**Title:** Once upon a time… (Matt. 25:1-13) – The Parable of the Ten Virgins

**Introduction:** “Once upon a time…” That’s how the fairy tales of my childhood all started. Something happened a long time ago in a faraway place. Whatever happened then and there, though it was distant from me in time and space, was supposed to teach me something. There was always a moral to those stories – a lesson that could change my life in some small or large way. As a child, I’m not sure how well I understood or applied the intended moral. I just liked the stories. Most people do.

Jesus told stories. I have to be careful when I say that because we sometimes use the term “stories” to refer to falsehoods. Everything Jesus ever said was true. But He would often communicate truth through a fictional story. His audience always knew He was telling a story – we call them parables – because He would usually introduce His stories with the following formula: “This is *like* that.” He used stories to compare one familiar thing with another not so familiar. “The kingdom of heaven is like…” is a phrase He spoke at least ten different times. He used parables to communicate truth. He also used parables to *hide* truth (Mark 4:10-12).

Some of Jesus’ parables are easy to understand. Others require more work and explanation. After the crowd had dispersed, Jesus’ first disciples would often ask Him to explain the meaning of His parable (Matt. 13:18-23). We shouldn’t be surprised or discouraged when we don’t understand the complete message of what Jesus was delivering.

Stories can be tricky to interpret. We tell stories for a variety of reasons – to distract children from scary circumstances, to elicit an emotional response (laughter, tears, compassion), and to teach. The purpose of telling the story will determine what details we include. Details become important. But details can sometimes obstruct the meaning of the story if there is one.

Take the story “Jack and the Beanstalk” for example. What would you say is the moral of the story? Is it to make sure you don’t get swindled and accept beans as payment for a cow? Is it that boys shouldn’t climb plants that reach up into the clouds? Or is the whole thing about the dangers of stealing? The world may never know.

Thankfully, Jesus usually includes the point of His stories at the end. The difficulty with Jesus’ stories is picking out which details are important and deserve a second look and which ones are included just to make the story flow.

Matthew 25 is the record of three of Jesus’ parables. Jesus tells each of these parables for slightly different reasons. The application of the first story in verses 1-13 is clear. Be alert (v. 13). Be ready. Make sure you have everything you need. But the call to readiness here is different from the other admonitions for readiness in Jesus’ earlier teachings (Matt. 24). There, Jesus’ goal was to inform them on how they could avoid or at least survive the judgment that was coming. Here Jesus calls His audience to be ready for a party – a celebration – that’s coming *after* all the difficult times! He doesn’t want them to miss it.

The second story (Matt. 25:14-30) is about investing in preparation for the Kingdom. When you know that difficult times are coming (destruction of Jerusalem, persecution, Tribulation), the temptation is to “hunker down” and just do your best to hold onto the assets you have. That’s how one of the servants in the story responds to his master’s actions. You don’t normally take risks in a bear market. Jesus’ call is for His servants to exercise faith and invest God’s resources even when the market is unfavorable.

In the third story, Jesus separates nations (people) into two groups based on one criterion: the kindness or lack thereof that they showed to Jesus through the proxy of his “brothers” (Matt. 25:31-46). Remember the world that Jesus described in Matthew 24. Life will be difficult. Resources will be scarce. Society will get ugly as people kill one another to acquire food, shelter, and weapons. People will selfishly hoard whatever resources they can find. They do that today even though for many, resources are plentiful. The temptation to go into a survivalist mentality will be hard to resist. Amazingly, some will share their resources evidencing their true nature. For their kindness, they will receive an unexpected reward.

Three stories. Three different responses to living in difficult times as we anticipate the Kingdom. While you’re waiting, be ready. While you’re waiting, be working. While you’re waiting, be kind.

Today, we’re going to examine the first of these three parables – the parable of the ten virgins. Out of the three stories in Matthew 25, this is the one where the details can most easily be used to communicate a message that Jesus did not intend. For example, Jesus said that there were *ten* virgins. Why did He pick the number 10? Is there some significance to the number 10? Numbers mean something when they’re mentioned in the Bible, so surely there must be some hidden meaning here.

