

Some End Times Questions (Part 2)

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[0:00] Take your Bibles then tonight and let's look at Matthew chapter 25.

! That will be the text that pertains to the question asked.! And the question, and you have that before you, is this.

In the parable of the ten virgins, what did Jesus mean by keep watch? Keep watch. And that's a good question.

A pretty easy one to answer. But I think it would be good for us to look at the parable itself, consider some things about the parable, so that we can, I think, fully understand just how important those words are.

Keep watch, which, by the way, we will discover at the close of the teaching tonight. Keep watch or watch in some translations.

[1:11] Be ready, I think, is in others. It is a command. It's a command. And so that then is something to be obeyed. And so it's key.

It's important. But let's understand it in its context here. And that's where we want to begin. But first, let me read the parable.

Chapter 25, verses 1 through 13. Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins, or bridesmaids, what they are.

Ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now, five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them. It's important that you note that it says they took no oil. Not that they had some and ran out or didn't have enough to last.

[2:07] They didn't take any with them. Very important. So note that as we go along. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard. Behold, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him. Then all those virgins, bridesmaids, arose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. 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. 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. Afterward, the other bridesmaids came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.

[3:11] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. Now, I want to say on the front end here, before we get to this first point or first bullet there on your notes, that regardless of your eschatology, that is, I guess I would say, as long as your eschatology fits within Orthodox Christianity, regardless of that, the meaning here of the parable ultimately is the same.

So remember that as we go along, because there may be some who disagree with me on some points, but the question about what is meant by keep watch or watch is going to be the same no matter what your eschatology is or your interpretation of this particular text.

And so with that, let's start with the position, the position of the parable in the larger text. The position of the parable in the larger text.

And what I mean is, first of all, it's context. But let's get that straight in our minds first. It's important. And by the way, if you were here last Wednesday, the context is the same as the question from last Wednesday because we're in that same passage.

And it's context. The parable is part of the Olivet Discourse. The Olivet Discourse. Which I think the theme is, Jesus' teachings concerning His second coming and the end of the age.

[4:50] And we learned that from chapter 24 and verse 1 to 3. We read that last week. Let me read it to you again. And Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.

I guess they were proud of them. And Jesus said to them, Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down. Now, as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately saying, Tell us, when will these things be?

That is, when will all these stones be torn down? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And Jesus answered and said to them. And then we have His answer.

Which takes up nearly two full chapters in the Gospel of Matthew, at least in Matthew's account. And so, the Olivet Discourse is an answer to that question.

So, that's the theme here. Jesus' teachings concerning the second coming, His second coming, and the end of the age. Its content, its content, the parable serves as an illustration.

[5:58] That's what it's here for. That's why Jesus included this parable. And not just this one, but several others. And we all know. We read all the Gospels.

And we know that Jesus used parables quite often, didn't He? And I would say that a parable is more than just an illustration. But primarily, here it's serving as an illustration of a truth.

And the truth being, the truth that Jesus has repeated over and over in the Olivet Discourse, the truth that no one, no one, not anyone, but the Father only, no one knows the precise timing of Christ's return.

So, the parable illustrates that. Or, maybe we could say, reinforces that reality. Again, this is something that Jesus repeated throughout the discourse, throughout this message.

He introduced that reality in chapter 24 and verse 36. That's the passage we kind of focused on last week where He says, no one knows, but the Father only.

[7:07] And then that same thing, or that same idea, or truth, or reality is repeated in verse 42 of chapter 24, and 44, and 50, and then on in chapter 25, verse 13, which comes at the close of the parable that we're looking at.

And so, over and over again, repeatedly throughout this message, or maybe I should say, this answer to the disciples' question, we call it the Olivet Discourse, Jesus repeats that over and over that no one knows the time of the second coming.

And He illustrates that truth with four parables. This is one of them, one of the four. The others would be the parable of the householder and the thief, chapter 24, verses 43 to 44.

Parable of the faithful and unfaithful steward, and you see the reference for that. Parable of the ten bridesmaids, and that's what we're looking at tonight. And then finally, the one that follows this one in chapter 25, the parable of the talents.

