these old ladies in conversation with him said but I've lived a very good life so certainly as yet that poor ignorant soul is not aware of things being seriously and sadly wrong but in many cases there is this time of consternation this realization that after all there is a difference between the wise and the foolish that after all there really is such a thing as a real work of the spirit of God which some professing

Christians do have and some professing Christians do not have Matthew chapter 7 verse 21 and following is an illustration of a similar thing really not everyone that saith unto me Lord Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven many will say to me in that day Lord Lord have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils and in thy name done many wonderful works and then will I profess unto them I never knew you depart from me ye that work iniquity clearly it seems in that case these people went on right to the end it wasn't until they were face to face with the judge that they were made to realise that they were after all wrong so whether there be a period of consternation or whether the moment of our judgment comes suddenly and we are brought face to face with reality right at that very last moment is in the Lord's hands there are obviously differences in

Christian experience coming back to the parable people we see that it was impossible for the wise to do anything for the foolish you know we can have a gracious influence one upon the other but we can't share grace the Holy Spirit may be at work in you and may be at work in your friend but it's an individual personal work of the Spirit of God I can't give you my grace if I have any grace you can't give me your grace if you have any grace I can't convey the Holy Spirit to you any more than you can convey the Holy Spirit to me that is a direct gift from the

Father in answer to the Saviour's Prayer the Holy Spirit comes to us individually so there is a sense in which much as we would want to we cannot I think particularly of parents with children now thankfully many of my children do know the way of salvation here but there is one who clearly does not if I could but convey grace into her heart I would but I can't if I could give her the Holy Spirit I would but I can't and you know many of you the same feeling you can't do it the wise answered saying not so it's part of the parable of course it's part of the picture to say lest there be not enough for us and you but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves they went to buy but they proved that it was too late the lesson is plain isn't it that we cannot and certainly not at the last moment convey grace now I think that as a minister and as a pastor there's a danger that people get the impression that they can have some kind of nominal association with a Christian church they can come to services they can perhaps be members of the church and in the back of their minds there's a thought that when they come toward the end of their life they'll send for the minister he'll pray over them and everything will be alright it's not far removed from the Roman Catholic doctrine is it send for the priest and he'll anoint the dying person and all is well there's nothing like that in the word of God and the emphasis here is very clear isn't it it must be and the wise knew this it must be personal go rather to them that sell and buy for yourself you must have it for yourself

I can't give it to you the minister your pastor can't give it to you it must be yours and it must be yours in a very personal way but it was too late 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 the finality of the separation afterward came also the other virgin saying Lord Lord open to us but he answered and said verily I say unto you I know you not friends there are some prayers in the Bible which were not answered this is a prayer that was not answered

[43 : 26] Lord Lord it sounds sincere it sounds urgent indeed I believe it was far more urgent than many indeed of all the prayers that they'd ever prayed before I believe they meant what they said in contrast to the prayers they'd prayed before if they were hypocrites they would pray but now they are genuine in that sense they are no longer hypocrites they're not pretending anymore are they they're not just praying to give a good appearance they really are praying Lord Lord open to us they meant what they said they were urgent their prayer was not answered

I find this parable it is an awesome part of God's teaching there is something truly startling about it Lord Lord open to us back in Matthew 7 we had a similar expression Lord Lord have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils and in thy name done many wonderful works and then will I profess unto them I never knew you verily I say unto you I know you not I remember hearing the story of an old Scots lady and a minister was questioning her about her

Christian hope and she had very little to say but in the end she put it like this I know when I die he won't be able to say I never knew you because he's heard from me so often well all I can say tonight is this friends let it be that the Lord has heard from you so often and let it be that your praying is real and urgent and sincere it's no use leaving it to the last moment the wise prayed and were heard foolish left it to the last moment they prayed and were not heard verse 13 watch therefore that seems to be a summing up really of the whole message of this parable watch be watchful be alert be concerned be prayerful watch search your hearts watch be careful about the way you're living examine yourselves whether you be in the faith or no watch remember that in the final separation one of the things that the

Lord is going to be looking at is the way we're living look at the end of this chapter 25 the king shall say unto them on his right hand come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for I was unhungry and ye gave me meat I was thirsty and ye gave me drink I was a stranger and ye took me in naked and ye clothed me I was sick and ye visited me I was in prison and ye came unto me I can't read the whole paragraph through it's a long one but you can see and you know the difference there are those whose lives prove the reality of their faith they are the wise virgins there are those whose lives indicate if we have eyes to see it that they are foolish they are not living godly self-denying lives of service to the

