

25:1- see on Mt. 13:19.

*Then*- Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom... will be likened unto ten virgins...", the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. "*Then* shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (Mal. 3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Mt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

If the judgment is in time as we now know it, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! Christ comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of Christ to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of Christ in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ. Therefore it would be fitting if the whole process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of time as we know it. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: "The morning is come and also the night".

This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence.

*Ten virgins*- Ten men were required for a synagogue to be formed. The Lord may be consciously subverting this idea, implying that in the new Israel He was creating, the congregations would be comprised of believing individuals, whose gender was unimportant.

*Took their lamps*- Gk. 'they received'. The same word is used throughout the chapter, also of the servants receiving their talents (:16,18,20,22,24).

*Went forth to meet*- Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively a calling to go and meet the Lord. However, the parable seems to be specifically about the response of the faithful immediately prior to the Lord's coming, once they know He is 'back' and must of their own volition go out to meet Him. This would then follow straight on from the teaching of chapter 24. The same Greek word translated "meet" is that in 1 Thess. 4:17. The faithful who are alive at the time of Christ's coming will be snatched away to "meet" Him. But they will have gone forth to meet Him of their own volition, and those who delay going to meet Him will not meet Him in that way.

25:2 *Wise*- Dan. 12:3 speaks of "they that be wise... they that turn many to righteousness". This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as "the wise" amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob's trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during "the time of the end... the time appointed" (RV)- of the three and a half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these "wise" in mind in His parable of the "wise virgins" of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

*Foolish*- The Lord uses the same word in saying that we are not to call anyone 'foolish' because it implies that we are condemning them (Mt. 5:22). Clearly enough, the people of God are divided between those who will be saved, the wise, and those who will be condemned. But that division will only be apparent in the last day, and will be made apparent by varying responses to the knowledge that the Lord has finally come. Likewise the parable of the two builders shows that the difference between the wise and foolish will only be apparent when the flood comes, i.e. at the Lord's return. The foundation they built is invisible to those around them- nobody can see whether they dug down through the sand onto the rock, or just built in the sand.

25:3 *Oil*- The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Lk. 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents-symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word- are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus during the delay period they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on genuine spirituality. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

However, it's quite likely that the oil has no particular significance. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

25:4 *The wise took oil... with their lamps*- The fact the lamps of the foolish 'went out' means that they all had oil in their lamps. The difference was that the wise thought there might well be a delay, and so they took oil with them.

*Their vessels*- The wise took lamps plus vessels; the foolish only took their lamps. The only other time the Greek word translated "vessels" occurs in the New Testament is also in Matthew and also on the lips of Jesus in a parable, in 13:48. There, the faithful are likened to good fish which the judge casts into "vessels" whilst the bad fish are cast away. The telling paradox is that the wise, those ultimately saved, are those who have "vessels" exactly because they suspect the oil of their own spirituality will not be enough. It is their awareness of their own likelihood of failure which is their salvation. And further, they recognize that the outworking of God's purpose is changeable- there may be delays, such is His sensitivity to human spirituality. The foolish, by contrast, think that all will be well with them because they accurately know the time of the

bridegroom's coming, and cannot think that their own oil may not be enough. Personal spirituality [oil] is therefore related to our perception of God's sensitivity and openness.

25:5- see on Mt. 22:9.

*The bridegroom tarried-* The same word translated 'delay' in 24:48 (see note there). Without doubt, there is a delay in the Lord's return. Beyond question, the fact not all will work out as expected in terms of chronology means that some will stumble. This is a sober warning to the very many who hold dogmatic views about the interpretation of end time Bible prophecy. Rev. 10:6 uses a related word to speak of how there will finally be no more delay. And yet 'delay' is to some extent metaphor- the same word is used in Heb. 10:37 "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (s.w. "tarried", Mt. 25:5). In one sense there will be a delay, in another sense there will not be. God on one hand foreknows all things, and in that sense there is no delay; in another sense, He does in real terms delay His program in response and sensitivity to human behaviour. This paradox is at the root of Hab. 2:3, which is being quoted in Heb. 10:37: "The vision is yet for an appointed time [the Hebrew could mean 'Will still not happen for another year / *moed* / until the next feast / until the time appointed]... though it tarry, wait for it... it will not tarry". Despite the delay, it will fulfil, and so it must be waited for. It tarries in one sense, but in another sense "it will not tarry".

