

Understanding the parable of the

Ten

Virgins

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It is necessary to put aside one's current understanding because so much teaching we have heard about the ten virgins has misunderstood the parable.

To understand it we need to see it in its cultural setting – how those who were listening to Jesus would understand this parable.

It is a very important parable as it speaks of the great wedding to come - between Christ and His bride.

We will take the parable step by step to extract its full meaning. A parable is a simple story to illustrate the truth it is teaching – it is 'laid in parallel' to that truth, so we need to take notice of the whole parable and not dismiss any bits we don't understand, or that don't fit our predetermined view.

The correct and full understanding of the parable confirms the doctrine of the rapture, or 'catching away,' of the church.

This may not agree with your current position. Please continue with this study and be prepared that you may have to change your position.

At the end of the study you will find further proof concerning the rapture of the church and details of further study aids.

Step 1 - To what time does the parable relate.

Matthew places the parable immediately after, what he describes as, *'great tribulation, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.'*

Chapter 24 is speaking, particularly to Jews, warning them of the coming 'great tribulation.' We know the emphasis is particularly for Jews because they are advised to pray that their flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. (verse 20)

Matthew goes on to say that *'immediately after the tribulation of those days They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.'* (verse 29-30)

The book of Revelation gives a full account of this period known as the 'great tribulation' and in chapter 19 describes the coming of Jesus in the power and glory described by Matthew. (Revelation 19:11-21)

Coming to earth with Jesus are the armies of heaven clothed in white fine linen – this is the bride of Christ. Revelation 19: 1-10 has just described the preparation for the marriage of the Jesus and His bride, she arrayed in fine linen.

So we can safely conclude – this parable is set at the end of the tribulation, when Jesus returns to earth with His bride for the marriage feast, and not before.

Step 2 - the context of a wedding

Now we need to take into account that the hearers knew all about weddings. They were frequent events. But, of course, the weddings were conducted along the cultural lines of the time and not according to our current cultures.

In brief a Jewish wedding followed this pattern:

1st The betrothal.

It was customary for the father to choose the bride for his son, often using an intermediary to help. We see this in Genesis 24 where Abraham sends his servant to find a bride for his son Isaac. (Chapter 24)

This same principle applies to us, the bride of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, speaking to the Father, *Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the scripture may be fulfilled.* (John 17:11-12)

Paul confirms the position – *‘I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.’* (2 Corinthians 11:2)

Once betrothed the bride was set aside for the husband to be and she was considered bound to this her future husband. The marriage was not yet consummated, nevertheless the betrothal was such an important event that it could only be ended by death or divorce.

For us now - the Holy Spirit is the intermediary – He is the one who reveals the bridegroom to us and He is the one who enters our human spirit when we are born again. He is the one who is the guarantee of our position - *'Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.'* (2 Corinthians 5:5)

For us now - our betrothal cannot be ended by anything. We cannot enter into a divorce and when we die we go to be with the Lord. Even if, on this earth whilst we wait for the marriage consummation, we deny Jesus (and in reality who amongst us has never denied Him in one way or another at some time,) even so He remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13)

He remains faithful for two reasons -

- 1) His promise never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) and that nothing can separate us from His love. (Romans 8:35-39)
- 2) The fact that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within our born again human spirit – and that at that level we cannot sin. (1 John 3:9) So, although after conversion we may sin and we may deny Jesus at the level of our human flesh (that is mind and body), nevertheless we are still guaranteed our eternal life – because the promise and calling of God is without repentance (change of mind.) (Romans 11:29) And because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

This is the nature of grace – it is impossible to earn it or to enhance it in any way – it is the free gift of God. Our 'works' are irrelevant to grace – but because of grace, and the love of God, we become happy to consider ourselves as bondservants of Jesus.

2nd - The bridegroom prepares a place for His bride.

Once betrothed the bridegroom goes to prepare a place for His bride – this was done in the house of the bridegroom’s Father where the wedding ceremony would take place a bit later on.

For us – we can see Jesus fulfilling this aspect of the cultural norm of His day. John 14 has this promise, *‘In My Father’s house there are many mansion; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.’* (Verses 2-3)

Jesus goes to prepare a place for us, His bride.

For us - the expectation is that when He comes we will rise to meet Him in the air, and be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Our corruptible, mortal bodies are transformed into incorruptible, immortal bodies. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54.)