When Jesus was differentiating between the wise and foolish virgins, He said that there were five of each. Does that mean that 50% of whatever Jesus meant by “virgins” would be ready for His return and 50% would not? Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, He said “the way is broad that leads to destruction … The way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” The insinuation is that the percentage of those who choose Jesus will be much smaller than 50% (Matt. 7:13-14). How do that statement and this parable mesh together in their teaching? Inquiring minds want to know.

To help discover what’s important about this parable – its teaching, we’re going to look at it from two perspectives. First, we’re going to examine it from an eschatological perspective. What is Jesus teaching about the future of humanity? Second, we’re going to ask and answer, what does this story have to do with me and my life right now?

1. **What is the significance of the parable of the ten virgins for *humanity’s* future?**

The first thing we need to establish is that this parable *does* have to do with the future and that it’s not just a morality story meant only for present personal application. That brings us to another principle of parable interpretation – examine the context. The context is what comes before the verses under examination, and what follows them. There’s more to this concept, but that definition will work for now. Examining the context is a bedrock principle for interpreting *anything* in the Bible, not just parables. You have to know where something fits in the overall flow to accurately interpret it.

So what comes before this parable? Jesus’ answer to the question, “What will be the sign of the end of the world?” What comes after this parable? Two more parables both of which end with eternal consequences for the characters involved. The events before our parable are future events. The subjects covered after our parable concern future events. This parable is about the future.

The first few words of the parable are a further indication of its future nature. It starts with the word “then.” The last event Jesus spoke of at the end of chapter 24 is the coming of the Son of Man – the Second Coming (Matt. 24:44) – and how He will deal with His servants at that time (Matt. 24:45-51). The event happening in this parable will occur after Jesus’ return to earth. This becomes even more apparent when He says the phrase “the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to” (Matt. 25:1) indicating the situation He is about to describe has far greater ramifications than just some young girls getting left out in the cold. He’s describing the kingdom of God at the time of the Second Coming. According to Revelation 19:6-9, a wedding *will* be happening in the Kingdom at the time of Jesus’ return. It’s the marriage of Christ and His Church, a highly symbolic event that signifies the complete unity of purpose, spirit, and purity among the participants.

Part of the context for this parable is the cultural background that existed when Jesus originally spoke it. Depending on your culture, you bring certain images to mind when you read this story about a wedding. If you live in the West, when you read about the ten virgins, you probably think this was a large wedding party because the bride had ten bridesmaids! Pity the photographer with the impossible task of getting all of those participants to look at him, smile and keep their eyes open at the same time!

Would it surprise you to know that these virgins had the glorious task of escorting the *groom,* not the bride? Using their “lamps,” they would form a row on either side of him and light the way as he arrived. The closer the lights came, the more excited the bride and her guests would become. Her groom was arriving!

It is also important to know that the bride and groom were married long before the celebration. No, they didn’t elope and have a wedding reception sometime after they returned. Their marriage began on the day both fathers signed an agreement with each other covenanting for a future that was secure from that point forward. That was the first part of a Middle Eastern marriage.

In many cultures, we would think of this as a betrothal or engagement, but it was much more binding than that. The only two differences between this betrothal and “marriage” were they didn’t live together, and they didn’t have a sexual relationship. They were legally bound together.

This explains Joseph’s actions when he found out that Mary was pregnant. He was about to divorce her even though they were not “married” yet (Matt. 1:19). He would have divorced her if the angel of the Lord had not stopped him. Their marriage was binding. The only thing that could end it other than death was divorce.

It was normal for at least a year to pass between betrothal and the wedding night, but it could be as much as seven years between the two events. Think Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (Genesis 29). So there were three parts to the Middle Eastern marriage – betrothal, the wedding night, and the celebration for friends and family afterward. The portion that our parable appears to cover is the latter two stages. Incidentally, the 7-year time frame that Jacob waited for Leah is also the amount of time in between the Rapture (betrothal) and the Second Coming (consummation & celebration).

