

THE TEN VIRGINS

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Lesson: Matthew 25:1-13

No doubt every one of you has been to a wedding at some time or other. We all like going to a wedding because it is such a special occasion, such a happy occasion. Everyone at the wedding feast or wedding reception is full of smiles. There are bright lights, and everything we see and hear shows how happy the invited guests are because the bride and bridegroom have come before the Lord together and have asked His blessing on their marriage.

If you had been living at the time the Lord was on earth, and if you had attended a wedding at that time, you would have found that there was one thing they did that was different from what we do today. It was something that took place after the ceremony, and it was very colorful. It was the procession from the home of the bride's father, where she had been living, to the bridegroom's home that he had provided for his bride, the home where she was now going to live. Try to imagine the scene as I describe it to you.

The procession took place in the evening. In order to see where they were going, the friends of the bride and bridegroom would carry lighted torches or lamps. What a bright and colorful scene it must have been with all those lamps alight! And there were sounds to please the ears as well as sights to please the eyes; the people would be singing joyous songs or else there would be musicians in the procession playing various instruments.

Not all the people walked in the procession, though; some stayed outside the bridegroom's house to welcome the bridegroom and his bride when they came. As soon as the procession came in sight, the cry went up: "The bridegroom comes!" Then the bridegroom would invite his friends into his house for a Wedding Feast.

Now, if you have been able to picture that in your mind, you can perhaps understand a little better the parable of the Ten Virgins that we read about in our lesson from the Word. The Lord told that parable to the disciples, knowing that they would be able to understand how foolish it would be for anyone to neglect to bring along some oil for his or her lamp.

You see, the lamps or torches they used in those wedding processions in those days were like dishes or bowls containing oil. Into the oil they would put some materials that would burn—such as pieces of cloth. These they would light, and the oil would keep them burning. The oil would keep the flame alight.

When the oil was all used up, the flame of the torch or lamp would go out. So each person in the procession carried a lamp in one hand—and in the other, something containing an extra supply of oil, so that they could keep their lamps burning. You can easily see how foolish it would be to be in that procession without making sure of having some oil for your lamp.

Now, in the parable that the Lord told, He said that there were ten virgins, that is, ten unmarried young ladies, in the procession. Five of them were wise and five foolish. The five wise ones took plenty of oil along with them for their lamps; but the five foolish ones did not do that. They were not prepared; they did not think ahead; they did not think of what they would need. They were *very* foolish.

When at last the bridegroom came, they found they had used up all the oil in their lamps. Their lamps were going out. What could they do? In a panic they asked the wise ones to give them some oil. But the wise ones said that they couldn't do that because then they themselves would run out of oil. So they advised them to go to the people who sold oil and get some. While the foolish virgins were away doing this, the bridegroom invited his friends into the house for the Wedding Feast, and then shut the door. When the foolish virgins came up to the house later, it was too late. They couldn't get in; they were not allowed in. In fact, the bridegroom said that he didn't even know them.

You may wonder about that. You may be wondering why they could not be allowed in to the Feast. But we can understand that if we remember that this parable, like all the Lord's parables, has another meaning inside it; it has a lesson for us in it.

The bridegroom is like the Lord. His house where the happy wedding feast takes place is like heaven—where everyone is smiling and happy, sharing the happiness of others. The lamps or torches that gave so much cheerful light are like the Word of the Lord. The Lord's Word gives us light; it brings light to our minds so that we can see, that is, understand. We would be very much "in the dark" without the Word; we would be in the darkness of ignorance. We would have only very dark or obscure ideas about how we should live, about what is right and what is wrong. The Word enlightens our minds so that we understand these things. You know how it is when someone is explaining something to you and you cannot understand what he means, it all seems rather dark, so dark that you cannot see what he means. And suddenly, it's as if a light goes on in your mind, and you see, you understand. You say, "OH! *Now* I see!" The light dawns. The Lord's Word is like that light. It enlightens our minds so that we can see or understand what the Lord wants us to do. That is why David said in one of the Psalms: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Now, it was the oil in those lamps that kept the light going. Without the oil, there was no light. Let's see what that oil is like. The oil that keeps the flame alight is like a good life. A good life (doing what the Lord's Word says we should do), that goodness of life, is like the oil, because it keeps us interested in the Lord's Word and its teachings; it allows us to love the things the Lord loves and dislike what the Lord says is not good. If we didn't try to do what the Word teaches, we would soon forget it. We would find it harder and harder to remember what it teaches, until in the end we would forget it altogether. It would be like the light going out. We would be in the dark, not knowing where to go, that is, how we should live.

Let us be like the wise virgins, who thought ahead and were prepared; who thought about what they would need and were ready; and who are like people who not only read and listen to the teachings of the Word, but actually live according to its commandments and do what the *Lord* wants at all times and in any company. The wise not only have the light of the Lord's Word but the oil of a good life, that keeps the light going. *Amen.*