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THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

We are all familiar with the parable of the ten virgins going out to meet the returning Jesus Christ. This parable is recorded in Matthew chapter 25. Who are those "virgins"? How well do we understand the message of this particular parable?

Let's take a closer look at this parable.

THE TEN VIRGINS

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)

This parable is about the people who expect to meet the returning Jesus Christ. The "ten virgins" represent all those who are expecting Jesus Christ's return. The fact that they are "virgins" shows that **this excludes any of this world's false churches**, where some people in those churches may also look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In fact, most of the dates for Jesus Christ's supposed return that have been proposed in the past two millennia were actually proposed by people in the churches of this world. But all of those churches are excluded from this discussion about ten "virgins" in Matthew 25, even if some of those churches do tithe or keep the Sabbath or even observe the annual Holy Days.

It is God's true Church that is represented as a virgin. I will later qualify this statement somewhat. But for now this general statement will suffice. So, for example, Revelation 14:4 says the following about all the people in the first resurrection:

These are they which were not defiled with women; for **they are virgins**. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, **being the firstfruits unto God** and to the Lamb. (Revelation 14:4)

All ten virgins in the parable took something with them. They did not go to meet Jesus Christ empty-handed. They all took "**their lamps**" with them. "A lamp" represents **God's laws** and God's commandments, because God's laws show us the way we should live, much like literal lamps showing us where to walk during a period of darkness.

For **the commandment is a lamp**; and **the law is light**; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life: (Proverbs 6:23)

NUN. **Your word is a lamp** unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)

So the meaning of Matthew 25:1 should be fairly clear. Members of God's true Church are represented as "virgins", and they are shown holding the laws of God in their hands (i.e. the lamps they carry). This symbolism of holding God's laws in our hands was already presented by God during the days of Moses, when Moses instructed Israel as follows regarding God's laws:

And you shall **bind them for a sign upon your hand**, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (Deuteronomy 6:8)

Now **outwardly** all ten virgins are **identical**; they are together and outwardly they appear to form **one unified body**. But that outward appearance is deceiving, because Jesus Christ now introduces a very significant difference between these virgins. This difference shows that not all who are "virgins" are actually converted Christians.

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

Looking at all ten of them, you would not be able to say which ones were wise, and which ones were foolish; which ones were converted members of God's Church and which ones were unconverted, even though all of them had been baptized, and they all attend with God's people. Outwardly you could not distinguish between them because in the absence of any conduct or behavior wisdom and foolishness are not readily apparent. **It is what we do or don't do that will reveal whether we are wise or foolish**. It takes actions to reveal the attributes of wisdom and foolishness.

So then Jesus Christ presents the actions that reveal who amongst these ten virgins are wise and who are foolish.

They that were **foolish** took their lamps, and **took no oil** with them: But **the wise took oil** in their vessels with their lamps. (Matthew 25:3-4)

Lamps can look nice, and even be showpieces, items of real beauty. But if lamps are not able to give off light, then they are useless. A lamp without oil is like a cold fridge without a scrap of food in it ... it is useless.

Oil represents God's holy spirit. This was exemplified repeatedly in Old Testament times. For example:

Regarding King Saul we read:

Then Samuel took a vial of **oil**, and **poured it upon his head**, and kissed him, and said, *Is it not* because the LORD hath anointed you *to be* captain over his inheritance? ... And **the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you**, and you shall prophesy with them, and shall be turned into another man. (1 Samuel 10:1, 6)

And regarding King David we read:

Then Samuel took the horn of **oil**, and **anointed him** in the midst of his brethren: and **the Spirit of the LORD came upon David** from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 16:13)

So likewise with the ten virgins: all of them had lamps, but only five of them had any oil at all. They were the wise ones. They had some oil "**in their vessels**".

"The vessels" represent **their bodies**. When God gives us His holy spirit, then we become "the vessels" that hold God's spirit. Any person that has God's spirit within him or her is "a chosen vessel" before God.

But the Lord said unto him, Go your way: for he is **a chosen vessel unto me**, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: (Acts 9:15)

Paul was a chosen vessel, as are all those who possess God's spirit.

But we have this treasure **in earthen vessels**, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

"Earthen vessels" is a reference to our physical bodies, and "this treasure" is a reference to God's holy spirit. The Apostle Peter referred to the wife as being "the weaker vessel" (see 1 Peter 3:7), implying that the husband is "the stronger vessel". But **both are "vessels"**. When we purge ourselves by putting sins out of our lives, then we become "**vessels unto honor**" (see 2 Timothy 2:21). It is clear that "vessels" refer our physical bodies.

