

The Ten Virgins

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches on the parable of the ten virgins from the Gospel of Matthew, emphasizing the importance of understanding the different stages of the parable and the significance of the midnight cry as a call to return to the original position of separation, manifestation, and expectation in the Christian faith. He addresses two wrong interpretations of the parable, highlighting the distinction between the wise and foolish virgins as representing true believers and mere professing Christians. Gaebelein urges listeners to heed the call to readiness for the Bridegroom's coming, emphasizing the eternal consequences of being unprepared and the urgency of accepting salvation through Christ.

Description

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Transcript

the-ten-virgins.pdf" txtUrl: "/pdf-text/text/a/arno-clemens-gaebelein---the-ten-virgins.txt" thumbnailUrl: "" hasTranscript: true oneLinerSummary: "The sermon on the ten virgins emphasizes the importance of being spiritually prepared for the imminent return of Christ." sermonType: "expository" topics: - name: "Christian Readiness" slug: "christian-readiness" - name: "Eternal Salvation" slug: "eternal-salvation" bibleRefs: - text: "2 Corinthians 11:2" bookId: "2CO" chapter: "11" verse: "2" outline: - heading: "I" points: - "Introduction to the parable of the ten virgins" - "Context within the Olivet discourse" - "Significance of the parable for the Christian age" - heading: "II" points: - "Misinterpretations of the parable" - "The foolish virgins and their lack of true faith" - "The wise virgins and their preparedness" - heading: "III" points: - "Historical stages of the parable" - "The falling asleep of the virgins" - "The midnight cry and its implications" - heading: "IV" points: - "The coming of the Bridegroom" - "The separation of the wise and foolish" - "The finality of the closed door" faq: - q: "What does the parable of the ten virgins illustrate?" a: "It illustrates the state of the Christian profession and the importance of being prepared for the coming of Christ." - q: "Who do the wise and foolish virgins represent?" a: "The wise virgins represent true believers who are prepared, while the foolish represent those who lack genuine faith." - q: "What is the significance

of the midnight cry?" a: "The midnight cry signifies a revival of the expectation of Christ's return and calls believers to readiness." - q: "What happens when the Bridegroom arrives?" a: "The wise virgins enter the marriage, while the foolish are shut out, illustrating the finality of their state." quotes: - "The parable of the ten virgins is one, which relates to the kingdom of heaven." - "The characteristics of the Christian calling are three-fold: separation, manifestation and expectation." - "The door was shut and when the door opens again He comes forth not as the Bridegroom, but as the King of kings." applicationPoints: - "Reflect on your own spiritual readiness and relationship with Christ." - "Stay vigilant and maintain an active expectation of Christ's return." - "Encourage others to seek genuine faith and not just outward appearances." keywords: - "ten virgins" - "Bridegroom" - "Christian profession" - "preparedness" - "midnight cry" - "separation" - "faith" - "salvation" ---

The study of this most solemn parable spoken by our Lord is very opportune. It is also necessary because certain wrong interpretations are being made of this parable, which have been accepted by not a few of God's people.

We find the parable of the ten virgins exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew, and here it is a part of the great discourse of our Lord, generally known as the Olivet discourse. The Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel of the King and His Kingdom. Three great discourses of the Lord are recorded by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Matthew. The first is the so-called "sermon on the mount." This contains the proclamation of the King concerning His Kingdom. The second discourse is found in the 13th chapter; this is composed of seven parables in which the Lord makes known the mysteries of the Kingdom. In the last great discourse He reveals the future of His Kingdom. First He reveals the future of the Jews, how the Jewish age will close, what great events are yet to take place in the land of Israel. He speaks of the great tribulation, which is yet in store for the Jews and immediately after the days of that great tribulation He will come in power and great glory. At the close of His discourse He reveals the future of the Gentile nations, who are on earth when He comes again. He will take His place upon His own glorious throne and all nations will be gathered before Him. They will be separated by the King, as a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats. Between these two predictions concerning the future, the beginning and the end of this discourse He gives three parables. These parables do not relate to the Jews, nor to the Gentile nations nor do they refer to the period of time, the end of the age, of which He speaks in the first part of Matthew xxiv. In these three parables the Lord shows the conditions which will prevail during the time of His absence from this earth. This period of time is the present Christian age. The three parables of the prudent and evil servant, the wise and the foolish virgins and the faithful and the slothful servants, give us a picture of the state of the entire Christian profession. This is seen in the very beginning of this parable. The parable of the ten virgins is one, which relates to the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven has here the same meaning as in Matthew xiii, that is, it means the entire sphere of Christian profession.

