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THE 5 FOOLISH VIRGINS OF MATTHEW 25

In Matthew chapter 25 we find the parable of the 10 virgins, 5 of them being "wise" and the other 5 being "foolish". Let's take a closer look at this parable.

Over the years we have had many preconceived ideas about the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ. Many assumptions have been taken for granted. This may have prevented people from understanding this section of Scripture correctly. If we want a correct understanding of this parable, then we need to read exactly what it DOES say without reading our preconceived ideas into this passage.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. (Matthew 25:1)

The 10 virgins represent ALL those in God's Church who are expecting the return of Jesus Christ.

Notice verse 2:

And five of them were wise, and five [were] foolish. (Matthew 25:2)

This is clearly a CONTRAST. Whatever attribute the "wise" have, the "foolish" clearly lack. There are two distinct and different groups here. So let's examine the word "wise" first.

In the N.T. there are 3 different words that refer to being wise.

The best-known one is "**SOPHOS**", which is used 22 times and always translated "wise" in the KJV. Another word is "**SUNETOS**", which is used 4 times in the N.T. and is always translated as "prudent". The third word is "**PHRONIMOS**", which is used 14 times and in the KJV is always translated as "wise". This word comes from "PHREN", which means "understanding". So "PHRONIMOS" properly means "correct perceptions, good understanding".

In Matthew 25:2 this word "PHRONIMOS" is used, meaning that the 5 virgins have correct perceptions and good understanding. The 5 foolish virgins will be the opposite to this.

The word translated as "foolish" in this verse is "**MOROS**", an adjective. It is used 13 times in the N.T.; 7 times by Christ in the gospel of Matthew and 6 more times by the apostle Paul. Of the 4 gospel writers only Matthew records this word. And he quotes Jesus Christ as using it. Notice how Christ used this word elsewhere:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou FOOL ("moros"), shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:22)

This is the first time this word is used. Here Christ intended it to convey something MORE SERIOUS THAN 'RACA'! Clearly Christ meant something a lot more serious than the flippant way we today are inclined to use the word "fool". Notice also that people with this attribute are in danger of ending up in the

lake of fire.

The next place where Christ used this word is Matthew 7:26 ...

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a FOOLISH ("moros") man, which built his house upon the sand: (Matthew 7:26)

Here Christ used the word to describe those who HEAR the truth of God, but don't respond to it. Would God give His Spirit to people described in this verse? Certainly not! In this verse it talks about more than just a lack of wisdom or understanding; here we have a refusal to really submit to God from the heart.

Next Christ used the word twice in chapter 23 to refer to the Pharisees in verses 17 and 19 as ... "You FOOLS ("moros") and blind ...". This is also not a reference to a lack of intellectual ability on the part of the Pharisees, but a refusal on their part to really see and acknowledge the truth.

The remaining 3 uses by Christ are all in chapter 25, in verses 2, 3 and 8, in the parable we are examining.

So when we look at the 4 places where Christ used this word "moros" outside of this parable, we find that it refers to:

- people who are in danger of the lake of fire;
- people whose spiritual lives don't have a solid foundation;
- people who are blind, religious hypocrites.

To none of these three categories will God give His Holy Spirit!

So ... which of these three meanings do you think Christ had in mind when He used the word "moros" here in Matthew chapter 25? From where do we get the idea that in this parable "moros" means nothing more than being "a little foolish" or "lacking a little understanding"?

Christ is telling us that these 5 "foolish" virgins are in danger of the lake of fire, they have built their spiritual lives on a foundation of sand and they are spiritually blind hypocrites ... these are the only meanings this word has in Christ's vocabulary!

Christ explains further in the next verse ...

They that [were] foolish took their lamps, and TOOK NO OIL WITH THEM: (Matthew 25:3)

Christ here very clearly said that they took "NO oil". Yet people will reason: "Yes but they must have taken some oil in the lamps themselves". But that is not what Jesus Christ said or intimated. When He said that they took "no oil with them", it means that they didn't have any oil at all, none whatsoever.

What else would you have expected Jesus Christ to say in order to get us to believe that He really meant "NO OIL"?! Would you expect something like:

"They took no oil with them, NOT EVEN IN THEIR LAMPS"?

GOD MEANS WHAT HE SAYS!

In the Greek of the N.T. there are two main words used for negation:

- the word "ou" denies absolutely, categorically, directly and objectively;
- the word "me" denies indirectly, hypothetically, subjectively, according to someone's opinion or preference.

Of these two words for expressing negation, the word "ou" (also at times in the form "ouk") is by far the stronger word. When "ou" is used, then the negation is not open to negotiation.

Christ used the word "ouk" when He said "they took NO oil with them" ... absolutely and categorically! You can check Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament for an exposition of these two Greek words of negation.

