

EFFECTIVE OR DEFECTIVE READINESS

(A MATTHEW 24–25 STUDY)

PART 11

The Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus approached eschatological preparedness and kingdom hope through a myriad of illustrations. The disciples and the Jews, unfortunately, had a wrong understanding of the “kingdom of God.” They anticipate a secularized Messianic rescue mission. Jesus told the worldly Pharisees the earth-shattering teaching: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). That kingdom could even be “within you” (Luke 17:21). The citizens of His realm would have a spiritual orientation.

To a small group of inquiring disciples, Christ used a wedding metaphor with ten virgin attendants to reveal its eternal realities. The inaugurated “kingdom of God” would become a consummated kingdom when the festivities begin.

The sound of the seventh trumpet (“last trump” – I Corinthians 15:52) will announce when that kingdom has consummated.

- *“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”* (Revelation 11:15).
- *“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed”* (Daniel 7:14; cf. Matthew 24:31).

That reveals when the wedding between Christ (depicted as a bridegroom) and His church (citizens of His kingdom – the bride) is complete.

“The marriage represents the reception by Christ of his kingdom.”¹ It is when Christ delivers the “everlasting covenant” to His people,² as though each person is given an “original copy” of the “marriage certificate.” We then are given the family name of God, that of His people and of Christ on our foreheads (Revelation 3:12).

Waiting and Not Watching

The ten-virgin parable details additional issues for those expecting the coming of Bridegroom Jesus (Matthew 9:15, John 3:29). “Ten” is a “full complement” – the whole church.

- Those virgins collectively represent a waiting church.
- They started out (“went out”) to meet Groom Jesus.

¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 426.

² *Ibid.*, p. 640.

- The church early on appeared prepared for that exciting event. They took their lamps, glowing from the oil of God's Spirit.
- But – a “wait” changed everything.

The marriage contract would have been executed by the time they met the Bridegroom. He would be taking His bride to the wedding banquet.³ The “virgins” (undefiled) “went out” to become part of those marriage festivities.

Christ is orienting us to a time concept regarding earth's eschatological end.

- If the coming of Christ had occurred when everyone was expecting Him, all ten would apparently have been prepared.
- But He tarried.
- That wait disclosed a spiritual division within that group!

The bridegroom did come that night. He came during a “time of darkness” – at midnight. This represents a period in earth's history of great spiritual obscurity.⁴

- Since it was night, they need special illumination to reveal the “path.”
- The oil that burned represents His Spirit.
- It brought light and guidance, and dispelled that darkness.

Jesus **didn't** come during the first watch but during the second or third (Luke 12:37-38).⁵

- The Jews divided the night into three watches (likely alluded to here) (the Romans into four).
- In the “wait,” during the “tarrying time,” they slept.
- The counsel was to “watch” – but they “slept.”⁶

The focus, however, is not on “they all slept.” One half of those virgins brought extra oil in a flask in case the bridegroom tarried. The other half did not. That's the greater issue! They all slept.

- Why didn't the “foolish” virgins bring extra oil?
- Why didn't they assume there might be a wait?
- Personal questions to ponder.

The extra time taken for Christ's arrival wasn't the challenge either – the preparedness was. “Be always prepared” is the warning!

- Complacency was in the foolish virgins' hearts – even before that night.
- They should have known it was common for a bridegroom to tarry.
- But more important, the cry that the “bridegroom is coming” could occur unexpectedly.

³ Turner, David L.; *Matthew* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 595.

⁴ White, Ellen G.; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 414.

⁵ Marshall, p. 537.

⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 635-652.

It is noteworthy to observe that end-time prophecy **has** such a “tarrying time” (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

- Paul even notes: “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:36-37).
- God reveals what will bring that tarrying time to an **end** (Daniel 8, 11 and 12).
- It is the **onset** of the appointed time and its unique events.

“There is a delay. Hour after hour passes; the watchers become weary and fall asleep.”⁷ “Five have neglected to fill their flasks with oil. They did not anticipate so long a delay, and they have not prepared for the emergency.”⁸ “As in the parable, so it is now. A time of waiting intervenes, faith is tried; and when the cry is heard, ‘Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him,’ many are unready. They have no oil in their vessels with their lamps. They are destitute of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

The “wise virgins” were able to trim their lamps and receive the **extra oil** – characterized as the “latter rain.”