*Slumbered-* The word is used figuratively of 'delaying'. The only other NT usage is in 2 Pet. 2:3, where it clearly means 'delaying': "Their condemnation *slumbers* not". Because the bridegroom delayed, so did they. Here again is the Lord's commentary upon the dangers of assuming a fixed date for His return. Spiritual life grinds to a halt when it is perceived [wrongly] that God's purpose has ground to a halt. The delay in the Lord's coming means that there is a delay in the spiritual life of those who waited for Him on a particular day. By slumbering, they were assuming that He too is slumbering. But the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4). David had sworn not to slumber nor sleep until God was enthroned in Zion (Ps. 132:4). Regardless of delays in the program, it is the end result which must ever be kept in view- the coming of the Lord to Zion. The fulfilment of prophecy is not an end in itself, but it is the end result which must be our desire- rather than merely seeing the vindication of our own pet interpretations.

*All slumbered and slept-* Both wise and foolish "all slumbered and slept". This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Mt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as

being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Mt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber. Clearly enough, the very last generation of believers will all be weak, and those of them who shall be saved will only be 'ready' because of their own admission of their weakness and lack of oil.

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom is unusual- an element of unreality in the story. They must have been a pretty unenthusiastic, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 (as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely a similar element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I...?"... maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the weddings. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

25:6 *At midnight*- Israel both kept Passover and went through the Red Sea at night. Indeed, it is stressed six times in Ex. 12 that it was "night", and hence Dt. 16:1 reminds them to carefully keep the Passover (i.e. at night), "for... thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". Other latter day prophecies speak of the events of the second coming being at "night": Lot left Sodom in the very early hours of the morning; and it was "at midnight (that) there was a cry made" informing the virgins of their Lord's return (Mt. 25:6). There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. And yet there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps- which needs

continual topping up by our freewill effort. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt. 25:6). The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Mt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

*A cry made-* This is surely representative of some specific indication given to the latter day believers that the Lord is back and they must now exercise their freewill in going to meet Him. It may be in the form of a trumpet blast. The book of Revelation often uses the same word for the 'crying' of Angels in their various proclamations. So this may refer to the "voice of an Archangel" (1 Thess. 4:16) with which the Lord returns. This great cry also equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.
- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

*The bridegroom comes; go out-* "Comes" translates *erchomai* and "go out" is *ex-erchomai*. The coming of Christ must be greeted by our 'coming out' to meet Him. The idea is that we cannot be merely passive. The whole parable is designed to debunk the idea that we can know the exact date of the Lord's return, with the implication that we are just waiting for things to happen to us. But God's purpose involves us having a hand in the outworking of it; He is responsive to our freewill attitudes and decisions. His coming / going out to us cannot just be waited for by us; we

have to go out to Him. The virgins had all 'gone out' to meet the bridegroom (:1 s.w.), but now they actually go out to meet Him after the delay. And it is the response to how the Lord delays which is effectively the division between wise and foolish, worthy and unworthy.

*To meet Him-* The same Greek word translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

*25:7 Arose-* In the general application of the parable, this invites interpretation as resurrection. But the burden of the parable is clearly specifically for those who live in the last days, those who are "alive and remain" and are called to meet their Lord, but find there is a delay. The more obvious picture, however, is that the call will grab all by surprise, and will lead to them arising and taking stop of their lives, and coming to terms with who they really are. Again, this is relevant to the closing section of the Olivet prophecy- the Lord's point is that even if they think they know the day and hour of His coming, it will be a shock which can in no way be prepared for. And knowing the day and hour is not the essential thing, but rather being willing to immediately go to Him and leave the things of this world.