And now before we follow the different stages of this important parable I want to mention very briefly the two wrong interpretations, which like all other errors in our day, became more and more widespread. The first claims that the virgins do not represent Christians at all, but that they represent the Jewish remnant during the end of the age. The parable, according to this interpretation, will be fulfilled in the future. I am not going to enter into the different arguments which are advanced to support this view, but only wish to point out one fact, which is sufficient to disprove this theory. The ten virgins fell asleep, which, as we shall see later, means that they no longer expected the coming of the Bridegroom. Is it possible to conceive that the believing Jews during the great tribulation, when everything points to the rapid consummation of the age, can go to sleep? This to my mind is sufficient to overthrow this theory, not to speak of other reasons.

Another interpretation holds that the ten virgins represent indeed Christians. However, the foolish virgins are looked upon as true Christians, only they lacked a maturity of growth, depth of consecration, were not baptized with the Holy Spirit, or had not the so-called "second blessing." All this the wise virgins possessed. This is the favoured view with a certain class of holiness people. Others try to prove from it the theory of a first fruit rapture. The wise virgins are the first fruits and they are taken first. The foolish will have to pass through the tribulation and will be taken later. Against such teaching we simply hold up the words of the Lord, when He as Bridegroom tells the foolish virgins "I know you not." They were never His, they never knew Him and therefore they do not represent true Christians. Never will the Lord say this word to any one who has truly trusted in Him, no matter how weak and ignorant, how imperfect and erring that one may be.

And now let us look at the details of this parable, which gives us a picture of the attitude and character of professing Christendom up to the time when the Bridegroom comes.

Four historic stages can be easily traced in this parable. Three of them are passed and the fourth is imminent. At any moment the fourth may become actual history. They are the following:

1. A description of the Christian profession in its beginning and its characteristics. 2. The falling asleep of the virgins. 3. The Midnight cry. 4. The Coming of the Bridegroom. We are living in the days when the midnight cry is heard and are facing the fourth great event of this parable, the Coming of the Bridegroom, the entrance of the wise virgins to be with Him and the shutting out of the foolish. And this it is which makes this parable so very solemn in the days in which we are living.

1. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom." In 2nd Corinthians we read that the virgin is used as a type of the church. "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The Lord in the parable uses the figure of ten virgins, because the parable does not altogether refer to the true church, His Bride, but because He had in mind the conditions of that which professes to be the church. The number ten is the number of testimony and responsibility. Nevertheless we learn from the beginning of this parable what true Christianity is. The characteristics of the Christian calling are three-fold: separation, manifestation and expectation. Separation from the world; going forth with lamps, which are for giving light, to shine as lights while the Bridegroom is not here; and then to go forth to meet the Bridegroom. One can read in these statements the very words and thoughts with which the Holy Spirit describes the Thessalonian Christians, "How ye turned to God from idols to serve the true and the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven." The emphasis in this parable is upon the last of these characteristics. The whole body of Christians in the beginning went out to meet the Bridegroom. The blessed Hope of the coming of the Lord was the Hope and the expectation of the church in the very start. It was the original attitude of the true church and bears witness to the heavenly hope and heavenly calling of the church.

In the next two verses the spiritual condition of the ten virgins is laid bare. It is noteworthy that the condition is stated first, the demonstration of it comes later; after the midnight cry had been sounded the foolishness of the five becomes manifested. The division of these virgins in five wise and five foolish brings out the fact that in the professing church two classes of people are found, the true and the false, saved and unsaved, professing and possessing. The wise represent such who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who have personal knowledge of Christ and are sealed with the Spirit; they have the unction of the Holy One, who is represented by the oil. The foolish are such who have the form of godliness and deny the power thereof. They represent such who have taken the outward profession but lack the reality.

As they never truly trusted in Christ they have not the oil, the Holy Spirit. The objection has been made that the foolish virgins can hardly represent unsaved persons, because they are called virgins and went out to meet the Bridegroom. In their profession they were virgins, and in profession they had gone out to meet the Bridegroom. Another objection is raised. Did they not later say "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out?" Then they must have had some oil, else how could they say that their lamps were gone out? There is no proof at all in this that they had a certain supply of oil. It is distinctly said that they only took lamps, but they did not take oil. They may have made an attempt to light the wick of their lamps only to see that they did not give light and went out. No, they never possessed the oil, just as the great mass of professing Christians in our days have lamps, an outward form, but no reality. Christ was never accepted and therefore the Holy Spirit and His power is lacking. A fearful condition it is! Alas, the thousands and hundreds of thousands who are in that condition to-day!