We will be taken to the place Jesus has prepared for us in His Father’s house.

3rd The marriage ceremony

In the culture of the time the bride was taken away from her house, to the house of the bridegroom's father, for the ceremony. In the Father's house they enter the bridal chamber – the place prepared for the bride by the bridegroom. The place and time for the consummation of the marriage. They remain there for 7 days.

For us - We are taken away from our house (earth) and taken to the place prepared in the Father's house where we remain for 7 days. (Using the principle that one day can represent a year, this period coincides exactly with the tribulation on earth.)

The great tribulation is a period of the final dealing of God with man before the personal reign of His Son. For the Jews it is known as 'the day of Jacob's trouble.' It is a period of increasing difficulty on earth as antichrist comes to power. God's judgements increase in severity step by step. It is not a period for the church, the bride, who is in heaven enjoying the marriage ceremony.

4th The marriage supper or banquet or feast.

In the culture of the time the bridegroom together with his bride leave the father's house and go to the bridegroom's house for the wedding celebration, the supper or banquet. This wedding feast was held in the bridegroom's house.

For us – Revelation 19 has the Bridegroom and His bride leaving heaven (the Father's house) and coming to earth (the bridegroom's house). Here will be the great banquet –the wedding supper.

There will be guests at this wedding feast. We see the ten virgins waiting to welcome the bridegroom (with His bride) to the feast. Already gathered at the bridegroom's house will be resurrected saints of the period of time which preceded the calling out of those who form His bride (that is Old Testament saints); and the resurrected saints who 'washed their robes in the blood of Jesus' during the tribulation period.

So at the wedding feast we have:

The bridegroom

The bride

Resurrected 'Old Testament' believers.

Resurrected tribulation martyrs.

The five wise virgins - who represent ordinary human beings who have survived the tribulation. These enjoy the feast and will go through to the millennial reign of Jesus and repopulate the earth.

Step 3 - Now we can understand the parable:

'Then the Kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.'

The ten virgins were waiting here on earth to go into the wedding banquet. They were waiting for the bridegroom to bring His bride from his father's house to his own house.

Who are these virgins? Certainly not the bride of Christ who comes with the Bridegroom. Certainly not Christian believers of our time – as we are betrothed to Jesus – His bride. The ten virgins are 'religious' people expecting a messiah at the end of the great tribulation, but not very actively - rather they slumber.

'Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.'

Oil is used in the bible as representing the presence of the Holy Spirit. During the seven year period of the tribulation, whilst the bride is absent from the earth, every human being left on earth will face the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ for personal salvation. This will not be adding new believers to the bride of Christ, as the bride is already fully formed, and complete, and now enjoying the marriage ceremony and feast.

The foolish virgins are religious people looking for a 'messiah' but not for Jesus Christ, The Messiah – they are not born again - they have no oil. They are followers of false religions and followers of the false prophet (Revelation 13:14)

'but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.'

By believing in Jesus Christ the human spirit of the wise virgins is born again, brought back to life, by the Holy Spirit. The wise virgins have oil in their vessels.

Many will come to believe in Jesus for salvation during the period of the seven year tribulation, and many of those will be martyred. (Revelation 7)

'but while the bridegroom was delayed , they all slumbered and slept.'

Fallen asleep on the job! No difference between the wise and the foolish – except that the wise had oil.

'and at midnight a cry was heard; "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!"

The parable gives no indication of who makes the cry – just that the cry is heard. An angel maybe. It is not critical to our understanding – the point is He is coming with His bride to go in to the wedding banquet.

'Then all those virgins arose and trimmed (prepared) their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise. "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

No oil – the lamps could not light up – they were going out. The foolish turn to the wise for oil.

‘But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there not be enough for us and you; but rather go to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’

The wise could not share their oil. They had only enough for themselves. This is the very nature of salvation. When born again we receive enough oil for ourselves. We do not have the capacity to give that oil to others – only to point them to where they can obtain the oil for themselves. (This is, of course, to Jesus – by believing in Him we are born again by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.) But it is now too late for the foolish.

‘and while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding (feast); and the door was shut.’

‘*gamos*’ is here translated ‘wedding.’ The word encompasses the whole ceremony and feast. The ceremony has already taken place in the Father’s house, in heaven, and now the celebrations of the feast take place at the bridegroom’s house, on earth. It is too late for the foolish virgins.