This parable points out several important messages:

1. Man has a personal part in spiritual preparedness.
2. Prophecy points very closely to when Jesus will come. Before the arrival cry, the waiting saints will be fully ready to meet and proceed with Him.
3. A period of “delay” is to be planned for.
4. When the confirmation cry goes out, there is a final period of preparedness that focuses on the oil and light!
5. The oil – the Spirit – cannot be transferred. The “light” results from the Spirit burning in the saints’ hearts.
6. When He comes, the wedding will have already occurred – the wedding party is on its way to the marriage supper.

“The marriage represents the reception by Christ of His kingdom. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is the capital and representative of the kingdom, is called ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ Said the angel to John: ‘Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ ‘He carried me away in the spirit,’ says the prophet, ‘and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.’ Revelation 21:9, 10. Clearly, then, the bride represents the Holy City, and the virgins that go out to meet the bridegroom are a symbol of the church. In the Revelation the people of God are said to be the guests at the marriage supper. Revelation 19:9. If guests, they cannot be represented also as the bride. Christ, as stated by the prophet Daniel, will receive from the Ancient of Days in heaven, ‘dominion, and glory, and a kingdom;’ He will receive the New Jerusalem, the capital of His kingdom, ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.’ Daniel 7:14; Revelation 21:2. Having received the kingdom, He will come in His glory, as King of kings and Lord of lords, for the redemption

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Christ Our Righteousness*, p. 405.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

of His people, who are to 'sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,' at His table in His kingdom (Matthew 8:11; Luke 22:30), to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb."¹⁰

Those wise virgins are further depicted:

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Revelation 19:7-8).

Towards that anticipated celebration God observes: *"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God"* (Revelation 19:9).

This is explained in the Jewish rite by the eighth day at the Feast of Tabernacles. That was the great celebration of the harvest (alluded to in Leviticus 23:35).

Luke notes that those who are prepared are blessed. No matter if it is the second or third watch, they are ready to meet the Lord at His return (Luke 12:37-38). They will sit down to eat with the Master – a "harvest celebration."

The Expectant Foolish

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

Trimming the lamps suggests that the wick was cut, removing the blackened area to then produce a strong, clean flame. Then additional oil would be added.

- All ten engaged in this final process. ***That means that all respond to the call!***
- The last blackness of one's heart is cut away.
- As the wick is trimmed, it must remain ***soaked*** in the oil.

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

The foolish church members suddenly note that their oil is low or gone. They are unable to make their wicks/hearts flame. The bridal procession is about to arrive! It is at night. They need light.

- A state of anxiety and urgency seizes them.
- The oil of their wise friends was the nearest at hand.

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

- Those in the church who are unprepared for earth's final call will see the excitement and expectation of God's "wise" remnant people.

¹⁰ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 426-427.

- This suggests that they now long to have a similar experience and “be on fire” for that final procession.
- In desperation they seek to obtain the missing power of God’s grace, His Spirit.

“*And while they went to buy*” (Matthew 25:10a) (a period of time).

The five foolish virgins going out to buy suggests that they are now trying to *sacrifice themselves* to obtain the oil, urgently willing to exchange anything for it.

- But it is too late.
- The opportunity for a heart change has passed.
- One must conclude that they tried to obtain inspiration and knowledge and perhaps set aside “things of this world” because they did go “to buy” – to give something in exchange.
- But it was too late.

“Those who would overcome must put to the tax every power of their being. They must agonize on their knees before God for divine power.... Men may have a power to resist evil – a power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master; a power that will place them where they may overcome as Christ overcame. Divinity and humanity may be combined in them.”¹¹

- This echoes the ever-present mandate of Jesus in Matthew 24:44: “*be ready*”
- “for in such an hour as ye think not” – He comes

Why was it too late? Are there not eleventh-hour conversions? The foolish certainly were able to obtain “some inspiration!” Why? They did make it to the “door” of the banquet hall.

- But – there’s a problem:
- While they were trying to “finish” preparing for the arriving bridegroom, he came and took His prepared guests into the hall – the marriage supper.
- They ran out of time! That is ***why timing prophecies*** are so important to know – right now!

Note something deeply important:

“... *the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut*” (Matthew 25:10b).

- The door was shut.
- The last opportunity for “joining the bridal party” had passed. Mercy ceased to plead.
- When the call of His coming was made, there was still time – to “trim” their hearts!