2. A second stage historically is seen in the fifth verse. "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Both the foolish and the wise grew heavy, became drowsy and then slept. This has been interpreted in different ways. However, the meaning of it is not hard to discover. The Bridegroom tarried and they no longer expected Him. As the centuries went on the professing church gave up the blessed Hope and ceased looking for the Lord. This is an historic fact. The Coming of the Bridegroom was forgotten and all, the most earnest believers as well as the mere professing ones slept, and for long centuries nothing was heard of the Bridegroom and His Coming. Darkness and confusion prevailed in dispensational truths; the writings extending over hundreds of years witness to this fact. Of the end of the world, a universal judgment day, and the Day of wrath something was heard occasionally, but the blessed Hope as it was known in the beginning was completely forgotten. Nothing is heard of it for many, many centuries. This is the second great historic event. The Lord was no longer expected.

3. And now we come to the third. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the Bridegroom! go out to meet Him." The question is has this period been reached, or are we still to wait for such a startling cry, reaching the ears of both the wise and the foolish, the professing and the possessing? Some teach in our day that that cry is the same as the shout which is mentioned in 1 Thess. iv, the shout which the descending Lord will give to call His own into His presence. But that is incorrect. The midnight cry and the shout of the Lord have no connection. The shout of the Lord is the first word which He will utter. His last word was, "Behold I come quickly." The next word will be His shout. The midnight cry is not uttered by Himself, but it is given by the Holy Spirit. And has the midnight cry been given by the Holy Spirit? Has there been a revival of the blessed Hope of the Coming of the Lord? Did anything like this of which the Lord here speaks take place? We unhesitatingly answer it with, Yes. We all know of the Coming of the Lord. Most of us are cherishing the blessed Hope and are waiting for Himself. We sing precious hymns full of hope and expectation. Over the entire Christian profession the preaching has gone forth of the Coming of the Bridegroom. This is sufficient evidence that this stage in the parable has been reached. The midnight cry has been given. When was it given? We do not hear anything about the Bridegroom and His nearness during the great reformation period. The great instruments which were used in the reformation had no light on the Coming of the Lord. Luther, for instance, spoke occasionally of the great universal judgment day, which he believed was near, because he believed the Pope to be the Antichrist. In this conception he was followed by all his contemporaries. It was not given to the great reformers to be used in the revival of the prophetic Word and to give the midnight cry. Nor do we hear anything like the midnight cry immediately after the reformation; we go back to the first half of the last century and there we meet with a revival of the blessed Hope, the coming of the Lord. The Holy Spirit flashed forth this blessed truth once more and ever since then the midnight cry has been heard, and it is still being heard. We live in the

fulfillment of this period of the parable of our Lord.

But what is indicated by these words? You noticed we left out the word "cometh." The authorized version reads, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." The revised version has left out the word "cometh" and that is the right way to read it, "Behold the Bridegroom! Go ye forth to meet Him." This tells us that the midnight cry is more than a mere announcement of the coming of the Lord. It is, of course, indicated, but the Holy Spirit in the midnight cry calls attention to the person of the Bridegroom. He unfolds His glorious person anew and brings out the fact that His church, whom He has loved, is His Bride and that He is the Bridegroom. And along with this message of the Bridegroom there is a call to go forth to meet Him. What else is it than a call to the original position? It demands a return to that as it was in the beginning. It is a call to separation from all that is false and unscriptural. How can any one, or how could any one honestly believe that that adorable Person, the Bridegroom, is near, soon Coming, without turning away from all that is displeasing to Him, without turning the back upon all which dishonors both His Person and His Word? This then is the significant meaning of the midnight cry. Exactly this took place and still takes place in our present day. Along with the revival of the blessed Hope, the preaching of His imminent Coming, we have a return to other great truths, such as the teaching concerning the church. Just as the giving up of the blessed Hope affected the other great doctrines of the Bible and became in part responsible for the fearful decline, confusion and departure from the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints, so the recovery of the blessed Hope, the imminent Coming of the Lord, results in the recovery of these same blessed doctrines which were given up and leads to a return to the true position. All this has come to pass. All is still coming to pass. The midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom, go ye forth to meet Him," stands in closest connection with the church message to Philadelphia, in the third chapter of Revelation. There the person of Christ, as the Holy One and the True One, is in the foreground. Once more a company of His people at the very last days are keeping His Word and are not denying His name as well as keeping the Word of His patience, which has reference to His Coming, and to His Philadelphia remnant He gives the encouraging message, "I will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is to come upon all the earth." Philadelphia assuredly originates with the midnight cry. The two are inseparably connected.

But to return to the parable of the Lord. We notice that the midnight cry discovers the true condition of the wise and the foolish. They all arose and trimmed their lamps. The message has an effect upon the entire Christian profession. Of the wise we read but little, but the foolish now discover that they have no oil and further demonstrate their foolishness by appealing to the wise to give them oil. The wise in turn direct them to go to those who sell and buy for themselves. The words have occasioned much controversy.

