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Grounders:

If Christ returned today, would you be prepared? Whether in your physical death or in Jesus' second coming, would you be ready to meet Him? In a world where His arrival is delayed, we have a tendency to be unprepared for His imminent return. Jesus addressed this lack of preparation as foolishness in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Matt. 25:1-13).

The bridegroom's arrival is delayed (Matt. 25:1-6). "*At that time*" refers to Jesus' second coming (Matt. 25:1; cf. 24:42). Jesus said that the time between His ascension and Second Advent would be like ten virgins who went out to meet a bridegroom. *Ten* means *complete* in Hebrew; thus, this might be a reference to all people who will fall into two groups upon Christ's return: wise or foolish. In the story, the wise are those virgins who took jars of oil for their lamps. The foolish ones did not.

Parable means "to throw along side." A parable is an earthly truth thrown alongside a spiritual truth. A key component of Jesus' parable is to understand that the bridegroom's delay was expected.

Earthly Truth: Jewish weddings took place at night. In the late evening, guests were entertained in the bride's house. After hours of waiting for the bridegroom, whose coming was repeatedly announced by messengers, he would arrive around midnight to fetch his bride. She was adorned like a queen. The girls who had dressed her accompanied her as companions. The bridegroom was dressed in finery and jewelry. He was accompanied by his friends, floodlit by burning candles, and received by the guests who had come out to meet him. The wedding assembly then moved to the house of the bridegroom (possibly the home of his father), where the marriage ceremony and fresh entertainment took place. The dark roadway to the bridegroom's home was lit with oil lamps held by the wedding guests.

Spiritual Truth: Late Jewish tradition stated that the Messiah would come at midnight to deliver his people in accordance with when their forefathers had left Egypt (Exodus 12:29). Jesus' parable teaches us that we should expect Christ's return to be delayed (2 Peter 3:9). Yet, we should be ready for His second coming at any moment (Rev. 22:12).

Five wise virgins are prepared (Matt. 25:7-10). It was wise to be prepared (Luke 12:35-40). Upon the bridegroom's arrival, the virgins trimmed their lamps. *Trimmed* stems from the Greek word, *kosmeo* meaning "to get ready or to place in order." The oil lamp was used for lighting houses in first century Palestine. Originally, this consisted of an open earthenware saucer containing olive oil. Part of the saucer was pinched in the manufacturing process to provide a place for a flaxen wick. Due to problems with spillage, new closed containers were developed with 2 holes: one for the wick and one to pour in the oil. When the oil would run low, the flax would smolder and the lamp would need to be refilled from a container. Giving oil to another, the request of the foolish virgins to the wise, would mean that one's lamp would run out as would the others' lamps—prior to the groom's arrival. Thus, preparedness for Christ is one's personal responsibility (Matt. 25:8-10).



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The result of being prepared for the Christ's return is intimacy with God (Matt. 25:10). We are ready for His arrival when we are: (1) fully surrendered to Christ (1 Peter 3:15a) and (2) prepared to describe our hope to others (1 Peter 3:15b; 2 Tim. 4:2; Matt. 5:16).

Five foolish virgins are unprepared (Matt. 25:11-13). It was foolish to be unprepared. Foolish in Greek is *moros*, meaning dull, stupid, or blockheaded. All ten virgins knew the wedding drill. They had been given the capacity to bring the extra oil in the jars because it was customary to wait throughout the evening for the bridegroom to arrive. The wise ones brought the jars of oil; the foolish ones did not.

Christ has given us the capacity to surrender to Him by lighting each one of our hearts with a spirit (Jn. 1:9). When we surrender our hearts to Christ as Lord, that spark becomes a flame. However, when we foolishly reject the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, God is justified in rejecting us (Matt. 12:30-32). The result is the same as recorded in Jesus' parable: *panic* (Matt. 25:11) and *separation from God—the point of no return* (Matt. 25:12).

This week, follow Jesus' plea, "Keep watch" (Matt. 25:13). We don't know the day or the hour of His return. Consequently, be wise—in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Be prepared—share the reason for your hope with everyone who asks. Let His light shine in your jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

Prepared,
Mitch