Part of the intrigue of this parable is the characters. Jesus mentions the groom and the virgins, but not the bride. She is not included in the story because her position is secure. She is safe. There is nothing left to settle about her. She is exactly where she is supposed to be, and she is full of joy just as the Church she represents will be at Jesus’ Second Coming. The Bride of Christ will watch with amazement as her Groom makes sure she is protected forever by destroying all those who had ever brought her pain or danger (Rev. 19:11-21).

Unlike most weddings, at least in the West, the focus of this story is *not* on the bride, so she is in the background. Two characters are in the foreground – the virgins and the bridegroom. It seems obvious that the bridegroom is Jesus. The imagery of the Church as Christ’s Bride and Jesus as her groom is inescapable in the Bible (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:9; 22:17).

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”* (Eph. 5:25-27)

Figuring out the identity of the “virgins” is more difficult. The simplest answer to who they represent is that the wise virgins are Christians who were ready for Jesus when He returned. The foolish virgins then would be those people who were not ready for Jesus and were therefore left out. There is no salvation for them. But if we assume the Bride/Groom imagery from other biblical passages is carried over into this parable and that the virgins are more than just a means Jesus uses to tell the story, then none of the virgins could represent Christians because the unseen bride does.

The virgins are the main focus of the story. They have to represent something. But what? I believe they represent Israel.

We know that Israel and the Church are separate entities and that God has a plan to redeem both of them. We have shown that the events this parable is picturing are events that happen at the conclusion of the Tribulation. One of the purposes of the Tribulation – also known as the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7) – is to draw Israel into a relationship with Jesus. God used the Gentiles to make Israel jealous (Rom. 11:11), and the Tribulation is the time of their succumbing to God’s call. It is also the time of their protection by God and their ultimate rescue from Satan.

A relationship between the Jewish people and the Gentile nations revolves around Jesus in the same way that the activities of the bride and those of the virgins revolve around the groom in Jesus’ story.

Here is one more fact to consider. When John the Baptist was asked by his disciples how he felt about people leaving him to follow Jesus, he said these words:

*“He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom…rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice…”* (John 3:29)

Instead of the circumstances making him sad, they made him happy. This was how his mission was supposed to proceed. In his statement, he pointed out three distinct characters in the wedding celebration – the bride, the bridegroom, and the friends. We have identified the wedding couple. John identifies himself as one of the friends. John was a Jew.

We are left to consider one final set of figures from the parable – the lamp and the oil. I remember when I was very young, I learned a song that went like this: “Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning; give me oil in my lamp, I pray; give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning; keep me burning till the break of day. Sing Hosanna, sing Hosanna, sing Hosanna to the King of kings.” The lamps of the song are the lamps of the story. Jesus does not tell us what the lamp and the oil represent. The lamp spoken of here would likely be a torch, and the oil *could* represent the Holy Spirit.

Prophets, priests, and kings were usually anointed with oil before they began serving in their respective capacities (1 Sam. 10:1, 6). This oil represented the presence and empowerment of the Spirit. Saul, the first king of Israel, could not be the light God wanted him to be without the “fuel” of the Holy Spirit. Later in Israel’s history, Jesus told His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they were “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The power was the Holy Spirit, and the “clothing” happened on the Day of Pentecost. One of the ways the Holy Spirit manifested His presence was through light (Acts 2:3). These references to oil and its effect suggest the oil that kept the lamps burning for these virgins represents the Holy Spirit.

Since Jesus did not specify what each of the portions of His story symbolizes, we cannot be dogmatic. One thing is sure. A properly fueled lamp produces light. It directs our attention in a specific direction and enables us to see the item reflecting that light. The virgins had one task – to direct attention on the Groom (Jesus) so that the Bride (the Gentile Church) would recognize Him and would increasingly anticipate and be excited about His arrival. That’s what Israel was designed to do – to be a light to the Gentiles for them to be able to see the Messiah.

