

The wise and the foolishMatthew 25 vv.1-13.

The Lord Jesus is still with His disciples upon the Mount of Olives. He has foretold to them the coming destruction of the temple. We told you about that in the previous chapter.

But the Lord spake a great deal more on that Tuesday evening. He told them also that He would one Day appear in the clouds of heaven. That shall take place in the Last great Day. We have already said that before that Day also, terrible times shall come. Wars and earthquakes, death and destruction

When that Last great Day, the Day of Judgment shall come, nobody knows. The Lord did not give this information. But He did say that it shall come suddenly, when no-one is expecting it. Trains may be running; factories working; cars may be roaring along the roads; farmers will be busy on the land; children may be at school and then ... instantly ... the Lord shall come, as King and Judge, to pass judgment upon every human being, great and small; young and old. Yes, even the dead shall be raised up.

That is why the Lord tells them they are to watch. They are to look for the Lord Jesus. They are to expect Him every single day.

"Watch therefore," says Jesus, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

In order to warn them the Lord tells another parable. Just listen to it, for this parable is in the Bible for your warning and instruction also.

The Lord Jesus speaks of a wedding. When in our country a boy or a girl is married, then it is a time of celebration. At a wedding there is joy and happiness. And rightly so too, for a wedding is not a funeral. I know that nowadays many ungodly wedding celebrations take place. Dancing and singing then goes on, very often deep into the night. But no, such things should not be.

Have you ever been to a wedding where, not Jesus, but the devil, was present? ... I hope not. Evil behaviour and wrong things should have no place at a wedding, but certainly happiness should reign.

In the land of Δ Canaan weddings lasted much longer than they do with us. Among the Jews they lasted a week. We have told you about this before

(in Chapter 12). Remember too the wedding of Samson, when he posed that wonderful riddle.

On the seventh day, late in the evening, the bridegroom went with his friends to the bride's house. On that evening the friends of the bride used to go out to meet the bridegroom. They would take lamps with them, and then ~~##~~ they would all return together with the bridegroom to the bride's home. There the feast was carried on.

I had to tell you this first, otherwise you would not understand the parable which now follows. Now listen carefully!

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins," thus the Lord Jesus begins the parable. They were going late in the evening to meet the bridegroom. So these ten virgins then were ten friends of the bride. The maidens took their lamps with them. They had, all ten of them, put oil in their lamps and lighted them, so that all their lamps were burning brightly.

Five of the maidens however, took a cruse of oil with them, so that, if need be, they could pour fresh oil into their lamps, for sometimes it was midnight before the bridegroom came! The other five took no extra oil with ~~##~~ them. They thought that it would be quite unnecessary. This was very careless of them. That is why the Lord calls one group wise and the other group foolish.

Look, there they go through the darkness. But their path is now brightly lit by the burning lamps. All this is done in honour of the bridegroom.

After a while the virgins stand still. They decide to go no further, but to wait for the bridegroom at the spot they have now reached. They settle down at the side of the road, hoping that he will shortly appear.

A quarter of an hour ... half an hour ... a whole hour ticks away. What ~~xxxxxxx~~ a long time he is coming. In the Bible it says that the bridegroom tarried.

The waiting virgins become sleepy. At last their eyes are shut, and finally they all fall asleep. All this time their lamps have been at their sides.

Suddenly - it is now midnight, they awake. They jump up in surprise. They can hear the cry: "The bridegroom cometh!"

But, O just look, the oil in the lamps is burned up and the bright flames are slowly going out.

For five of the virgins that is no problem. Speedily they take their spare supply of oil, re-fill and trim their lamps, which very soon shine out as brightly as before. But for the other five virgins it was indeed awkward. They had no oil with them. How foolish not to have thought of that before. Yes, but what are they to do now? ...

"Give us," they say to their friends, "of your oil; for our lamps are gone out."

"Not so," comes the reply, "lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves."

So that is what they decide to do. The five foolish virgins hurry off to get their lamps filled with oil.

But ... before they get back the bridegroom comes with his friends. The five virgins who are ready join the procession. Soon afterwards they enter the house and when they are inside the door is shut.

Shortly afterwards there is a knocking on the closed door.

"Lord, Lord, open to us," comes the cry from outside.

Who can that be? ... You know, don't you? The five foolish virgins have returned and want to come in also.

The door remains closed however, and the bridegroom answers them: "Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

They came too late! While the marriage is being celebrated within, the five foolish virgins must stand outside.

So, that is the parable which the Lord Jesus recounts to His disciples. But, what is the meaning of it? ... Listen!

The bridegroom represents the Lord Jesus. The Day of Judgment Jesus here compares to a marriage.

