

Jesus' Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24 & 25



Wedding customs differ from culture to culture. Let me summarize my understanding of the wedding customs of the Jewish culture of the first century.

There were three stages to a Jewish wedding:

1. The first was *engagement* - a formal agreement made by the fathers often while the bride and bridegroom were children.
2. The second was *betrothal* - the ceremony where mutual promises were made.
3. The third was *marriage* - approximately one year later after the bridegroom had finished the house where the couple was to live.

- being changed to bring change -

For the marriage the bridegroom would come relatively unannounced to fetch his bride back to the home he had prepared. There would be a procession, a brief ceremony attended by a relatively few guests, followed by another procession to the wedding banquet.

One more detail: According to Jewish sources, there were usually ten lamps held by ten attendants in the procession.

Listen as Jesus describes ten attendants at a wedding:

Matthew 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Matthew 25:2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Matthew 25:3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,

Matthew 25:4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Matthew 25:5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

The **ten virgins** are the attendants of the bride. They discerned that the **bridegroom** was coming so they readied themselves to **meet** him. He was somehow **delayed** and they all fell asleep.

Sleeping wasn't the problem. Some of them had lamps but no oil. No self-respecting attendant would do such a thing! The parable is an exaggeration to accentuate the foolishness of such thinking.

Matthew 25:6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

Matthew 25:7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

Matthew 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

Matthew 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

Did they ever have **oil** in their lamps? The fact they say they are **going out** seems to indicate they did. I say no; it ruins Jesus' point.

Even a nonbeliever can appear to have oil in their lamp. In fact, those who profess Christ but trust in works of righteousness seem to 'burn' all the brighter. But there is no real source and that kind of 'oil' cannot be replenished.

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They all **trimmed their lamps**. Why would you bother to trim your wick when you knew you had no oil soaking into it to burn? *You wouldn't!* Again it is an exaggeration to show just how foolish they were.

We interpret this parable as having its application for Jews who are alive at the return of Jesus at the end of the Great Tribulation. He is the **bridegroom**; they are the **ten virgins**. They need to be spiritually ready to greet Him. If they are not, they are as dumb as these five attendants.

The **lamps** speak of a profession a faith in Jesus, the light of the world. **Oil** is universally a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. Jesus was telling His disciples that spiritually readiness means being

saved by grace through faith in Him – not by works or rites or rituals or sacrifices or offerings.

Remember: For the first three-and-one-half years of the Great Tribulation the Temple will be in full swing. But that is not how Jews will be saved!

A critical, and usually overlooked, point in this parable is that there is no mention of the bride. We assume that the attendants fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom to come fetch his bride and are awakened just as he is arriving for her. But as the parable progresses it is more likely that the attendants fell asleep and completely missed the coming of the bridegroom for his bride. He took her while they were sleeping.

This understanding is substantiated by a Syriac version of the Bible called the Peshitta. According to J. Vernon McGee,

The Peshitta translation of the verse... indicates that the virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom *and the bride*, which means that the bridegroom is coming [back] from the marriage to the marriage supper.

Beginning in verse ten the wedding ceremony has already taken place and it is the wedding banquet that is beginning.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Matthew 25:11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'

Matthew 25:12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

They are denied entrance to the banquet. In a stunning statement the bridegroom says he doesn't know them.

Jesus Raptures the church. Israel will be on the earth during the Great Tribulation awaiting the Second Coming. When Jesus returns it will be from Heaven with His church to establish a kingdom on the earth. The Jews are being exhorted to watch and be ready – which means to be saved and awaiting His return. Only saved individuals, whether Jews or Gentiles, can enter in to the kingdom.

Matthew 25:13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Notice He specifies **the day or the hour**, not the century or the year. As we've said in previous studies, for various reasons it will be impossible to pinpoint the exact moment of the Second Coming.

No self-respecting bridal attendant would fail to have oil for her lamp let alone try to trim the wick as if she did. I said it was an exaggeration but it borders on the absurd.

In the same way no Jew (or Gentile for that matter) during the Great Tribulation should fail to respond to the Gospel and be saved.

Even now there are multitudes of people who would profess faith in Jesus but who are not saved. The Roman Catholic church worldwide is teeming with such misled folks. Every religious poll conducted in America reveals that the vast majority of our fellow citizens considers themselves to be saved.

All those who profess but do not possess faith trim their wicks, so to speak, even though they lack oil. The various works of righteousness people perform to earn their salvation are wick-trimming exercises. But without oil your works are not pleasing to God and cannot save.

One application, then, for us – the bride – is to let folks know that the Lord is coming for us. It is to be sure they understand that works cannot save but that you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. It is to live as the betrothed bride and to warn others about the danger inherent in 'missing' the Rapture and being left behind.