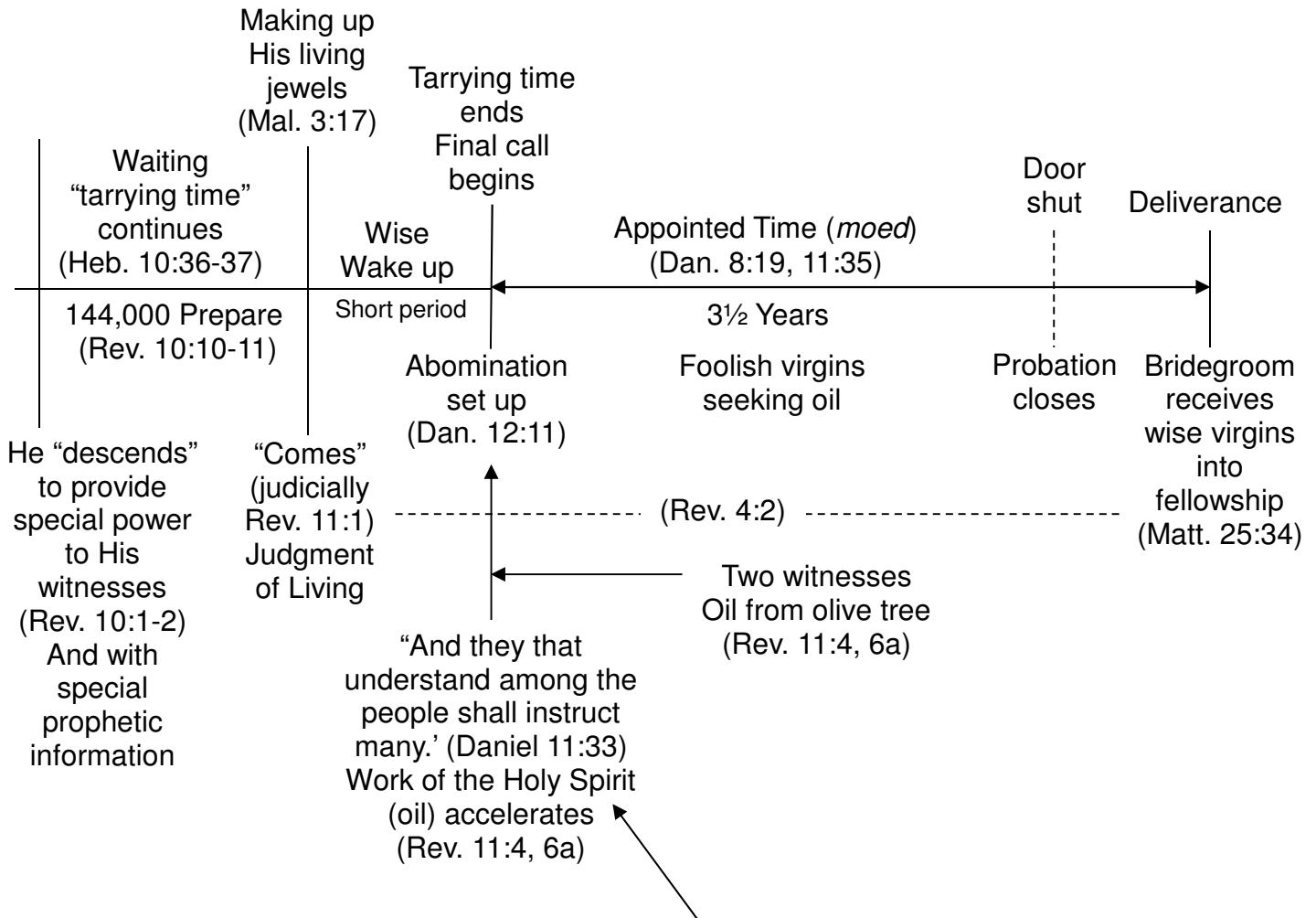
A provocative question: “When does that call go out?”

It comes before the arrival of the bridegroom. It comes at the end of a “wait.” The procession reveals that people will join the remnant church before the door is shut! That call will occur

¹¹ White, Ellen G.; *That I May Know Him*, p. 32.

soon. That will be the final chance to prepare to be ready for His coming, using the experiences already gained.