So, He takes four parables to illustrate this reality that no one knows when, the timing, the precise timing of the second coming.

[8:18] And it's all, it kind of comes to a consummation or a conclusion where He applies this teaching, or applies the, I guess, the ultimate implication of it.

in chapter 25, verse 31, the application is judgment. Judgment. And there, He's not really telling a parable per se. Some call it a parable where He speaks of the separation of the sheep from the goats.

But the idea is that judgment is going to come, ultimately is going to come on those who were not prepared for His coming. And that coming, no one knows but the Father.

So it behooves us to be ready, to be prepared. Alright? The point of the parable. Let's go to the second bullet there.

The point of the parable. And it's pretty simple. Since, I've just kind of laid it out this way in a logical fashion. Since, no one can calculate or discover the precise time of Christ's second coming.

[9:28] since no one can do that. Then, it's vitally important for one to be spiritually prepared now. Right? I mean, it's pretty logical, isn't it?

So the point of the parable is simple. All the parables. The point of them is very simple. So since no one can discover the precise time, then it's vitally important to be spiritually prepared now because unbelievers living at the time of the second coming will have no further opportunity for salvation.

The opportunity will be over. No second chance after that. Which, by the way, I think it's important to note, that's a different set of circumstances than was true at His first coming.

because many rejected Him at His first coming, but they did get a chance to receive Him. Think about Paul. Apostle Paul. And he out, just out and out, rejected Jesus as Savior.

In fact, so much did he reject Him that he served to persecute and even have put to death those who were followers of Christ. And yet, Paul was saved.

[10:47] Alright, so at the first coming, there was an opportunity. If you reject Him, an opportunity was open for you to receive Him. But at the second coming, when He comes, there will be no more chance, no more opportunity.

Alright? The particulars. Yeah. I'm a slave to alliteration. The particulars of the parable.

Alright, let's begin with the setting. The setting here is easy to see. Well, the Jewish wedding ceremony. That's the setting of the parable. True life setting.

The parable is not intended to be an account of an actual event, but it is, the setting is the wedding.

The wedding ceremony, the Jewish wedding ceremony, which consisted of three stages. And you probably have heard this and know this. First came the engagement.

[11:51] And we have engagements in our culture as well, but engagements in the Jewish ceremony were binding, just as binding as if the couple were already married.

But the engagement was preset. It was, you know, there would be a contract of marriage that would be arranged by by the fathers of the bride, of both the bride and groom.

In fact, in many cases, the bride and groom didn't even know one another. I said it was binding. I'm sorry, I misspoke. This first stage is not marriage yet, but this is the step, and this is kind of the prearrangement, and we kind of know a little bit about that in not just Jewish culture, but other cultures do that as well.

Then second comes the betrothal. Betrothal. This is binding. Alright. Even though they're not together yet, the vows are exchanged at the betrothal, but the couple remains apart.

They remain separated, and the marriage is not consummated, not physically consummated in the betrothal period. The betrothal period could last as long as a year.

[13:08] Generally, some months, sometimes a year, sometimes longer. And it was binding. If there was any immoral activity going on with another person, then it would be adultery.

And you remember, of course, the instance in Scripture about Mary and Joseph and Mary being found with child, and so the assumption was that she had had relations with another man, which would be adultery, and she could have been stoned, because they are legally bound together, even though they don't live with one another yet.

And generally, that time period would be a time where the bridegroom would be preparing a place for them to live. So he would remain at his father's home, and she would remain at her father's home, until the third stage, which would be the wedding feast.

The wedding feast. Now I'm giving this to you, not just because it's interesting, somewhat, but it plays in, we need to understand what's going on in this parable, what stage is Jesus referring to in the parable.

The wedding feast is the third and final part of it, and it is generally a week-long festival, followed by the friend of the groom, we would call him the best man, I don't think they use those terms, but the friend of the groom would take the hand of the bride and place it in the hand of the groom, and after that they would be officially together, and they would go into the bridal chamber, and the marriage would be consummated.

[14:51] So now, that leads us to the story. The story in this parable, the events, and that would be the events leading up, this is what's contained in this parable, the events leading up to this third stage.