So the point in this parable is:

The wise virgins have God's holy spirit within themselves, i.e. they have God's spirit influencing their minds.

The foolish virgins, on the other hand, took no oil with them. This means that "their vessels" were empty. **So the foolish virgins did not have God's spirit within themselves.** The oil must be in the vessel to start with, before it can be poured into the lamp. The lamp is not the storage place for oil. We must have God's spirit within ourselves before it can be put to use, before we can use it to make God's laws work and give off light.

In other words, it requires God's spirit to make the lamp work, to cause God's laws to give off light. When unconverted people keep certain parts of God's laws (e.g. the Sabbath or tithing, etc.), then that law-keeping is not able to give off any light because there is no oil present, the precise situation with the foolish virgins.

Consider that when someone keeps some of God's laws (e.g. the Sabbath, tithing, etc.) but at the same time does not keep certain other laws of God, then those laws that are being kept cannot possibly give off any light. Whatever "light" there might have been to give off, **it is extinguished** by the non-observance of other laws of God. That is the principle of James 2:10, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all". Thus people in this world's churches who observe some of God's laws cannot really give off any "light"; at best they might have lamps without oil.

So here is the situation at the start of this parable:

Of all the people who are **together as one group**, and who are expecting the return of Jesus Christ, only one half actually have God's spirit. The other half of the people who expect Christ's return do not have God's spirit, and this means that **they have never had it!** They have never had oil "in their vessels". They have never had God's spirit influencing their minds. But they do attend God's Church, and they do have "the lamp", and they were baptized.

It is simply not possible that they would have had oil in their vessels at some point in the past, but they had then somehow lost it before going out to meet the returning Jesus Christ. Paul explained quite clearly that **if we ever lose God's spirit** ("were made partakers of the holy spirit"), **then it is impossible to be renewed again** unto repentance. See Hebrews 6:4-6. Any person who has at some point lost God's spirit cannot qualify to be called "a virgin". So Jesus Christ is telling us that the five foolish virgins have never at any point had God's spirit "in their vessels".

It is not any oil in the lamp that counts! The only oil that really counts is oil that is still in the vessels, in order to be put to use. And the foolish virgins don't have any oil in their bodies. Keep in mind that this is only an analogy, and all analogies sooner or later fall short in one way or

another. Here the key is "oil in their vessels", and in this parable oil in the lamps is not a deciding consideration.

So half the people attending God's Church and expecting the return of Jesus Christ have God's spirit, and the other half doesn't have it. But during the day all ten of them look alike, without any distinguishing features between them. They are together. And very likely the wise virgins themselves don't even recognize who amongst them are the foolish virgins. During the day all ten virgins look good and genuine.

CAN "VIRGINS" BE WITHOUT GOD'S SPIRIT?

This situation raises a question.

People have sometimes reasoned as follows: since God refers to all ten of them as "virgins", therefore they must all have had God's spirit, and it is just that the foolish virgins don't have **enough** of God's spirit. But they surely had some oil "in their lamps" or God would not have called them "virgins".

That line of reasoning is flawed on several counts.

First of all, "virgins" are not defined by whether or not they have God's spirit. **People can assuredly be spiritual "virgins" without having God's spirit.** That is clear from a Scripture we have already looked at. Let's look again at Revelation 14:4.

These are **they which were not defiled with women**; for they are **virgins**. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. (Revelation 14:4)

Notice the little conjunction "**for**" in this verse. This is a translation of the Greek conjunction "gar". In the New American Standard Greek Lexicon this conjunction "gar" is defined as follows:

"... a conjunction **used to express cause**, explanation, inference or continuation".

And that is also how we commonly use the English word "for", when we don't use it as a preposition. The word "for" expresses a cause.

While most of the time "gar" is translated as "for" in the KJV, it is also translated as "because" in several places ("... **because** their deeds were evil" = John 3:19; "... **because** you are not of My sheep" = John 10:26; "... **because** that unto them were committed the oracles of God" = Romans 3:2), and it is also translated as "therefore" in Mark 8:38 ("... whosoever **therefore** shall be ashamed of Me" = Mark 8:38).

So Revelation 14:4 could equally correctly be translated to read:

"These are they which were not defiled with women **because** they are virgins."

Or even as:

"These are they which were not defiled with women, **therefore** they are virgins."

Revelation 14:4 in effect gives us a biblical definition of what is a spiritual virgin.

A spiritual virgin is anyone, male or female, who is not defiled with false religions (i.e. with "women").