It is not at all necessary that in a parable everything must have a definite meaning. It shows simply the utter blindness of these foolish one in looking to human beings for that which they lacked. The oil, the Holy Spirit, can be obtained only from Him, who gives without money and without price. But their foolishness just consisted in this very thing that they came not to Him, who is so willing to give. One can imagine the haste and activity of these foolish virgins in running here and there trying to get oil, to have burning lamps to meet the Bridegroom. It is exactly that which has happened since the midnight cry has been given and which we still witness about us. There is a great deal of religious activity, an immense amount of religious fervor, all kinds of endeavor and service, trying to do this and attempting to be better and do better. The so-called religious world feels that there is something in the air. Something is troubling them and yet they refuse to go to Him who alone can give and whose Grace alone can save and make ready. This is, alas, the sad condition of a great part of Christendom to-day. They hear the midnight cry and yet refuse to go to Him for oil.

But the wise arose and trimmed their lamps. They had the oil and they responded to the message, "Behold the Bridegroom! go ye forth to meet Him." It is a significant fact that the blessed Hope faithfully preached is causing separation between the true and the false. That is exactly why we must preach it and preach it more faithfully. And this continues. It has continued for a good many years, longer than those who were used by the Holy Spirit in the recovery of the blessed Hope, anticipated. The infinite patience of the Lord has delayed the next great event. How long will it all continue yet? Who can give us an answer to this? For all we know the next moment may usher in the actual appearing of the Bridegroom.

The next is "the Bridegroom came." How solemn this is. While the foolish kept on running and seeking and the wise had arisen and the separation between these classes had taken place, He came at last. That is exactly what is before us now. Oh! I wish I could impress it upon every heart that this solemn event may be upon us at any time. Surely the Bridegroom will not delay his coming much longer. When John the Baptist announced the first Coming of the King through the power and energy of the Holy Spirit did it take long for Him to come? And now for so many years already the Holy Spirit has announced the nearness of the Bridegroom, His soon Coming; can it then take much longer? Every waiting one, every spiritually minded believer who has intelligence, answers with thousands of others, "It cannot be much longer. He will tarry no more, but will quickly come."

How it fills our hearts with joy. The Bridegroom is coming and it reads, "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage." The wise, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and know Him, are ready. Grace has made them ready and when He comes He will receive them. What a happy and glorious moment it will be at last. Said my little boy, who has an interest in the Coming of the Lord, "I wonder how He will look. I wonder what kind of a face He has when we see Him." That is exactly what you and I have often thought about and often wonder what it will be when we see Him at last as He is. And we shall see Him.

But there is another side, fearful indeed. "The door was shut." What words these are. The door closed in the face of the rest of the virgins. No more possibility, for them to enter in. Directly they come saying "Lord, Lord, open to us." But He answered and said, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." They find themselves shut out. And let me say this is their final state. One of the fearful things with some of these new theories concerning this last parable is that they meddle with these last words addressed to the foolish virgins, as if they have another chance. No, no, the door was shut and when the door opens again He comes forth not as the Bridegroom, but as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, as the mighty judge. I know you not--what words from such lips! What eternal misery they foretell!

And this is the doom which hangs over the heads of the large masses of Christian people, Christians in name only, never saved. The moment He comes the door will be shut for these foolish virgins. Forever outside will be their destiny.

Perhaps I am speaking here to some, not many, but some, who have not the oil, who have not the Spirit of Christ and are none of His. Let me address these words to you, and if it is but one person. Delay no longer. Arise this very moment and go to Him who still waits in patience. He waits for you and invites you to come to Him to buy without money and without price. Oh! come now, confess yourself with all your religiousness perhaps and self-righteousness a lost sinner. You need to be no longer in that dangerous position. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; decide it now and I can assure you He will give you that which you lack in your empty profession; and should He come to-night, as may be the case, you will be ready to enter in with the oldest saint of God. He died for you to have you with Himself. Will you reject then the offer

of salvation as it comes in this solemn hour? How can you? Delay no longer, but now cast yourself into His arms.

And we who know Him and wait for Him with longing hearts, there is more than one solemn message which comes to us from this parable. Think of the awful doom of the multitudes of professing, but unsaved, Christians. Some believers who believe in the eternal punishment of the unsaved act as if it were not true. If it is true as alas! it is, how can we be idle? Brethren, we have a great responsibility towards the foolish virgins, the great mass of the professing church. God forbid that we should be negligent in discharging this duty. Away with the miserable sectarian spirit which takes the skirts together, like the Pharisee of old and says, "I am holier than thou," and refuses to go to those who need the truth and the Gospel. We have a debt to pay; we are debtors to all. As long as the Bridegroom tarries let us go to those who are Christians in name and who know Him not and He will graciously own our testimony.

"Watch, therefore, for ye know not neither the day nor the hour." Soon all will be reality. Soon we shall enter in to be with the Bridegroom; shut in with Him. God grant that none of us may be shut out.

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