We’ve just spent a great deal of time attempting to explain this parable and give its importance for the future sequence of events. You may rightly ask, “What’s the point? Why should I care?” Here’s why. God made a promise to Israel that He would bless them and that they would be His treasured possession. They walked away, so God moved His primary efforts to the Gentiles – us. But He hasn’t forgotten the Jews. He hasn’t thrown them away. He has disciplined them. There is distance between them and Him right now. But He still loves them.

God doesn’t break His promises, and God doesn’t throw away people even when they rebel against Him. God promised to redeem Israel. All those who express faith in His Son Jesus as their Messiah will be with Him as He “consummates” His relationship with His Bride, the Church. They will have the privilege of joining in on the celebration, and then they will live with Christ and His Church in the New Jerusalem.

1. **What is the significance of the parable of the ten virgins for *my* future?**

“Still,” you might say, “All that concerns the future and the Jews. I’m not convinced that the images Jesus’ presented match up with the interpretations you have given. Even if they do, what does this parable have to do with me, a non-Jew, in the present?” To find out, let’s focus on what we *know* this parable is communicating. We can disagree on all the symbolism and imagery, but there are some truths here that are undeniable. The parable teaches that…

1. There is a celebration coming. (Matt. 25:1)

Regardless of the culture of your birth, people all over the planet like to celebrate! In America, some of the big celebrations are Independence Day, Thanksgiving and Spring Break. Most places in the world celebrate Christmas, New Year’s Day, birthdays and weddings. Israel had a set of celebrations and commemorations established by God and spread throughout the year. These yearly celebrations were indicators of God’s plan for the future. Celebrations remind us of what is good about life, what we have to be thankful for, and what has real worth. They break up the mundane and add festivity, music, and color to an otherwise boring day. They remind us of past sacrifices while giving us something to anticipate. They provide us with hope for a better day.

Jesus could have used any setting to communicate the overall message of this parable. He could have used a battle scenario: “The invading army is coming. Be ready.” He could have told a story revolving around business, fishing or offering a sacrifice. Out of all His possible choices, Jesus chose a celebration scenario. And it’s not just any celebration. It’s a wedding. A wedding is a celebration that is full of joy, based on love, and designed to bond two people together for the rest of their lives.

When God instituted marriage, He centered it around unity – two people becoming one (Gen. 2:24). It was unity that Jesus desired. He prayed that the disciples would be unified together and that they would experience that same unity with Him (John 17:11, 23)

A wedding is a perfect descriptor for the relationship between Christ and His Church! All of the positive characteristics of a human wedding celebration will also be true of the celebration Jesus has spent the last two millennia preparing (John 14:1-3). Jesus is the source of enjoyment, laughter, and companionship (John 10:10). Some people throw elaborate parties and spend exorbitant amounts of money on weddings.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Jesus gave His life to secure us and has since been putting all of His resources into protecting us and preparing a home for us to live in after the wedding (Rev. 21:15-27). It will be the celebration of the millennia, and it will last for millennia. You don’t want to miss it.

1. Not everyone is prepared for this celebration. (Matt. 25:2-4)

Virtually all celebrations require some level of preparation. Independence Day requires the purchase of fireworks and a safety lesson on their proper use hopefully. For your Thanksgiving Day to be a success, you need a list of the family members that are coming and assurance that someone is bringing the sweet potato casserole. Both birthdays and weddings require a disproportionate amount of decoration set up and tear down for an event that is quickly over. It’s all worth it. The preparations increase the anticipation. It is preparation or the lack of it that determined the opportunity for participation for the “virgins” in Jesus’ story.

The terms Jesus used to describe these girls tell us much about them. He first calls them “virgins.” That means they were unmarried, and they were relatively good. It wasn’t unusual for unmarried girls to be virgins in Jesus’ day. Sadly, virginity is not something that is common today among women *or* men when they choose to get married. Those that commit to saving the sexual relationship until marriage are sometimes mockingly referred to as “good” girls. In comparison to the society around them, they *are* good, and they have made a good choice. All the girls in Jesus’ story were virgins. They were all “good,” but not all of them got to go into the celebration. Their goodness was not enough. Human goodness is never enough to gain entrance.