‘afterward the other virgins came also (no mention of coming with any oil!) saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But He answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

Devastating for the foolish – it is too late and the Lord does not know you.

Mis-understanding

There are mistakes made in regard to understanding the parable.

- 1) Assuming that the 10 virgins are born again believers today. It should be obvious that this is not the case. Half of the virgins have no oil – so by definition they are not born again believers.
- 2) Placing the parable before the rapture of the church. This is often accompanied with 1) above. So this mistake has the ten virgins as the church waiting for Jesus. In this thinking the foolish virgins have not prepared themselves and thus don't go into the wedding. However, scripture is very clear, born again means a whole new regime. God given promises exclude the possibility of Jesus saying 'I do not know you' to anyone born again.
The eternal part of us, made in God's image, cannot sin – the born again human spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is unleavened – that is without sin. 1 John 3 : 9.
- 3) Thinking the parable applies to the church. Often coming with an attitude of 'works.' We must prepare ourselves. We must prepare righteous acts to qualify to be part of the bride. This thinking is then justified by quoting a mistranslation found in revelation 19. *'And to her was*

granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.'

This is the error. 'acts' is not in the text, it has been added in error. The Greek '*dikaiomata*' is the plural of righteousness – that is righteousnesses, and that is how it is translated in literal translations. I have my gift of righteousness imparted to me by Jesus, and so do you, and so does every born again believer. The bride is made up of many born again believers each with their own gift of righteousness. So the use of the plural is exactly right – the bride of Christ has many righteousnesses. Our acts whilst on earth, on the other hand, will be judged by fire. That which we build on earth, our acts, being tested by fire will result in some loss – that which is hay and stubble are destroyed. Those acts which survive the testing do not become fine linen garments they become silver, gold and precious stones. (1 Corinthians 3:12-13)

To think that our acts qualify us to be the bride of Christ is a mistake. We are chosen by God in His foreknowledge. In that choice we are then predestined to be transformed into the image of His Son. 100% of our justification is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. (Romans 8:29)

Righteousness and righteous acts.

It is important to understand what is meant by 'righteousness.'

Romans 5:17 *'For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one (reference to Adam), much more those who receive abundance*

of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.'

Fundamental righteousness is a free gift ('*dorea*') given by Jesus to the born again believer.

Righteousness is 'the character or quality of being right or just,' - being in right standing with God. Righteousness is the quality of the goodness, the truthfulness and the faithfulness of God. The born again believer receives righteousness in the person of the Holy Spirit who Jesus promised would be with us and in us. (John 14:17)

We are expected to demonstrate this wonderful gift in all we do. We fail in many ways because we are still in fully human form - that is we have this precious gift in earthen vessels. However, our indwelt human spirit enjoys a sinless state because of the presence of the Holy Spirit - this is specifically stated in 1 John 3:9.

We cannot add to this fundamental righteousness by any act of our own. Neither are we expected to - the gift is more than sufficient.

However, this is not an excuse for unholy behaviour. We are expected to be like Jesus for our time in this world. Holiness and co-operation with the life changing ministry of the Holy Spirit are expected.

The testing of believers acts (works)

The process of testing of all we do on earth is found in 1 Corinthians 3:9-16. We are God's building - Paul lays the foundation, and we build our lives, and we minister to others, upon this sure foundation.

None of the building work we do, whether in our own lives or in the lives of others, is described as contributing to a wedding garment.

Everything becomes clear when the fire reveals everything built on the sure foundation. That which endures and that which is burnt away will be clearly seen. Enduring works are the silver, gold and precious stones.

Conclusion.

The parable of the ten virgins is not for the born again believers of today.

We are urged to rightly divide the word of truth – that means to put it into its right place. (2 Timothy 2:15)

The right place for this parable is at the end of the tribulation as shown:

- 1) By the position given to it by Matthew - after the great tribulation.
- 2) By the example, the shadow as it were, of the cultural setting when the parable was spoken, as outlined above.

Following on are further proofs of the pre-tribulational rapture of the church.