*Trimmed their lamps-* This is the same word translated "garnished" in the Lord's parable about how response to John the Baptist's teaching left a house "garnished" (12:44). And his teaching was about Jesus as Christ and the need for repentance and faith in His grace. Those who properly responded to it would be ready for the Lord's second coming. The whole language of Jesus as bridegroom was surely intended to recall John, for he had used the very same figure for the Lord. The introduction to the Olivet prophecy had noted that the temple was "garnished" (s.w. "trimmed"; Lk. 21:5), and the Lord is surely saying that that was irrelevant, for the true garnishing is of personal preparedness for His coming. The bride herself is to be "adorned [s.w.] for her husband", the bridegroom (Rev. 21:2).

*25:8 Give us of your oil-* Those who thought they knew the day and hour of the Lord's coming are revealed here as actually having no personal spirituality. They could have just gone to meet

their Lord for joy of wanting to see Him, throwing themselves upon His grace. A bridegroom wants to see His bride and would rather see her without some piece of jewelry, than find she turns up very late. Their request for oil from others indicates they have no personal love of Him, no personal relationship with Him, and a group mentality whereby they thought others' spirituality could count for theirs. All they had was their conviction that they knew the day and hour of His coming. So it's no surprise when finally the Lord tells them "I know you not" (:12). This puts all obsession about figuring out Bible prophecy into correct perspective.

*Gone out-* Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" (relative to the foolish, anyway) can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterise the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at His coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyse and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realisation will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period. This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analysed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ- they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic- "Give us of your oil"! In that moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish. Those who are spiritually empty will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually stronger, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil- what faith they had- ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

25:9 *Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you-* This translation is problematic, as reflected by the way the AV puts "not so" in italics. This has been added in a valiant bid to make the difficult Greek have at least some kind of sense. The idea seems to more accurately be: 'In any case there is not sufficient for us, let alone for you too'. The only other time *arkeo ou* occurs it is translated "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7); and there, the idea is 'We cannot possibly have sufficient of ourselves, only God's grace can provide the sufficiency'. As it is translated in most English versions, the sense is somewhat selfish- as if the wise are too concerned for their own acceptance by the bridegroom to worry about anyone else. But I suggest the sense of the original is rather 'We ourselves hardly have any oil, we are woefully unprepared ourselves, we are going to throw



ourselves onto His grace when we meet Him. It's not about how much oil we have. It's about loving Him enough and trusting His grace enough to just want to go immediately and be with Him. But if you're so worried about oil, well, presumably you will have to go and get some- a hard job, in the middle of the night, when the shops are all closed'.

*Go-* The Greek really means 'to depart', and significantly, the very same word is used by the Lord in this same context when condemning people at judgment day in :41: "Depart [s.w. "go"] from Me, you cursed". So the point is again established that in their response to the news of His return, the rejected have their judgment. They are asked to go and meet Him, but they depart, to try to make themselves prepared by relying upon others ["them that sell"]. Their departing from the Lord was in essence their condemnation, for condemnation is all about departing from the Lord.

*Go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves-* This may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change; or going looking for *people* who could sell them oil. But again, they go to others- rather than immediately to the Lord Himself. Hence His comment in :12 that they do not know Him, and therefore He doesn't know them. There is simply a lack of personal relationship with Him, despite their confidence that they knew the day and hour of His coming. "Go... and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position, but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: "Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?". I mentioned under *Not so...* that the only other time *arkeo ou* ["not enough"] occurs is when the amount of bread required was described as "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7). The advice to *go and buy for yourselves* is also alluding to that same feeding miracle. The lesson then had been that no amount of bread was enough / sufficient, nor was it possible to go and buy for oneself- rather must there be total reliance upon God's grace in Christ. I feel the allusion or similarity is purposeful, because lack of oil didn't have to mean rejection by the Bridegroom. They could simply have thrown themselves upon His grace. If they were ready and eager to go and meet Him at any moment, regardless of whether they felt or externally appeared ready, then this was enough for salvation. And that, really, will be the struggle of every spiritual heart when we know the Lord has returned; our love for Him and trust in His grace must be greater than our awareness of our own unworthiness, lack of preparation and poor external appearance. Those who thought they knew the day and hour [and we must ever remember that this is the context of the parable] couldn't cope with things working out other than they had expected, needed to run to others for help, rather than to the Lord personally; and had no sense of His grace nor, in fact, any overpowering desire to simply be with Him. Rather was their own correctness of expectation the most significant self-defining issue for them. And it would appear so many 'Christians' have

fallen into this trap, becoming obsessed with chronologies of events and accuracy of prophetic interpretation, at the expense of true spirituality and direct personal relationship with the Lord.