This is really the equivalent of God's statement to Elijah in the Old Testament, when God said:

Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, **all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal**, and **every mouth which has not kissed him**. (1 Kings 19:18)

These 7000 men in the days of Elijah didn't necessarily have God's spirit, but to use New Testament terminology, they were "not defiled with women". These 7000 men were "spiritual virgins", people that God could potentially have worked with.

So here is a point we should understand:

The "five foolish virgins" are all people with whom God wants to work, but these people themselves have thus far never yet responded to God with any real repentance.

Simply because someone does not accept any of the teachings of the world's false religions, that doesn't mean that the person is necessarily repentant and converted. **Rejecting what is false is not the same as accepting what is true**, and then submitting one's mind unconditionally to God.

When Worldwide was breaking up about two decades ago, virtually all of the people who went out rejected certain false teachings that had been introduced after Mr. Armstrong's death. But all those who rejected some things that are false did not necessarily accept all the things that are true. In practice many of those who went out because of some heretical teachings that had been introduced ended up accepting other teachings that are equally wrong.

In fact, many of those who left Worldwide were not unlike Jehu in Old Testament times. God appointed Jehu to be king over the Northern Ten Tribes. Jehu had a zeal for destroying Baal worship, to the point of killing every last Baal worshiper. As 2 Kings 10:28 says, "thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel". He resolutely rejected something that was wrong, i.e. Baal worship.

But that doesn't mean that Jehu faithfully obeyed all of God's laws. And so Jehu freely condoned worshipping the two golden calves in Bethel and in Dan (see 2 Kings 10:29). Two verses later Jehu's attitude is spelled out in plain language.

But Jehu **took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart**: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. (2 Kings 10:31)

Jehu is a clear example of the fact that rejecting what is false is not the same as accepting what is true. In our present age many of the people who left Worldwide are in this regard very similar to King Jehu of old.

There are three different steps in the process of coming to repentance, three steps which most people who repent and receive God's spirit typically go through. They are:

Step #1 = **Rejecting** all of the teachings and doctrines that are false.

Step #2 = **Proving and accepting** what are the right and true teachings.

Step #3 = **Unconditional submission** of the human mind to God.

Now people who go through step #1 are already "spiritual virgins" because they are not defiled with false religions. And if they prove and accept the teachings that are true, then they have also gone through step #2, and therefore they will then be in possession of "the lamp".

But that still doesn't mean that they must have God's spirit. Thus, if people who have gone through step #1 and step #2 are still self-righteous and don't see the true self and don't submit their minds unconditionally to God, then they certainly don't have God's spirit, in spite of going through the first two steps, in spite of being spiritual virgins and also having "the lamp".

So let's get back to the ten virgins in Matthew 25.

BACK TO THE PARABLE

The setting for Jesus Christ's second coming is as follows:

All of those who are not involved in the false religions of this world and in their false teachings, and who are expecting the second coming of Jesus Christ are represented as "ten virgins", all of whom have God's laws in their hands. By all outward appearances they are all a part of the Church of God.

We see that **half of them have God's spirit**, which empowers them to make God's laws shine like a bright light. We also see that **the other half** also have God's laws, but they **don't have God's spirit**. So they can't really make God's laws give off any light. They can't make the lamp fulfill its real purpose, which purpose is to give off light. But this distinction between them is not apparent during the day, while the sun is shining.

However, the people themselves who don't have God's spirit are **oblivious to their own deficiency**. They think that they are okay simply because they have got God's laws. **They don't understand** that it really takes God's spirit to make God's laws produce light. As long as it is "day" they believe they are equal to the five wise virgins; and the wise virgins in turn don't discern any difference between themselves and the foolish virgins. So the wise virgins accept the foolish virgins as their fellow-members of God's Church. And **during the day they are all together**.

Let's see how things develop from there.

While the bridegroom tarried, **they all slumbered and slept**. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go you out to meet him. (Matthew 25:5-6)

They all fall asleep because for too long they had set dates for Jesus Christ's second coming. Since those dates were always wrong, therefore they tired themselves out constantly expecting the second coming of Jesus Christ. So they fall asleep, meaning that **they lose the focus on the second coming**, a focus they used to have when they first went out to meet the Bridegroom.

At some awkward and totally unexpected point in time **the call goes out** that the count-down for Christ's second coming has begun. I have no idea how or when that will happen. But it seems that this call will have enough credibility with all ten virgins, **to motivate all of them to prepare themselves** for Christ's imminent second coming. Notice:

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

However that call will go out, **all ten virgins take it seriously** and examine themselves.

