

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

<http://SundaySchoolResources.co.uk>

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

Background: Remember we are coming to the end of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. There are only a few days before he will be crucified. He has so much to tell his disciples to warn them and to help them in the trials to come.

In the Olivet prophecy Jesus gave his disciples a number of signs of the second coming to this earth. Now he tells a few final parables where he outlines how his disciples should behave themselves in his absence so that they might be prepared to meet him.

As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ these parables apply to us today just as much as they did to the disciples in the Lord's day so we must give special attention to what the parable is telling us and see how we can alter our lives to please our God.

The Ten Virgins

If you have read the parable carefully you will see in the last verse it teaches us how to be truly wise, it is important for us to assess how it does this. The key is found in Jesus' final words – "Watch therefore for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh..." v13, by saying this Jesus is telling us that *watchfulness* is a token of *wisdom*. However even the virgins who were "ready" also had a particular duty to do, they had to have a supply of oil ready for the special time when the bridegroom arrived.

Now let us go through the details. There were 10 virgins. When 10 is used in the Bible it is a number which represents a large number. This we find shown in Gen 31:7, Num 14:22 etc. So here the number 10 represents a great number of believers, the fact that five are accepted and five are rejected does not indicate that half of those called will be saved. Jesus is always concerned with the *quality* of his servants and not the number of that multitude who will be saved.

What was the difference between the two groups, wise and foolish?

They both had oil in their lamps, but the wise had reserve oil. Oil was essential for the lamps so that they could burn brightly. In Israel the oil was produced from the olive berry which had to be gathered and then crushed so that the oil was produced. This took time and effort. The wise had not only filled their lamps, they had spare oil, they had taken the time and effort to crush more oil than they needed immediately so that when suddenly aroused they had oil at hand.

Oil in the scripture stands for the spirit of God which enlightens the dark human heart. Exo. 27:20 and Psa 119:130 show us this. Today the oil stands for the *Word of God* given by the Holy Spirit in which is revealed the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. 2 Pet 1:19-20, 2 Cor 4:4. So what does this mean to us today? If we want to be wise we must read our Bibles daily. Not just reading the minimum amount – even the foolish did this – but taking the time and effort (like the crushing of the berries) to understand God's word. When we do this our lives should be changed so that we live in a way which pleases God, then our characters will shine as a lamp filled with oil, Matt 5:15-16, and we should in fact *shine out* or show to those who see us that we are different. The light that should be seen in us is the reflection of the ways of the Lord Jesus followed by those

who are his disciples in whatever age. The New Testament teaches us many things about the light of the truth which should shine from us.

They all slumbered and slept

This statement is interesting, the word *slumbered* means to “nod the head” indicating a short sleep when we just lose ourselves for a moment. The word *slept* however means to be fast asleep. The statement indicates that a long period of time would elapse before the Lord returns. Most of the disciples and followers of the Lord down through the ages will have fallen asleep when the Lord returns only a few will be alive compared with the multitude who have died. When the bridegroom comes and calls them they all arose and should have been prepared to meet the Lord. The followers of Jesus all know that when he returns we shall all be called to give an account of ourselves and our lives. Will we have enough oil or the knowledge of God’s word, the Bible? Remember the call came at midnight, the darkest hour. This emphasised the lesson that the Lord will come suddenly and when least expected. Anxiously they arose to trim their lamps. What does this mean? Well the lamp was trimmed to make the light shine brighter, which is like us trying to display the best side of our character and works so that we should *shine* bright.

Coming back to the parable. Desperately, the foolish pleaded for the wise to give them oil because their lamps had gone out. But it was too late and their panic shows the terrible realisation which will overtake those servants of the Lord who have wasted their opportunities to serve God. What about us? How much time do we waste putting off until tomorrow the reading of God’s word? The wise replied “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you”, in this answer we are shown that when the Lord arrives it will be too late for further preparations, the day of opportunity will be over. Now is the time for us to *buy* oil. How can we do this? We buy it with our time – time given to God and the reading and understanding of His word is like an investment. Remember the words of Isaiah. “Come ye to the waters and he that hath no money, come ye and eat, yea come buy wine and milk without money and without price” Isa. 55:1

Notice the ending of the parable, the door was shut at the marriage feast and although the foolish begged to be let in Jesus replied that *he did not know them*. The word *know* means to acknowledge or approve. I am sure we would hate these words to be said of us, to be shut out of the kingdom with the Lord Jesus telling us that he did not approve of our way of life.

The day id opportunity is for each one of us *today*. Today, give God time. Today, read his word. Today, live as Jesus did. Today, do good to all. Tomorrow will be too late – the door will be shut.

Jesus ends with a warning to the disciples then and to us today. “Watch therefore, for we know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh”.

Many, many years have passed since Jesus gave this parable. We can see all around us the signs of the return of the Lord. What are we doing with our time? Are we wasting it with our games, TV, recreation? If we are, we can clearly read what is to be our end. We will not be permitted to enter the Kingdom of God – the door indeed will be shut against us.

How much better to take the warning and to be like the wise giving our time and energy to God. Always putting our reading first, trying to help others and day by day without fail taking into our minds the oil of God’s word. When the Lord comes (and come He will), then we shall not be ashamed, nor will He be ashamed of us, but will be able to look into our hearts and our minds and see clearly that we have tried to the best of our ability each and every day to be wise servants.

Well, what of us? The parable is before us. We have probably known the parable as a story for many years but it has to mean more to us today. It has to motivate us and stir us on. Let us determine from this day on to give God more time, more thought and more praise. It really is worth it. Think of the reward of the kingdom offered to us. Think of the dreadful realisation that we have been cast out of the kingdom, nothing in this life is worth losing the kingdom for. So remember, tomorrow never comes and it is useless putting off our efforts day by day. Do it now and you will never regret it, but abundantly blessed. Just as the foolish virgins could not get oil from the wise, likewise ourselves, we cannot rely on others whether it be parents or partners, it is an individual matter – so let us press onwards and get on with the work before us before the bridegroom comes.

Extra work: Explain what the parable means to us today giving quotations to support your explanation.