All right, so we're talking about the third stage of the wedding ceremony, not the engagement, not the betrothal, but the wedding feast. Now, here's how we go.

The third stage of the Jewish wedding, generally, it began with the groom and his friends, his best friends, his groomsmen.

would begin with them arriving at the bride's home. That's kind of how it would begin. He would leave his father's house, his friends would go with him, and they would go to the bride's home, and the bridesmaids would be waiting there with the bride, and a friend of the groom would usually run ahead of the group and announce that the bridegroom had arrived.

He would say, Behold, just like we see there in chapter 25 verse 6, Behold, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him. And then a torch, kind of a torch-lit processional of bridesmaids, groomsmen, friends, family, all a part of the marriage party, the wedding party.

[16:22] Then they would escort in this kind of parade, torch-lit parade, they would escort the groom and his bride to the bridegroom's home, to their new home usually.

And upon arrival, the marriage festival would then begin. It's kind of a neat way to do it. We have that festival and once that started, just like the parable suggests, the door would be shut.

That is, everyone who's not part of that party, the wedding party, they would be barred from going in. They would not be admitted unless they were part of the wedding party.

And the festival would usually last about a week, after which the groom and his bride would enter into the bridal chamber and the marriage would be consummated. So that's roughly how it was done.

And that's kind of what we have described for us here in the parable. Alright, so now let's get to the symbolism. We're kind of getting, gradually getting to the real point of the parable and it's symbolic of something here.

[17:40] And it's this, the primary participants of a wedding ceremony, a Jewish wedding ceremony, represent for us the key personalities present at Christ's return.

Let me put it this way, another way. The physical preparedness of the bridesmaids at the Jewish wedding is symbolic for us or comparable to the spiritual preparedness required for entrance into the kingdom of heaven at the end of the age.

Let me say that again. That's what this is all about here. The physical preparedness of a bridesmaid, the bridesmaids at a Jewish wedding, which is what we have in the parable, the physical preparedness, the torches being lit, having oil for the, the physical preparedness, that's what we have presented in the parable.

That is symbolic of or comparable to the spiritual preparedness, not physical, but spiritual preparedness for entrance into the kingdom of heaven at the end of the age.

Now let's just follow along in the text and see this connection. And I'm just going to highlight, and I have provided these for you on your notes.

[19:09] I'm not giving you all the scriptures there, but we've already read the parable. Now let's just highlight some particular words here to help us to see this symbolism of the parable, what it's illustrating.

The word then in verse 1 is a reference to the actual event of Christ's return. The actual event of Christ's return. Now here is where some would diverge in their eschatology.

I hold that the event of Christ's return that Jesus is referring to here is his second coming, his actual coming at the end of the tribulation period.

Not his coming for the church. Jesus' coming I believe is in two stages. And he's going to come for his church and rapture them prior to the tribulation.

Then at the end of the seven years he will come and establish his kingdom. So it's that part of the coming, that event that the word then I believe is referring to.

[20:19] The kingdom of heaven in verse 1 that phrase which is very common in Matthew's gospel sometimes it's referred to as the kingdom of God here the kingdom of heaven is just simply talking about the supreme rule of Christ.

Now the kingdom of heaven is here right now but his rule resides in the hearts of born again believers. One day the kingdom of heaven is going to come in reality and that is his rule and reign will be established here on this earth and we will reign with him for a thousand years.

That's the millennium. The kingdom of heaven is speaking of the supreme rule of Christ. The bridegroom in verse one is who? It'll be Jesus Christ himself.

He's the bridegroom. The ten virgins in verse one mentioned in verse one represent professing disciples of Christ. Represent all professors of Christianity.

Alright? Disciples of Christ. The lamps they are holding represents for us the outward testimony of identity with Christ.

[21:42] The outward observable testimony of identity with Christ. The oil verses three to four represent the inner spiritual reality of identity with Christ.

You see the difference between those two. There are ten bridesmaids and they represent just all professing disciples of Christ.

All professing Christians. But not all professors are possessors are they? And so the lamps that all ten are holding and carrying they represent the visible representation testimony and the oil represents the inner.