And the foolish said unto the wise, **Give us of your oil**; for our lamps are gone out. 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 25:8-9)

It is only at that point in time that **the foolish virgins realize that they don't have God's spirit** because they had never at any time in the past really repented, and really changed their way of thinking. So they start to panic. But those who do have God's spirit (the five wise virgins) explain to them what they must do in order to receive God's spirit.

The timing of this event is just before God takes His people to **the place of safety**. The implication is that the foolish virgins actually do try to seek real repentance; they do try to establish a right relationship with God. They make the effort to change.

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)

Now notice something interesting.

Earlier Jesus Christ used the words "wise" and "foolish", with exactly five in each group. Now in verse 10 Jesus Christ used neither the words "wise" or "foolish", or even the number "five". Instead, Jesus Christ introduced a totally new term into the discussion. Christ now used the term **"they that were ready"**, without telling us how many were actually "ready". Instead of saying "the wise virgins went in with him to the marriage", Jesus Christ said "they that were ready went in".

Now it is easy for us to assume that there must have been "only five" virgins that were ready. And perhaps that will be the case? But it does also leave open the possibility that some of the foolish virgins got a supply of oil fairly quickly, perhaps quickly enough to "be ready" for the next event? Have you ever considered that possibility?

I don't know whether or not that will be the case. But the expression "they that were ready" is different from the expression "the wise". **How long will it take for some of those foolish virgins to repent?** I obviously don't know. Could some of them at that point in time repent within days or within a couple of weeks?

The point is:

While the implication seems to be that only five "are ready", I don't think that I can exclude in my own thinking **the possibility** that some of the foolish virgins changed pretty quickly. After all, the five foolish virgins could include individuals on **a wide scale of foolishness**: ranging from extremely foolish at one extreme to just barely short of real repentance at the other extreme? Could that perhaps be a possibility?

The next point to consider is this: those that are ready go into some place where **"a door is going to be shut"**. But that is not the actual marriage supper of Jesus Christ.

At the marriage supper there will not be a "door" to exclude anyone. The marriage supper will take place in heaven, in the presence of God the Father. And at that occasion it will simply not be possible for any late stragglers to come knocking on some door, begging to be let in. That's not the way events around the marriage supper will unfold.

The place where **"a door"** is going to be shut, to keep everyone else out, is **the place of safety**, which God has prepared for His people at the time immediately before Christ's return. See Revelation 12:14-16.

These two different events, God's people being taken to a place of safety, and Jesus Christ's actual return, have been **conflated into one event** in verse 10 for the sake of simplicity. And I suspect that there may also be another reason.

I don't know that the following speculation is correct, and I certainly can't prove it. But here for you to consider for yourself is what I believe might be the case:

1) God is preparing exactly 144000 for the first resurrection. That number will include everyone who has had God's spirit, from righteous Abel through all of those who have died with God's spirit in their minds, and right up to all those who will be alive at that point in time with God's spirit in their minds.

2) The five wise virgins will make up the end-time part of that number of 144000. But even with the five wise virgins at that time, the total number may perhaps still be somewhat short of 144000. If it is short, I don't know whether it might be short by 10 or by 100 or by 1000 or even by 10000 or more? But the total may perhaps still be short of 144000.

3) If that is the case, then that will be where the five foolish virgins enter the picture. They have a good start because they are already "virgins". They have already gone through "Step #1" and also through "Step #2", which we discussed earlier, because they all have "a lamp". What these "virgins" still need is to go through "Step #3" of the process, the step of unconditionally submitting their lives to God, to the point of being willing to die for their commitment to God, and being willing to change the way they think and reason and use their minds.

4) There may well be a short period (days or a couple of weeks or a month?) between when the call goes out, and when "the door will be shut". Perhaps that is where the 1260 days, 1290 days and 1335 days of Daniel 12 tie into the end-time events in some way?

At any rate, might that short period be long enough for **some** of the foolish virgins to come to a real repentance? I don't know. But **if** the total number, including all the wise virgins that have entered the place of safety, is still short of 144000, could the early repentant and formerly foolish virgins still be in time to classify as "**being ready**", and therefore they also enter before the door is shut? "**Being ready is the key criterion here.**"

5) Here is why I consider that this may at least be "a possibility". The door will be "shut" to indicate that **God has exactly 144000 people** for the first resurrection. I believe that all those baptized adults that God selects to be at the place of safety will be deeply converted individuals, and that all of them will be changed into spirit beings at the time of the first resurrection. They (i.e. including us) have all been **hand-picked by God the Father.**

6) God must be absolutely certain that He has exactly 144000 ready for the first resurrection. And when that door is shut, that is also to indicate that **no more applications for the first resurrection will be accepted** ... the door to becoming a part of the first resurrection will have been shut. At that precise moment of shutting the door there will be no repentant virgins outside of that door.