Jesus also described these girls as “wise” and “foolish.” Incidentally, these are the same terms Jesus used at the end of the Sermon on the Mount to describe those who put His teachings into practice and those who did not (Matt. 7:24-27).

Jesus used the term “fool” sparingly and carefully. To call someone a fool is serious business (Matt. 5:22). He used it to describe the two disciples on the road to Emmaus because they had not understood from the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer (Luke 24:25). He used it of the Pharisees because they were more concerned about the ceremonial purification of eating utensils than they were concerned about the cleansing of their hearts (Luke 11:40).

The most informative and compelling example is the parable of the successful fool. He had wisely prepared for the rest of his life. He foolishly hadn’t considered how short “the rest of his life” was going to be. He died the next day, and he had made no preparations for what happened after death (Luke 12:20).

So a fool is someone who knows what they should do but doesn’t do it usually because they are distracted by some other priority. They see only the immediate not the eternal. The fool pays the consequences of his own foolishness. The greater the foolishness, the greater the consequence. Jesus said some of these virgins were wise. They were prepared. Some of them were foolish. They were not prepared when it came time to welcome the groom.

1. We don’t know the exact timing of the celebration. (Matt. 25:5-7)

Most celebrations are designated on the calendar. Each year when I get a new calendar, I am thankful to find that many of the blocks are already filled in with events common to my culture. Weird celebrations are included too – national popcorn day is Friday, Jan. 19. August is a great month. It has National “Respect for parents” Day (Aug. 1) and National “Chocolate Chip Cookie” Day (Aug. 4) all in the same week.[[2]](#endnote-2)

It’s left to me then to record in the appropriate blocks all the celebrations unique to my family and me – birthdays, the family reunion, vacation week and wedding anniversary. Why do I do that? You know what it is like for a celebration to catch you off guard, don’t you? “Oh, our anniversary is *today*?” If you have a problem with remembering dates, it might be wise to buy your anniversary gift on January 1 and keep it hidden in your bedroom closet so that you are ready whenever the event does come! You know the anniversary celebration is coming. Better to be prepared at all times.

That’s Jesus’ point here. This celebration is known. It’s coming. It’s just that the timing is not known to us, so we have to be constantly prepared.

Earlier in Jesus’ discussion with His disciples (Matt. 24:36), He used marriage imagery to discuss the timing of His return. In Jewish wedding ceremonies, though it was the groom and bride who were getting married, it was the father of the groom who decided the exact timing of the ceremony. Anyone who asked the wedding participants for a schedule would get a stock answer – “only the father knows.”

Jesus may or may not have known at that point when His return would eventually be. Our inability to know the timing and the subsequent need to be ready at all times is part of Jesus’ teaching. The context requires it (Matt. 24:42). But an equally important part of His teaching is His example of submissiveness to His Father’s will. Jesus was submissive to the Father throughout His ministry (Matt. 26:39; Luke 23:46). He had come only to do what His Father directed (John 5:17-19; 17:4) and say only what His Father communicated (John 8:28; 17:7-8). Because of this, the Father indicated His utter pleasure with His Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Jesus was willing to leave the timing in the Father’s hands even if that required a delay.

We don’t handle delay well. Have you ever been in the car with children for an extended journey? It doesn’t take long for children – and adults – to start rehearsing the familiar phrase, “Are we there yet?” The wait to get a table at the restaurant, the traffic delay due to some unseen cause, and the parental demand for children to “grow up” are all evidence of our lack of patience. Waiting is hard because waiting requires us to submit to someone else’s schedule. A Day-Timer gives us the illusion of control. The advertised job that lets you “set your own schedule” and “be your own boss” gets overwhelmed with resumes. Control over some portion of our lives is a desire all of us have.

These virgins didn’t have control over the timing of the groom’s return. And neither do we. We don’t control anything except how we respond to the delay. They responded by going to sleep.