In verse 2 Christ was making a contrast! The contrast is not that 5 virgins take a lot of oil and the other 5 only take a little oil. The contrast, if we have the eyes to see it, is that 5 took some oil and the other 5 didn't take any oil. That's what Christ explains in verses 3-4. The wise therefore have "correct perceptions and good understanding". The foolish are the opposite to this ... their perceptions are incorrect and they have no understanding. Therefore they are spiritually blind, they have built on sand and they are in danger of the lake of fire.

NO ONE WHO HAS ANY "OIL" (IN ANY AMOUNT!) IS IN DANGER OF THE LAKE OF FIRE!

With God we either "have" some oil or we don't ... there is no such thing as just having "too little oil", implying that someone has the Holy Spirit, but just "too little of it".

Let's continue with verse 4 ...

But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (Matthew 25:4)

Here we have the contrast. The wise took something with them ... they took "vessels" in which to carry the oil! For the foolish in verse 3 no vessels are mentioned ... **THE ONLY THING MENTIONED IS THAT THEY HAD A LAMP!**

So let's understand the symbolism that is involved here:

- A) "the oil" represents the Holy Spirit;
- B) "the lamp" represents the Word of God (including the LAW of God);
- C) "the vessel" represents "the person", the true believer.

Note! "The lamp" NEVER represents the person of the true believer! And "the vessel" NEVER represents the Word of God! Can we understand this?

Now where does the Holy Spirit reside ... in the Word of God or in the person of the believer? Can we not see that it is IMPOSSIBLE to carry the Holy Spirit within the Word of God (within "the lamp"); that the Holy Spirit MUST reside within the person of the believer (within "the vessel")?

God's Spirit must come into the true believer, the "vessel" of the Holy Spirit. Then such a true believer has to USE the Holy Spirit to put God's laws, as revealed in the Bible, into living practice in his life; he has to pour some oil from his vessel into the lamp to make it work! The law only has meaning in the

presence of individual beings ... in the absence of any "vessels" there is no purpose to any oil within the lamp. Of itself the law of God doesn't contain any "oil"; the law is merely a statement of the rules of conduct between different individual beings. It is THE ACTIONS of these individual beings that give life or light to the law!

It does not make sense to believe that the "oil" resides in the law of God. And EVEN IF there was some "oil" in the law of God (in "the lamp"), how can we possibly equate "the lamp" with "the person of the believer"? Christ used THREE symbols here ... oil, lamp and vessel; and these three are NOT interchangeable. "The vessel" represents the person, not "the lamp". Therefore "oil within the lamp" cannot represent "Holy Spirit within the person".

Mr. Armstrong said many times: "It is many times more difficult to unlearn error than it is to learn the truth in the first place." Can we learn to read Matthew 25 without reading our own ideas into Christ's words?

It is precisely because they did not have the Holy Spirit within their bodies, that "no vessels" are mentioned with the 5 foolish virgins. The "vessels" were there alright, but there wasn't anything in them ... so there was no point mentioning them.

Let's continue with the parable: all 10 of them went out to meet the "Bridegroom" during the day. During the day you don't burn a lamp! You save the oil until it gets dark! There is no point burning away all the oil during the daylight hours! You don't do that even if you DO have a lot of oil!

So during the daylight hours there was no discernible difference between the wise and the foolish virgins ... both groups had "lamps" in their hands, both groups themselves as individuals represented the "vessels". Outwardly they looked similar. They had similar actions in their lives. But only the one group had the necessary ingredient to make the lamp "work".

When it got dark, they were all tired and went to sleep (Matthew 25:5). That's sounds like a fairly accurate description of the Church of God today! Then comes verse 6:

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; GO YE OUT TO MEET HIM. (Matthew 25:6)

What do you mean ... "GO OUT to meet Him"? WHERE are they supposed to go? This isn't talking about meeting Christ in the clouds. Could this perhaps be speaking about going out to the "place of safety"? As it turns out, only 5 of them actually follow this instruction to "go out and meet Jesus Christ".

Now comes verse 7:

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. (Matthew 25:7)

Now ALL 10 OF THEM do something. What do they do? They "trimmed" their lamps. That translation is based on the customs that prevailed in England in 1611 A.D. when this was translated. The Greek word for "trimmed" is "ekosmesan", the aorist active indicative of "kosmeo" (from which we get the English word "cosmetic"). This word "kosmeo" means: put in order, make ready, arrange.

The lights had all been out while they all slept. "Sleeping beauties" don't provide much light!

So what did they do when they "put in order and made ready" their lamps? Why, they poured fresh oil into the dish of the lamp, trimmed the wick and lit it. Quite simple, isn't it? The foolish ASSUMED there was oil in their lamps. It is when they try to light their lamps that they discover their lack of oil!