The five wise bridesmaids represent true born again Christians. That's just very simple to see this. And so the point is that their outward testimony the torches and the lighting those torches being lit at some point represent or came from the inner reality of a genuine faith in Christ.

[23:13] And so then conversely the five foolish bridesmaids are false professors. False professors of faith in Christ. That makes sense?

See, I think it is helpful to note that all ten bridesmaids carried torches. All ten of them did, didn't they? And there's no indication from the parable that the torches, some look different than others. They all were the same. And from the outward observable features of these ten bridesmaids with their torches, they looked the same and were the same.

On the outside, all ten, it's helpful I think to consider this, all ten appeared to be looking for the bridegroom's arrival.

And what's it a picture of? It's a picture of the church today. It's made up of hopefully, mostly, actual believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24:31] It would be great to know and to have a church that is made up of all regenerate, born-again believers in Christ.

But the church today, quite frankly, is made up of both true believers and false professors. And many of them look the same.

Don't they? On the outside? Involved in the same kind of worship? Maybe the worship is identical? people, and many other things.

I think you could consider here the similarity that, well, Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. Remember that in Matthew 13? The wheat and the tares. And if you know anything about tares, then you know that at least in the early stages of that plant, the tares looks exactly the same as the wheat.

[25:37] Exactly the same. That doesn't bear any fruit. Ultimately will not bear fruit, but the point is that they both look the same. One's wheat and one is not.

And that's the idea here with the ten bridesmaids. They all appear to be true members of the wedding party. They all appear to be prepared for the bridegroom to come, but only five of them are.

Five of them are not. That's the idea here. Paul described false professors in 2 Timothy 3.5. I think I gave you that reference and you might remember it. Having a form of godliness but denying the power.

Denying its power. Alright, the next phrase, the bridegroom was delayed. What is meant there?

Verse 5. Well, just simply that the time of Christ's return will be unexpected.

precise time. Signs have been visible and so those living in the tribulation will know the time is coming near.

[26:48] Just as we can with some of the signs, begin to understand that we're nearing the time, but really signs have not been given to us.

But no one will know the exact time or day. And so that's the idea. The bridegroom was delayed.

That's the idea here. Now, he uses the word delayed and it might be a little bit confusing.

And I think we ought to consider that it's a matter of perspective. because from man's perspective, from our perspective, Christ's return seems to be delayed, doesn't it?

I mean, we're waiting for him. We want him to come and it just seems like he's waiting and waiting. And so we might use or conceptualize it in terms of delayed coming.

That's from man's perspective, but from God's perspective, Christ will come at the time decreed in eternity past. The time's been set.

[27:55] And God knows, God the Father knows, and I think Jesus knows now. He did not know during the time of His incarnation as we explained last week. But the time is set.

You know, sometimes we will speak about, say, future plans, we're making future plans, and we might use the phrase if the Lord tarries. Ever used that before or heard anybody say that?

And I understand, we understand what we mean by that. That's from our perspective. It may seem like He's tarrying, but He will not tarry.

Jesus Christ's return will take place precisely at the predetermined time. Just like His first coming, by the way. Galatians 4.4, the fullness of time, in the fullness of time.

That is, at the time preselected, predetermined, God sent forth His Son, born of a virgin, and so forth. So He will not tarry, He will not delay His coming.

[28 : 55] And the fact that He seems to be taking a long time to come is a testimony of His grace. Not His grace in the sense that He's waiting, waiting, waiting, just won't get one more in before He comes.

I'm just hoping that old David over there will get right with the Lord. And just as soon as He does, I'm going to send Jesus. Not His waiting according to His grace in that sense, but the fact that He has given such a space of time for people to repent is a testimony of His grace.

And so it's not an indication that He's waiting for some undetermined time or that He is indecisive. Certainly, God is not indecisive concerning when He should return.

Alright, the next phrase, they all slumbered and slept, verse 5. And the idea there is, and this is important I think, the idea is one of security, not faithlessness.

Because all ten, all ten of these bridesmaids fell asleep. And why did they fall asleep? Because it was midnight. Most of us do go to sleep sometime before midnight.