Notice that there is no reaction in the story – negative or positive – to their sleep. Were they wrong for going to sleep? Wasn’t there something they were supposed to be doing while they waited? Apparently not. All the wedding preparations were complete.

For us though, sleeping would be a bad response to Jesus’ delay (1 Thess. 5:4-8). We have a job to be doing while we wait for Jesus’ return.

Sleep *can* be a very positive response to delay. Remember those children in the car? You’d like them to go to sleep, wouldn’t you? Sleep makes time seem to pass more quickly. Sleep puts us in a better mood and refreshes us for what’s coming next. Sleep gives evidence that we are at peace about our situation. There have probably been at least a few nights that sleep has eluded you. You were worrying about situations beyond your control. You were stressing about the timing. You don’t need to stress about when Jesus is going to return. Just know that He is, listen for the call, and make sure you are personally prepared. Then you can sleep in peace too.

1. Each person must be personally prepared for the celebration. (Matt. 25:8-9)

All ten of the virgins were sleeping peacefully because they all believed they were prepared for the groom’s arrival. Five of them were wrong. When they discovered they didn’t have what they needed, their first solution was to ask the five wise virgins to share their resources. The request was denied. In their assessment of the situation, the wise realized that giving up some of what they had would not meet the need and would instead put all of them in jeopardy.

Withholding what someone else needs for your own benefit looks greedy, thoughtless and unkind. In the third of the three parables of Matt. 25, the “sheep” get entrance into the kingdom *because* they gave away resources they presumably could have used for themselves. Those who withhold resources (the “goats”), like the wise virgins here, get shut out. Looking out for yourself might be smart, even “wise.” But is it good?

The only way for us to evaluate the “goodness” of their actions is to see how the groom responded to them. He welcomed them into the celebration. How could Jesus tell a story in which He condoned seemingly selfish actions and even told people they must mimic the readiness of these wise but seemingly wicked virgins? The answer to that question requires us to understand the nature of what they possessed and could not give away – the oil.

Though I earlier suggested what the oil might symbolize, nailing that down is not all that important. All we need to know is that the oil, whatever it symbolized, was the key to entrance into the celebration. Oil gets you in. No oil gets you left out. This parable is about the future kingdom of God. That’s clear from Matthew 25:1.

What is necessary to be included in the kingdom of God? Many believe good works get you in. If I’ve done enough of them, their merit will outweigh my spiritual debts, and God will grant me entrance. If I’ve done more than enough of them, I can give you some of my good works to help you out.

During the Middle Ages, emissaries of the church sold indulgences. When a person bought an indulgence, they were buying the “goodness” of Jesus that was left over after He made payment for sin on the cross. A person could also buy the extra good works of saints who had done more than enough to gain entrance into heaven. Rather than waste those works, the church sold them. The practice allowed people to “indulge” in sin so long as they had money to buy enough of someone else’s good works to balance out that sin.

Human works no matter how “good” can never gain me entrance into the Kingdom (Eph. 2:8-9). The Bible says that my righteousness is like “filthy rags” (Is. 64:6). Who would dare show up at a wedding dressed like that? (Matt. 22:11-13) Works *do* get you entrance, but it’s Jesus’ works, not my works. His works become effective for me as I express faith in what Jesus has already done to secure my forgiveness.

The “oil” that gets you entrance into the celebration is grace – God’s gift – through faith. Unfortunately, I can’t give you *my* faith. It can’t be inherited. It can’t be sold. It’s free, but it’s costly. I can help grow faith within you by communicating Scripture and my faith experiences to you (Rom. 10:17). But if the faith never becomes your personal possession, you will be shut out. Both Moses (Exodus 32:32) and Paul (Rom. 9:3) said they would be willing to give up their place with God in eternity if it meant that Israel would be rescued, but they could not substitute their faith for Israel’s need.

Not only can faith not be shared, but it also can't be exchanged from one person to another. Your grandparents would give you their faith if they could. So would your parents. But it can’t be done. Each person must take personal responsibility for their own decisions and their own choices. The possession of faith or lack of it has serious consequences.