That is when the lamps of the wise virgins light up ... precisely because they have added some oil out of their vessels to the lamps. And that is when the lamps of the foolish virgins refuse to light up because there is only a wick but no oil.

It is only when it is time to go to the place of safety that the foolish virgins recognize that they are missing something. So then they try to get what they lack.

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for OUR LAMPS ARE GONE OUT. (Matthew 25:8)

This is it! This is the verse around which we have built our whole previous explanation!

The key, supposedly, is that the verb "can also be translated as 'going out' (as the KJV margin implies)", thereby allowing the explanation that some oil MUST have been there to start with. That all sounds very nice, but that's not correct.

The Greek verb used here is "**sbennuntai**", the present passive indicative of "sbennumi", which means: to quench, to extinguish, to put out. The indicative mood presents a simple statement of fact. The present tense does the same thing ... present a simple statement of fact. It is the present tense, not the continuous present.

In plain English, the foolish virgins are saying: "... our lamps ARE EXTINGUISHED, ARE PUT OUT, ARE QUENCHED" ... and the indicative mood means this statement is a fact! They do not say or imply:

"Would you believe it, girls, but our oil has lasted RIGHT UP TO THIS MOMENT and it is RIGHT NOW starting to flicker like it wants to go out. If only the bridegroom had come 30 minutes earlier, everything would have been fine. As it is, can't you girls just give us just a little bit of your oil?"

If the bridegroom comes two hours earlier or if He comes two hours later; they are still in exactly the same predicament. They have NO OIL because they didn't have any in their vessels to start with.

The reason they NOW notice their deficiency is because they try to light the wick ... but without any oil in the dish the flame doesn't really "take". The wise virgins are doing exactly the same thing, lighting their wicks. And because they have oil, therefore their lamps "take".

Consider another symbolism: there is absolutely NO WAY that we can let our lights shine when we "slumber" and "sleep". There is no way that the virgins "sleep", but their lamps burn on brightly! It is impossible to have good works while we slumber and sleep. When they awake out of their sleep, all 10 of them have to light their lamps, but only the 5 wise can do so.

So now the wise virgins are preparing to go to the place of safety, and they reply:

But the wise answered, saying, [Not so]; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. (Matthew 25:9)

The wise virgins KNOW how and where they got their oil. And this they explain to the foolish virgins; that there is a way to get oil. The advice is the same as that which Christ gives to the Laodiceans:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. (Revelation 3:18)

The advice is: GO AND BUY!

Revelation chapter 3 makes clear that this "buying" has to be from God. It is only God who has "the oil" to give.

Now comes verse 10:

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. (Matthew 25:10)

There are several things we should notice in this verse. Firstly, notice that they do take this advice! They make an effort to really "go and buy". THAT IS GOOD!

The wise virgins "go into some place" and then "the door is shut", cutting off access to "this place". To me this seems to be a pretty clear reference to going into the place of safety.

In our English translation the verbs are all presented in the past tense. But in the Greek text the past tense is not used for these verbs. Notice ...

- "came" is "elthen", the second aorist active indicative;
- "went in" is "eiselthon", also second aorist active indicative;
- "was shut" is "ekleisthe", the aorist passive indicative.

Notice that all 3 of these verbs are in the aorist tense (aorist and second aorist are identical in meaning). I have explained this tense in some detail in my article "ARE YOU ALREADY SAVED?". Briefly, we have no equivalent for this tense in English. In biblical Greek this tense considers the concept of the verb without regard for past, present or future time. In the N.T. the two aorist tenses are used 12043 times, representing over 41% of all verb occurrences in the Greek text. Many hundreds of these are translated into the English text as either present tense or as future tense. It is always THE CONTEXT in which the aorist tense is used that leads English translators to decide whether to use the past or the present or the future tense.

By using the aorist tense in this verse, Jesus Christ was emphasizing WHAT is going to happen without regard to WHEN it would happen, something we cannot really express in the same way in English. Christ was emphasizing that He (the Bridegroom) is going to come, that some people will be ready to enter in with Him and that a door is going to be shut. The exact timing for these events Christ chose not to highlight.

Now there is "no door" that is going to be shut when we speak about the actual marriage supper that will take place at Christ's return. And there certainly will not be anyone who could "knock" on such a door.

Most analogies can only be taken so far before they break down in some way. Jesus Christ in this parable had to be referring to either the place of safety or to the marriage supper itself, which takes place later than protection at the place of safety. Now Jesus Christ chose to picture the foolish virgins coming back and asking to be let in (verse 11). That symbolism is compatible with people wanting to be given access to the place of safety, but it is not compatible with people coming up to heaven and "knocking on the door" to be let into the marriage supper in the presence of God the Father. On the other hand, verse 10 says that the Bridegroom "CAME" and the wise went with Him "TO THE MARRIAGE". But in the previous chapter (i.e. Matthew 24:30-31) Jesus Christ had already stated that His coming would be in a very public way, meaning that He would not first come and somehow be at the place of safety.