Thousands of people attend Church or Chapel Sunday after Sunday. They hear sermons preached by God's servants, the ministers. They have a thorough knowledge and understanding of what they hear. Oh certainly, they must be converted. They can talk about it very intelligently. Now, you see children, those are the foolish virgins. They serve the Lord with their head, but not with their heart. They lack a supply of oil, which means they lack grace, they have not a renewed heart. They merely have a wonderful profession, but nothing more.

The wise virgins are intended to represent God's people. They have not only a wonderful profession (or confession of faith), but they have the oil of God's grace in their hearts.

When the Lord Jesus shall appear in the clouds of heaven, then they shall go in unto the marriage, that is to say, they shall enter into eternal glory. But the unconverted shall remain outside. They shall be cast into everlasting ruin. What a difference between those two, is there not?

And what about you, boys and girls? You go to church or chapel too. You know very well that you must not die unprepared. But are you satisfied with merely knowing that? ... Have you no oil with you? ... I will put it another way. ... Are you born again? Have you been given a new heart?

Many children think to themselves: "When I am older, I shall start to pray a lot. I have no time for it now. I would rather play now. At the moment I am so tired in the evenings after playing football, romping about and playing, that I do not really feel like praying much. I shall do so later."

That is foolish, for nobody knows whether he will grow older. Any moment the Judgment Day can come, or at any moment death can come - and then it is too late. Then you lack the oil, you lack grace, and then too the day of grace is gone. That is why this parable is a solemn warning for you too. Do not put it off until later, but plead each day that the Lord will grant you the oil of grace. Beg of the Lord to quicken you from the dead.

What the Lord said to His disciples He says to you also: "Watch!"

Matthew 25 vv.14-30.

How do you live, children? ... What a strange question, is it not? ... Yes, how can you answer it? ...

Do you know what I mean? Are you a good example to your friends. Do you rebuke them sometimes when you hear them using bad words? Do you ever warn them when you see them doing wicked or wrong things? ... Or do you join in with them? ... When they sin, do you laugh it off? Do you think it is rather amusing?

How terrible! ... Then God's ~~xxx~~ wrath will be upon you. You must warn your comrades whenever they do things which are wrong. Remember that!

"The kingdom of heaven," says the Lord Jesus "is as a man travelling into a far country." Before this man left on his journey, he called his servants

to him. To the first servant he gave a large sum of money, five talents. To the second servant he gave two talents, and the third had one talent. They were to trade with this money and thus try to increase it. Their master then departed.

The first servant went to work. He bought goods, perhaps some fine cloth, or wheat, wine or oil. But he did not keep those goods for himself. Oh no, he sold the articles again to others and by trading he earned more money. This servant was a diligent worker and he continued to increase his lord's wealth.

The second servant also went to work. He may well have bought a farm. He worked hard on the land, sowing wheat perhaps, and planting a vineyard. When harvest came he sold the wheat for a good price. When the grapes ripened he made wine from them and the wine he sold too for a lot of money. So the second servant also did good business and made more of his money.

But the third servant thought: "No, I am not going to work. I do not feel like it. My master will not see anyway, for he is on a long journey. The whole day long he sauntered about or lay in the grass. And what happened to the money which he had been given? Well he digged a hole in the ground and buried his talent. "So, thought the idle servant, "now it cannot be stolen either. When my master returns, I will give him his talent back. Then he cannot say anything."

At last the lord came home from his long journey and immediately called his servants to him.

The first servant, who had been given five talents said: "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more."

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant," said his master to him, and that servant was given a good reward.

Then came the second servant. He had been given two talents, and by hard work he had made two talents beside them, so that now he had four.

This servant was also praised and received a reward too.

But look, here comes the third servant. He gives back to his lord the talent that he had received, saying: "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." He tells his master that he feared punishment if he should lose

the money "for I know that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown."

He has placed the bag of money on the ground at his master's feet.

His master however shakes his head in anger and replies: "Thou wicked and slothful servant. Thou oughtest ... to have put my money to the exchangers (or to the bank as we might say), and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury (or with interest."

No, this lazy servant gets no praise, but on the contrary, he is cast into a dark dungeon. He is very heavily punished.

You too have received talents from the Lord. No, I do not mean that you have been given a bag of money, but one may have been given intelligence and a capacity for learning;; another may be healthy and strong and able to work well and for long hours. Are these not "talents"? Are they not blessings?

How many children are not so blessed, but are deaf, blind, dumb or crippled?

What do you do with the blessings which God has given you? Do you expend them in the service of sin? Has the Lord given you these gifts for that purpose? ... Surely not? ... Your health, your strength, your intelligence and understanding is to be used in serving the Lord. If you do not do so, then the Lord shall judge you.

One day you will have to give an account of all that God has given you, here, in this life. Certainly one may have greater gifts than another, but use what you have received, to the honour of God. That is your bounden duty and calling.

This chapter is difficult, boys and girls, but I hope you have been able to understand my meaning.