Lord and to their fellow men and particularly to the church of Jesus Christ watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh let me just conclude by trying to gather together these thoughts in a few short sentences good intentions are not enough church membership is not enough good friends are not enough if others sleep that is no excuse for me the one vital necessity is to be awake with oil in our lamps watch therefore even the wise were not watching when they were asleep the Lord is reproving them as well watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the

[49 : 56] Son of Man cometh let me just give you another little personal illustration when I was allowed at school we lived in Rochdale and the grammar school I went to in Rochdale was a very old building and a very tall building and we looked out of our classroom window right over the centre of the town and in those days there was no smoke abatement act and there were lots of cotton mills belching out their smoke and people's home fires were smoky and so on sometimes we used to get foggy days well this day wasn't exactly foggy and yet above us there seemed to be a layer of smog as we used to call it and as we sat in the classroom it seemed as though the whole light that was shining down through this layer of smoke was changing colour colour and I have never never before and never since have

I seen anything like it it was the most lurid and vile colour you ever did see the sky literally changed its colour until the whole of the class of boys were looking out of the window and the teacher was looking out of the window and you could tell they were terrified and so was I we just did not know what was happening well it must have been one of those strange inversions in the atmosphere that pulled the smoke down and the sun was shining through from above and it was a most strange and frightening experience but you see in my mind was this thought is the Lord coming is the Lord coming well it's a question I feel we need to ask ourselves more often than we do is the

Lord's coming is the Lord coming if he did come now tonight before we leave this room what then we need to be asking obviously we can't be doing that every moment of every day but we do need at times seriously to face questions like this the Lord is coming am I where I would want him to find me am I involved in what I would want him to find me involved in last evening I was preaching at home from those words almost at the end of John's record of the gospel how the Lord had restored Peter after his sad sin of denying his master

Peter and how even then after all that Peter had gone through he turns away from the Lord and he sees John and begins to ask curious questions about John even though the Lord had said follow me Peter turning about seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following which also leaned on his breast at supper and said Lord which is he that betrayeth thee Peter seeing him saith to Jesus Lord and what shall this man do Jesus saith unto him if I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee follow thou me I think in the light of the second coming there are many things of which we would have to say what is that to thee why are you involved in that why are you occupied in that why are you wasting your time with this that and the other what is that to thee follow thou me

I would want the Lord to find me following wouldn't you I would want the Lord to find me a true disciple wouldn't you it's question like that it's that kind of application it seems to me that needs to be made when we read a parable like this how will the Lord find me tonight and then of course there needs to be repentance and there needs to be restoration as there was in Peter's life there needs to be a new devotion there needs to be a new determination a whole hearted determination that we shall obey his commands that we shall follow him we shall not be distracted and turned aside and that we shall be ever seeking after that true wisdom and never satisfied unless we know the presence and power of the

[55 : 29] Holy Spirit I don't want to go on too long tonight but just one last thought when the charismatic movement became very obvious I was very ignorant and I didn't really know what it was all about and I began to try and find out what it was all about and I got to a stage where I was almost frightened to read any more about it I was almost frightened to pray for the Holy Spirit to be given to me because I had been reading about all the things that happened as they said to people upon whom the Holy Spirit came and I was almost afraid I should burst out speaking in some weird gibberish foolish and it was a wrong reaction of course it was a temptation and it was a misunderstanding but you know in the midst of all that confusion in my mind there was one thing which eventually

I believe the Lord made very plain to me and that is that there must constantly be a prayer to be filled with the Spirit I'd read all about being baptized in the Spirit and being filled in the Spirit and all the things that would likely happen if you were I left in the end by God's grace I was able to leave that all on one side and just simply pray in this way the Apostle Paul exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit Lord let me be filled with the Spirit that's how I would like to be found that's how I want to be found that's how I pray I may be found when the Lord comes filled with His Spirit spiritually minded following the Master watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the

Son of Man cometh may God bless that part of His Word to us and make it really powerful and useful in our lives years to be every else for breath in a heart not be in a world a heart that was the heart was raised in Thank you.