7) So at Christ's second coming the dead in Christ are raised first, and they could have died anywhere on earth. But all those who are alive and who are then changed "in the twinkling of an eye" (see 1 Corinthians 15:52) will be **in one location**, and that one location will be the place of safety, to which place God will have taken them.

This scenario may not be the exact way things will work out. This is only my speculation. Time will tell whether any of the foolish virgins really repent in time to still "be ready". But I do know that God will have exactly 144000 people ready for the first resurrection. And when the foolish

virgins actually seriously seek to get some "oil", then at least some of them are likely to feature somewhere in that number of 144000.

God is not going to leave anything to chance.

God will have the exact number that God has predicted in the Book of Revelation. To avoid having more people than the number God desires to have, **there must also be a specific cut-off point for accepting more candidates for testing for the first resurrection.** That cut-off point is indicated by the door being shut.

Let's now continue with the parable.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, **open to us.** But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, **I know you not.** (Matthew 25:11-12)

Perhaps this means that all five of the foolish virgins come later? Or perhaps it only applies to a part of the original five foolish virgins? I don't know. But after mentioning the numbers ten and five at the start of the parable, those numbers are not mentioned again, which suggests to me that those numbers could change as a result of what the people involved actually do.

Notice that these "other virgins" are trying to gain entry into some place. That cannot be the marriage supper, because that will take place in heaven, and it only takes place after those who attend have been changed into spirit beings. At that point in time it is no longer possible for anyone to ask about being let into the marriage supper.

The only possibility is that these "other virgins" are asking about being allowed into the place of safety, and God denies them access. The reason God denies them access is because **God does not know them!** Now when God the Father or Jesus Christ say "I don't know you" to someone, then that is always code language for: **you do not have the holy spirit!** The people God "knows" are all those who have the spirit of God.

So here is the point to consider:

When the five foolish virgins go to try to obtain God's spirit (i.e. "oil"), then some of them (i.e. excluding any who earlier on were in time to be "ready") come back, but **they still do not have any oil!** And because they still do not have the holy spirit, therefore God says "I don't know you" to them. These individuals are still not really repentant.

If those virgins that came back had actually managed to obtain some oil (i.e. they had received God's spirit), then God would surely have "known them", and if God had "known them", then God would also have opened the door to them and let them in.

The reason these "other virgins" have come back, even though they are still not repentant, is because **they are seeking protection in the place of safety,** and God will not let them in, because God still does not know them.

Also understand that God's statement "I don't know you" means that these particular "virgins" have never had God's spirit. And they don't have God's spirit at that point in time. And if they had (hypothetically) possessed God's spirit at some point in the past and lost it, then they would be even worse off, and would certainly no longer qualify for the designation "virgins". So these people have never had God's spirit, in spite of being called "virgins".

Let's face it, the knowledge that God is going to protect His people in a place of safety is not restricted to repentant, converted individuals. All the unconverted spouses and family members, and all the unconverted people who had managed to get themselves baptized also know about the place of safety.

So when that time comes, many of them may quite possibly also try to be accepted into the place of safety. And they don't understand that at that particular time ... "though Noah, Daniel, and Job, *were* in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, **they shall deliver neither son nor daughter**; they shall *but* deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:20). So having "good connections" isn't going to be good enough to receive entry into the place of safety; it isn't good enough to be granted protection at that point in time.

Their attempt to be accepted into the place of safety may well be represented in this parable by these other virgins wanting to get into the place where the wise virgins will be gathered together.

Let's look at the last verse in this section.

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes. (Matthew 25:13)

There are two things here for us to keep in mind. We must watch and discern what is going on in the world. That doesn't mean that we should speculate about prophetic events being fulfilled, interpreting every single thing that happens anywhere as something of prophetic significance. But we must be realistically watchful, without letting our undeniable bias get the better of us.

But more important still, we must make sure that we are a part of the wise virgins, and that we are not a part of the foolish virgins. The way to do this is to constantly seek contact with God through regular prayer and Bible study and occasional fasting.

You should now also read the article "THE TIMES IN WHICH WE LIVE", which article presents a detailed discussion of the Philadelphian and the Laodicean eras of God's Church. These two articles present information that is complementary to each other.

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