[30 : 13] And maybe you don't. I try to. And so it's just natural. All ten. So it's not a testimony to faithlessness or laziness. Or that God's people, God's true born-again believers, they just got so weary in waiting they gave up.

It's not the idea at all. It's one security. That's the idea here. Security. The wise bridesmaids were experiencing a genuine security of salvation.

They were sleeping in the Lord. Now, the foolish bridesmaids were experiencing security as well. But it was a false security of salvation.

And so they all slept. Alright? At midnight a cry, verse 6, is just simply the announcement of Christ's return. Again, in my view, it refers to those living at the conclusion of the great tribulation.

And where tribulation saints, because I believe there will be people saved during the tribulation, saints and sinners alike will see the signs of His coming, but they will not know the precise day and time of His coming, and He will come as He used this analogy.

[31 : 34] In another place, He will come as a thief in the night. Or, to use the parable here, He will come as a bridegroom whose return is expected, but the exact time is not known until it is announced.

And then you better be ready because it's time to go. By the way, I would say to you that the church today, on this side of the rapture, we're not given signs.

Did you know that? We're not given any signs. As a matter of fact, Jesus gave a pretty strong rebuke against those who were looking for signs.

He said it's a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks after signs. And we've not been given signs, and so as I've heard it put, the church is not looking for signs, the church is listening for a shout.

And that's where we are. So there's no signs for that. Jesus may come and take us, rapture us at any moment. It could be right now. Alright.

[32 : 38] Now, our lamps are going out, per se. What's the idea here? Well, the false believers, here's the idea, they have no reality of faith.

There's no reality. They have a false faith, false profession of faith, but there's no reality of faith.

They have no oil. And therefore, since they have no oil, they have no light.

And since they have no light, they cannot join the processional that is going to take the groom and the bride and everyone to the groom's house and where the festival will begin.

They have no light, so they can't go. And here's the picture. The foolish bridesmaids, I think here's how we ought to understand it, they had no oil.

They didn't run out, they just had none. And so, it's kind of a foolish attempt to light your torch without oil. And it may flame up for a moment, but then it's going to go out.

[33 : 45] And so, I think that's the implication here. And similarly, false believers in Christ will attempt to join the bride, but will be unable to.

Go to those who sell, they say in verse 9, go to those who sell and buy oil for yourselves, which is a reference to getting salvation from the Lord.

It's really not a reference, I don't think, of trying to buy salvation from other sources. Some have seen that as part of the analogy here. And bringing into play the idea of buying. You can't buy salvation, although in some places, in fact it's Isaiah, wasn't it, said buy without money. So it is put in terms of buying, but the idea is go ahead and get salvation. It's time, bridegroom's coming, you're not ready, better get saved. And so, they go out to look. And then verse 10, the door was shut.

[34 : 52] And the idea is that the opportunity for salvation had come to an end. And will one day come to an end.

Luke chapter 13, I think I gave you that reference there. Let me read it. Luke 13, verse 24, where Jesus said, strive to enter through the narrow gate.

We looked at part of this parable a few weeks ago. Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to shout outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us.

And he will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from. Then you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.

But we will say, I tell you, or he will say, I tell you, I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and yourselves thrust out.

[36 : 14] And they have the same idea, isn't it? There's coming a time, a point in time at the end of the age when the door will be shut and there will be no chance, no opportunity for salvation after that.

And then finally, the priority of the parable. And here's the answer to the question, though we've really already answered it. Watch, therefore. there's the priority here.

It's not only, of course, not only apparent in this parable, but in the other parables and in really you could take the Olivet Discourse as a whole, and that is the theme that runs throughout.

Watch, therefore. What does that mean? Well, verb is an imperative, i.e. this is a command. And the command is given specifically to the inhabitants of the earth, living during the Great Tribulation, but it is applicable to any age.

Is it not? It's applicable today. We ought to be issuing the same message. And so therefore, I think the command is an evangelistic, I could preach this as an evangelistic message or at least make an application in that regard, evangelistic invitation to or appeal to obey the gospel.

[37 : 46] Be on the alert. Be ready. Make sure you don't miss the bridegroom because you do not know when he will come.