*Buy for yourselves-* Literally, ‘redeem yourselves’. The whole point is that we were bought / redeemed by the Lord and not by ourselves.

25:10 *While they went to buy-* There seems no reason to think that the Bridegroom would have rejected them because their lamp was not burning. They could have just gone along anywhere, motivated by the joy that comes from love. But they were too convinced by their need to *appear* ready externally. I have spoken elsewhere of a collapsing of time [as we understand it] in the period around the Lord’s return and judgment. But let us not think that such collapsing of time only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus we read here of the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside the marriage. In time as we know it, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

*They that were ready-* “You- be also ready” (24:44) uses the same word. This parable is the definition of what ‘readiness’ means. The wise virgins were hardly ready. They fell asleep when they should have stayed awake; and they recognized that they didn’t really have enough oil. They hadn’t calculated the day nor hour of their Lord’s return. They were ‘ready’ only in the sense that they wanted above all to be with their Lord, and this sense was far stronger than their deep awareness of their own shameful unpreparedness. But this is what ‘readiness’ is about.

*Went in with Him to the wedding-* This is another hint that the faithful come with Jesus to judgment. See Digression *With Jesus to Judgment*. The Lord entering into the wedding feast is the exact picture of His coming in judgment (22:11 “the King *came in*” s.w. “went in”). But in that same parable, we ‘come in’ to the wedding feast at our response to the Gospel in this life (22:12 s.w.). The nature of our initial response is highly significant. “Went in” translates the same Greek word found in 24:38: “Noah *entered into* the ark”. The next comment that “the door was shut” continues that allusion to the ark.

*The door was shut-* The very same words are used in Lk. 11:7 concerning how although the door is shut in this life, yet it can be opened by prayer and beseeching. We as sinners are condemned here and now, the door is shut- but we can repent and pray, and the door shall be opened. But

like the shutting of the door of the ark, once this is done at the day of judgment, it is too late. Now is the day to change the verdict, then will be too late.

25:11 *Afterward came also*- We may be intended to imagine some details of the story. They would have searched for oil sellers in the middle of the night, and finding none, they came without oil to their Lord. I suggested earlier that the issue is readiness, a love for the Lord, rather than having oil; they could have gone immediately and thrown themselves on His grace. But they didn't do that and chose instead to try to get human help; resulting in their rejection.

*The other virgins*- If the Lord literally meant 'the others', He would have used a Greek word like *heteros* [or the Aramaic equivalent]. But *loipoi* definitely has the sense of that or those which remain; it is elsewhere translated "the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2). The foolish virgins are those who remained, those who didn't go immediately in response to the call. Yet again, attitudes to the Lord's coming will decide our eternal futures.

*Lord, Lord*- The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here in :10 "they that were ready *went in* with Him to the wedding". The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Lk. 13:25 adds the detail that they 'knocked'. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

*Open to us-* The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord's return.

25:12 *I know you not-* Lk. 13:25 adds "From whence you are", from what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

25:13 *Watch therefore-* "Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the tribulation period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not

finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge".

It cannot be accidental that Matthew's Gospel twice records Christ's plea for us to watch (Mt. 24:42; 25:13); and then goes straight on to describe how in Gethsemane, Christ pleaded with the disciples to join Him in watching and praying, lest they fall to temptation (Mt. 26:38-41). He was evidently deeply, deeply disappointed that they could not share this with Him. Surely the reason for this further mention of watching is to suggest that in the pain of our latter day watching, we will be at one with our suffering Lord in Gethsemane, as He too watched- not "signs of the times", but His own relationship with the Father, desperately seeking strength to carry the cross rather than quit the race.