End time views

There are three main views regarding the end of the age:

The 'a millennial' view states there is no personal rule of Jesus Christ on earth. Very clearly unbiblical. (Revelation 20)

The 'post millennial' has the millennium, that is the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ on earth, now (but not exactly 1,000 years) and when we, the church, have made the world good enough then Jesus will return. Known as 'Kingdom Now.' As we see the world slipping further and further away from righteousness, and consider 2 Timothy 3:1-9, it becomes obvious that this post millennial view is also incorrect.

Both these views of the end of the age are in error, not taking account of the inspired scripture.

Then there is the 'premillennial' view which has three 'sub views,' which are:

The rapture of the church is before the great tribulation, or in the middle thereof or at the end thereof.

The pre-tribulational rapture of the church.

The principle reason for insisting that the rapture cannot be at the end of the tribulation is as follows:

At the end of the tribulation, when Jesus returns, there is a separation of sheep and goats. Unbelievers, goats, go immediately into everlasting punishment. This will take place after the wedding banquet when Jesus will sit in judgement over the people of the earth. (Matthew 25)

The old testament descriptions of the millennial rule of Jesus Christ require there to be human beings in normal human bodies who bring forth children and repopulate the earth. (Isaiah 11 for example)

The scripture states that when He comes we rise to meet Him in the air and are instantly changed into immortal beings with supernatural bodies – like the risen Christ. (Already discussed earlier.) There is no male or female here.

So the rapture of the church cannot take place at the end of the tribulation as there would be no humans in mortal bodies left to repopulate the earth. Believers would have immortal bodies whilst unbelievers would have been despatched into everlasting punishment.

There are other considerations also:

The great tribulation is described as the time of God's wrath. (See Revelation 6:17) The born again church is not destined for wrath. (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

The 7 year tribulation is a rerun of Daniel's 70th week - a specifically Jewish period.

Antichrist has power over those who become believers during the tribulation. Antichrist has no power over the church as, *'He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.'* 1 John 4:4. So the born

again believers cannot be present in order for antichrist to emerge and take up power.

The coming of the Lord is something for the bride to look forward to with joyous expectation – something the bride is unlikely to do if it is preceded by her suffering the 7 years of the great tribulation. The tribulation is so bad that unless the time was shortened no flesh would survive. (Matthew 24:22)

Revelation 3 has the Philadelphian church with an open door in front of it that no one can close. Revelation 4 – John sees a door standing open in heaven and then the elders around the throne. A reasonable interpretation is that the church is now in heaven (where the elders are – verse 4) before the tribulation, which will commence a little later when the Lamb opens the scroll in chapter 6 verse 1.

Material for further study.

All the following studies are available as free downloads at www.freebiblebooklets.com. They are also available as printed booklets from Amazon – at Amazon.com or .co.uk or .eu. Type peter michell in the search box and the titles will come up.

Explaining the Future - gives an overview of the end times explaining much of the book of revelation.

Will the church be caught away – a detailed discussion of the rapture of the church.

The King is coming - is a call to wake up – see the signs - Jesus is coming soon.

Ostrich Christianity – we have our ‘heads in the sand’ regarding what the bible says about time - here much is revealed.

So that's what its all about – an overview of the bible – giving a foundation

After Brexit – specifically about what to expect.

Last orders – some prophetic indicators.

In addition there are studies of wider subjects:

Written for the International Christian Chamber of Commerce their 'Transformed Working life' bible study course which contains the following titles:

Inherent Power - really fundamental truth about the meaning of being born again and the various relationships we have with the Lord.

Work is a first class calling – as the title says - we are all full time in the Kingdom.

No one can serve two masters – Do we serve ourselves or money or the Lord?

Hope - the certainty of future blessing.

Faith or presumption - we better know the difference!

Hearing God speak

Working from rest - it's the only way!

Renewing the mind.

Be strong in the battle.

Anointing

Fruitfulness.

This course is in use around the world with wonderful results.

Other studies for ICCC –

Stand Tall – take your position

Works of power - now is the time.

Powered by grace.

There are yet more titles of general interest:

Rightly dividing the word of truth.

Israel and the church not in competition - understand their different callings and expectations.

Favour – enjoying the children’s bread.

Going for Gold – it’s about testing and stretching of our faith.

What should we do with money.

Wisdom - do we understand what it is?

The sign of Jonah – solved. The seemingly impossible puzzle of ‘three days and three nights in the earth’ reconciled with ‘rising on the third day.’ Fabulous.

Health and healing