1. Some will be shut out of the celebration. (Matt. 25:10)

The first response of the foolish virgins to their recognized need was to ask the wise virgins to share. Not being able to do so, the wise suggested that the foolish should go and buy oil. They did. The foolish didn’t have to ask for directions to the merchant’s location. They didn’t have to ask for money to make the purchase. They knew what they needed, they knew where to find it, and they had the resources needed to acquire it. For whatever reason, they just hadn’t done it. Fools don’t need a reason.

Why does anyone put off what they know they need to do until it is too late? We don’t know the reason, but we know the result. They were shut out.

They weren’t shut out because someone was mad at them. They weren’t shut out because they weren’t part of the popular crowd. It was for one reason. They didn’t have what was necessary to gain entrance.

1. No amount of pleading will get unprepared people into the celebration. (Matt. 25:11-12)

Since this parable is a picture of the kingdom of God, does it mean some people won’t be included? Yes. I don’t say that with any joy or any sense of pride. I say it with great sadness. I’m the type that wants everyone to be included. I know what it feels like to be left out. It’s not fun. To be left out of the kingdom of God doesn’t just mean you won’t have anything to do on a Friday night. It means that you will be separated from God forever in a place the Bible refers to as the Lake of Fire.

How could God, who claims to love each of us, allow this to happen? I don’t have all the answers, but I’ll give you one. Learn from the parable. Whose responsibility was it that the foolish virgins were not prepared in time to enter the celebration? It was theirs. Personal responsibility. We like the freedom to make our own choices. We don’t like that those choices can carry negative consequences.

It’s easy to blame others for the outcome of the choices we make. The foolish virgins could have blamed the wise virgins for their refusal to share oil. They didn’t. The foolish virgins were wise enough to know that they could have gotten oil in time. They could have blamed the groom for delaying and for being so dogmatic about His deadline. “Can’t you give a little grace? Isn’t it okay to be fashionably late to a party?” Not this one.

We don’t know what the deadline is, but we know there *is* a deadline. So each of us needs to make sure we are ready.

1. Whoever doesn’t want to get left out of the celebration must get ready now. (Matt. 25:13)

Have you ever missed out on something exciting or helpful because you were late? The people of Noah’s day were late. The door got shut. The rain fell. They died. The people Lot warned eventually believed his warning of impending judgment. It was too late. The smoke from the city’s flames ascended up to heaven.

**Conclusion:** I know stories are not supposed to end like that. If this story were a novel, you would probably slam the book shut in disgust at the end. If it were a movie, you would walk out of the theatre stunned. You were told this story was about a wedding. A wedding is supposed to be a fairy tale event – a grand story of the groom boldly charging in at the last minute to rescue his bride from anyone who would threaten their “happily ever after” ending.

Jesus’ coming is no fairy tale. It’s real. He will arrive on a white stallion (Rev. 19:11) to destroy all His enemies who had the gall to threaten His bride and His people. Happily ever after is no fairy tale either. It’s real. And you can be a part of it!

Do I need to point out to you how this story has impact on your life right now regardless of who you are? Read through each of those statements again. A. There is a celebration coming. B. Not everyone is prepared for the celebration. C. We don’t know the exact timing of the celebration. D. Each person must be personally prepared for the celebration. E. Some will be shut out of the celebration. F. No amount of pleading will get unprepared people into the celebration. G. Whoever doesn’t want to get left out of the celebration must get ready now.

Are you ready for the celebration? Have you made the necessary preparations?

This is one of those interactive stories where you get to write your own ending. You don’t get to change the details or how the story goes for others. But you can determine how it ends for you. You can choose to be “wise” and be prepared or be “foolish” and wait to see what happens. Choose wisely.

1. “Average wedding cost”; Cost of Wedding; retrieved Feb, 2018. NOTE: The average cost of a wedding in the United States in 2017 was $26,720. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. National Day Calendar; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)