

Matthew 25:1-13

- Keep watch! The Lord is coming! -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

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Introduction

- ❖ “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’
Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains” (Mt 24:3-8).
- ❖ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14).
- ❖ “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mt 24:36).
- ❖ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Mt 24:42-44).
- ❖ What does being ready entail: repentance and expectancy, rejoicing in the Lord, proclaiming his gospel and keeping watch.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a stand-alone. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ After Jesus had finished his sermon rebuking the teachings of the Pharisees and the Scribes and after his Lament on Jerusalem, he prophesied the destruction of the temple and the city, which actually took place in AD 70 after a six-month siege by the later Roman emperor Titus. Shortly afterwards his disciples came to him in private and asked him about these things. He told them the following (overview):

The Day of the Lord will come (first part)	
Matthew 24:1-44	The Day of the Lord will come > you don't know when (44). Keep watch and be ready.
Three parables	
Matthew 24:54-51	(The parable of) the faithful and the wicked servant.
Matthew 25:1-13	The parable of the ten virgins, of whom five were foolish and five were wise.
Matthew 25:14-30	The parable of the three servants and the talents.
The Day of the Lord – the last judgment has come (second part)	
Matthew 25:31-46	The Day of the Lord has come > The Day of judgment (31)

- ❖ It should not be overlooked that the parable of the ten virgins is thematically linked with the other two parables and like a sandwich is embedded in the teaching about the Day of the Lord.
- ❖ A thematic overview:

Matthew 24:1-44	The Day of the Lord will come > you don't know when (44)		
Matthew 24:54-51	One faithful and wise servant	One wicked servant	Day of reckoning
Matthew 25:1-13	Five wise virgins	Five foolish virgins	Day of wedding feast
Matthew 25:14-30	Two good and faithful servants	One wicked and lazy servant	Day of reckoning
Matthew 25:31-46	The Day of the Lord has come > The Day of judgment (31)		

- ❖ The parable of the ten virgins is found between two other stories or parables, both about faithful and unfaithful servants.
 - All readers and listeners will agree that the wicked servants don't deserve any mercy because they were themselves merciless and lazy.
 - But, although most readers and listeners will know the outcome of the story of the ten virgins, the five foolish ones receive more sympathy and empathy. **The conclusion of the story is the more shocking:** "he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'"

Form and structure

- ❖ Most of the parables that Jesus taught the people consist of three parts:
 1. The setting of the story;
 2. The (dramatic) action;
 3. The conclusion.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins	
<i>The setting</i>	Matthew 25:1-5
<i>The action</i>	Matthew 25:6-12
<i>The conclusion / lesson</i>	Matthew 25:13

- ❖ Jesus applied one chiasmic structure in the narrative of this story. In a chiasmic structure, two words or thoughts are reversed:
 - The foolish ones took their **lamps** (1) but did not take any **oil** (2) with them.
 - The wise, however, took **oil** (2) in jars along with their **lamps**. (1)

By using this figure of speech, Jesus stressed the importance of the oil and the necessity of a good preparation, because of the possible delay of the Day of the Lord.

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ Jesus used daily situations as illustrations or parables to stress spiritual facts about the coming Kingdom of God. The listeners in his days were familiar with the "sower" (Mt 13:1-9), "the mustard seed" (Mt 13:31-32) and also with "virgins awaiting the bridegroom for the wedding." These illustrations were part of daily life.

Exposition

Verse 1-5 *The setting*

- ❖ **“At that time.”** This parable was told within the context of the other teachings about the Day of the Lord in Matthew 24-25. “At that time” does not refer to the moment that Jesus told this parable but focuses on the Day of the Lord, chapter 24, and connects this story with the final words of Matthew 24:51:
 - **“The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.”** < “At that time.....”
- ❖ **“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”**
 - It is a picture of the church in readiness for the second coming of the Lord. It might be the church of today or the church of tomorrow; we don’t know and that is the reason why Jesus told this parable.
 - For this parable Jesus used the setting of a wedding party.
 - Ten virgins are awaiting the bridegroom in the house where the festivities will take place. The bride is not mentioned, and with regard to the significance of this parable, attention for her would be distracting.
 - The virgins knew that the bridegroom would arrive after sunset! It will be dark when he arrives. They are invited to form a torchlight procession to welcome bridegroom and his guests. When his arrival will be announced, the virgins will leave the house and meet him outside and accompany him, while he enters the house to celebrate the wedding.
 - The virgins were told in advance that the bridegroom could arrive unexpectedly and late.
 - Five of the virgins are wise, five are foolish. These five are foolish because they didn’t take enough precautions in case the arrival was indeed unusually late. They didn’t bring any extra oil with them to refill the lamps if necessary.
 - Compare this parable with the parable of the wise man, who built his house on the rock, and the foolish man, who built his house on the sand (Mt 7:24-27). Nobody in Israel would build his house on the sand, because of the danger of strong currents, due to heavy rainfall in the desert.
 - Read also 2 Peter 3:4-9, in which Peter admonishes the church to keep watch:
 - “They will say, ‘Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing,

dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Verse 6-12 *The action*

- ❖ Suddenly there is the cry: **“Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”** (Mt 25:6. All wake-up. When the foolish virgins ask the wise virgins to share some oil with them, they act wisely and not selfish. They know that all will be locked out if there are no virgins at all to form a torchlight procession. So there are five ready when the bridegroom arrives, and there are five absent, looking for oil at the shopkeepers. Later on, they also arrive but too late. The torchlight procession is over, the festivities have begun. They are locked out. They dishonored the bridegroom by being absent at his arrival.
- ❖ **“Sir! Sir! they said. ‘Open the door for us!’”** They know that they are too late but they still have some hope that the bridegroom will be merciful, after they had shamed him by being absent at his arrival.
- ❖ **“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’”** He is really angry.
 - Jesus used the same words in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, **‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”**
 - The situation is similar. Jesus told his followers to do the will of the Father in heaven < but they did not, and instead of doing the will of the Father they were prophesying, driving out demons and performing miracles. Jesus told his followers **to prepare themselves and keep watch** < but instead of this preparation, the five virgins had to hurry and eventually were too late for the wedding festivities.

Verse 13 *The conclusion*

- ❖ Could the five foolish virgins have foreseen this late and unexpected coming of the bridegroom? Had they been informed about the possible delay? Had they been advised to take due preparation? The answer is: “YES.” But they didn’t take any precautions. See figure 1.

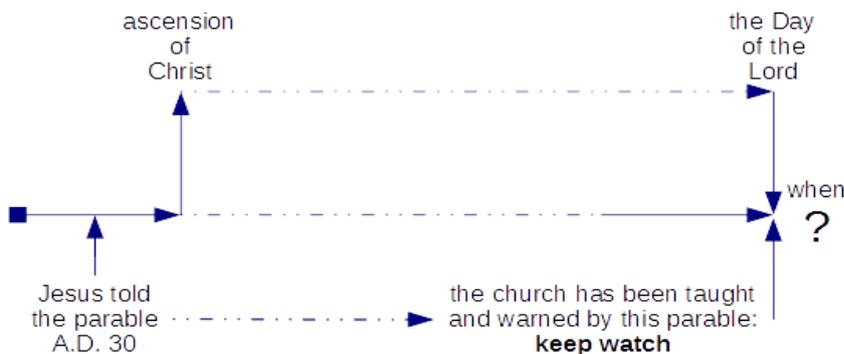


Figure 1.

Application

❖ Remark (1)

- When preaching this parable and applying it to the Christian faith and life, it is not necessary to identify all the elements and persons of the parable with aspects of the Christian faith and life, except for the following ones:
 - The bridegroom = the Lord Jesus Christ;
 - The ten virgins = the Christian church at the day of the second coming of Christ;
 - The oil and the lamp (preparation by the five wise virgins) = “keep watch” (verse 13).
 - The door has been closed = the Day of the Lord has come.
 - (The bride = not mentioned and therefore there is no need to pay attention to her silent presence.)
- Notice that the fact that all ten virgins slept is not the problem. Within the context of the parable, the fact that the virgins slept is quite understandable. The main problem is that five virgins had prepared themselves for a prolonged stay awaiting the bridegroom, and the other five had not prepared themselves, although the Lord had warned them before. Therefore, do not identify this sleep with a “sleeping church”, which is a real problem!

❖ Every believer and every congregation must ask himself: “Am I (are we) ready to meet the Lord, whenever he comes?”

- There is the risk of postponing this question because we are too busy with our daily lives. It is also an uneasy question when you are making plans for your own wedding, building your own house, raising your own family, having your business. But we must be ready any time!
- “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Mt 24:44).

❖ How can a Christian be prepared:

- (1) By repentance and putting on the new lives (Eph 4:23-24). Some Christians postpone their repentance from certain sins, because of the false assumption that they still have enough time to repent, before the Lord comes. But when somebody postpones repentance, he is not fully aware of the meaning, the significance and the urgency of the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ leaves no room for postponing the new life God will give through his Holy Spirit.
 - When a girl or a boy declares his/her love to a friend, it is not acceptable that this friend postpones his/her answer to a later date. In that case, the love is not reciprocal.

- (2) By keeping watch and noticing the signs of the times (Mt 24). A believer and a congregation must be focused on what is going on in world history and preach the gospel of watchfulness and expectancy of the coming Kingdom of the Lord. The apostle Paul summarized this in Philippians 4:6-7:
 - “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
 - Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
 - And also: Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love” (1 Cor 16:13–14).

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