So while there is the potential for understanding this parable in different ways, it seems to me that Christ intended it to be a reference to the place of safety.

The door being shut after the wise virgins have entered is a reference to access to the place of safety being sealed off from anyone else. It will be shut because others would also really LIKE to be there for protection.

Perhaps there is some significance in that here it says that those who are ready go in with Him "to the MARRIAGE", but no "SUPPER" is mentioned; where in Revelation 19:9 it says:

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed [are] they which are called UNTO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. (Revelation 19:9)

So Matthew 25:10 mentions "the marriage" only, where Revelation 19:9 mentions "the marriage supper".

Anyway, let's look at the next verse:

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. (Matthew 25:11)

It is interesting to note that there is an "AFTERWARDS"! This cannot be "after the marriage SUPPER". By then all the Laodiceans will have died in the tribulation. And if they had indeed gone and bought oil, then they would have died in the faith; and therefore they should really end up at the marriage SUPPER as well, as Christ said to Laodicea:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and WILL SUP WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME. (Revelation 3:20)

In this verse we also have a reference to a "door" before entering into the marriage supper ... but in this case it is Christ who is knocking.

When the "other" virgins come (verse 11 does not use the word "foolish"), it seems to imply that they have found some oil. They are still called "virgins". If they have acquired some oil, then they will not be turned away from salvation. There is no way that God will refuse salvation to anyone to whom He grants His Holy Spirit. However, what God would possibly withhold from some is physical protection at the place of safety, because their repentance was too late to be taken to that place of protection. Therefore they would be a part of "the remnant" of those who had been granted that protection.

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with THE REMNANT OF HER SEED, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 12:17)

The "remnant" pictured here in Rev. 12:17 has God's Spirit, yet they are not granted that physical protection at the place of safety. It seems to me that this "remnant" are the foolish virgins who went and bought oil and from then on "keep the commandments of God" (i.e. there is now OIL in their lamps) and they have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

In this sense Matthew 25:12 says:

But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. (Matthew 25:12)

As far as access to the place of safety is concerned, Christ says: "I don't know you". He does not say: "I NEVER knew you", nor does He say: "DEPART FROM ME, YOU THAT WORK LAWLESSNESS".

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:23)

Matthew 7:23 is a different and much stronger rebuke than in Matthew 25:12. Doing evil (i.e. working iniquity) is not really the issue in Matthew 25. Matthew 25:12 isn't really a rebuke. It is really more a matter of:

"You also want to get into the place of safety? Well, who are you? I don't know you. You waited too long to come to real repentance to be granted such protection. Since you didn't really commit yourself to Me and My way earlier, you now have to prove yourself under extremely difficult conditions. If you hold fast under such conditions, then I will also come to know you."

Matthew 25:12 does NOT pronounce any penalty on those "virgins". It only denies them access to one specific place. Certainly there is no hint at "works of iniquity" for these "virgins". Nor does Christ here say something like: "depart from Me, you cursed", as for example in the next parable to the "goats" (see Matthew 25:41).

That concludes this parable.

In this parable all 10 virgins went out during the day time. They all took unlit lamps with them, which they intended to light when darkness arrived. But only 5 of them took a supply of oil in their vessels. The other 5 virgins were "empty vessels". This only becomes apparent when all 10 of them prepare to light their lamps.

The description of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17-18 is a description of an unrepentant and unconverted group of people.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. (Revelation 3:17-18)

People who don't see the true self, have not come to a real repentance. The problem is not what they ARE! The real problem is what they DON'T KNOW and what they DON'T SEE! That, more than anything else, reveals their lack of real repentance.

Another clue that this group does not have God's Spirit at the time from which this group is viewed here in Revelation chapter 3 is this:

Of all 7 eras this is the only one that has NOTHING GOOD mentioned ... not even a whisper or hint of some good points. Now when people have God's Spirit, there is always at least SOMETHING good about them ... otherwise God's Spirit would simply not reside in them. All 6 of the other eras have at least something good and positive mentioned ... even for Sardis there is the one ray of light with ... "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. (Revelation 3:4)

But nothing good appears in the message to Laodicea. The reason is: when people don't have God's Spirit, then there simply is nothing good that God can find in them.

It is interesting that Revelation 12:17 views the same group of people as Revelation 3:15-18, but at a somewhat later point in time. If you want to tie Matthew 25 in with these accounts in Revelation, then

Matt. 25:1-9 refers to the timing of Rev. 3:15-18; and Matt. 25:11 ties in with Rev. 12:17.

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