Graphically, from many prophecies:



Between the *judgment of the living* and the refreshing "flame" from the oil is a brief period. The *bridal procession* represents the time when the "jewels" (saints) are being added to the church. Though this occurs through *individuals*, they will collectively be the *corporate bride* invited into the kingdom.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

The foolish virgins did some preparation and finally sought to join the bridal party. But the party was locked in the banquet hall. As they bang on that shut door, **they** now cry!

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

- Not ready for the initial work of the 144,000, they tried to become ready at the last minute.

- Their efforts were vapid. They may have gained knowledge – but certainly no understanding (cf. Proverbs 4:7, Colossians 1:9).
- Their final cry suggests that they think they are ready – “*Lord, Lord, open to us.*”

“Look – our lamps are burning. The Word of God is on fire in our hands/heart. We have been studying and making ourselves ready.” But they could not enter!

We are reminded:

“Without the Spirit of God a knowledge of His word is of no avail. The theory of truth, unaccompanied by the Holy Spirit, cannot quicken the soul or sanctify the heart. One may be familiar with the commands and promises of the Bible; but unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed.... The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live.”¹²

Then they receive the horrifying news:

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

Though the door is shut, there is an encounter with the bridegroom – the Lord.

- The term “*know you not*” was an idiomatic expression in Christ’s day meaning to ***treat someone as a stranger***.¹³
- A similar woe is stated by Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23. There a group again tries to justify kingdom citizenship through all the Christian works they did.
- Because they were active sinners (lawless), he said:

“I never knew you: depart from me.” A convicting thought will suddenly thrill them with horror – “I’m lost!”

Why didn’t Jesus know them when they were such ardent workers? They didn’t do the Father’s will – they didn’t obey.

- “*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother*” [part of my family] (Matthew 12:50).
- When the Father’s purpose is abandoned, Jesus assumes authority to:¹⁴
 1. Have righteous enmity (Psalm 6:8, 119:115, 139:19)
 2. Banish them from His presence (Matthew 7:23, 25:41)
 3. Repudiate the individual (Matthew 25:12; 10:33; 26:70, 72, 74)

Such words of Christ seal one’s eternal destiny! They are an ominous notice that mercy has ceased! “I don’t know who you are – depart from me.”

¹² White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 408-409.

¹³ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 598.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

- This is amazing language.
- Throughout their lives, Jesus has served as their legal advocate (I John 2:1), intercessor (Hebrews 7:25) and mediator (I Timothy 2:5).
- Then comes: “I can no longer defend you.” “I don’t even know you.” “Get out of here.”

Matthew is provoking reader shock to urgently take Jesus’ teachings seriously! If taken lightly, you will be vulnerable to the same eternal curse.¹⁵

The maidens who came late still considered themselves eligible to join the wedding party. But:

- Their failure to be ready **on time** severed that connection.
- Jesus is the Bridegroom and has already joined with His guests (Matthew 9:15).
- The eschatological kingdom is illustrated as a banquet (Matthew 8:11). The wise have become part of that honor.
- Though the foolish received an official welcome and had opportunity to prepare – they procrastinated.
- There is no appeal after a **specified time** has passed.
- In fact, preparation is impossible. There is not enough time to properly complete it.

This exclusionary deed is similar to what occurred with the man without wedding clothes (Matthew 22:11-14).¹⁶ The “shut door” imagery announces a point in time when redemptive mercy and grace have ceased.

- *“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved”* (Jeremiah 8:20).
- They may even have actively served in His work, but Jesus cannot identify them as one of His family.
- In fact, they are now seen as enemies of righteousness.¹⁷

This parable reveals Jesus’ ultimate authority to judge. That will be part of the discussion shortly. Luke’s narrative states that He stands up and shuts the door (Luke 13:25). That echoes Daniel 12:1 when Michael “stands up.” A great transition in redemptive history has come.

The “prepared” are corporately sealed in the banquet hall. The church (the “bride”) for God’s kingdom is complete (Revelation 19:7).

The Purpose of the Parable

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13).

We refer you again back to Part 9 of this Matthew study. The exact day and hour are unknown. But:

¹⁵ Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 341.

¹⁶ Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 596.

¹⁷ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke*, vol. 2 (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI – 1996), p. 1237.

- The ten virgins were in their “white attire.”
- They had gone out to meet the bridegroom, whom they knew would come “that night.”
- They were waiting somewhere where the procession would pass.
- The “wise” knew enough to not only be ready for that arrival but had spiritual reserve to permit them to experience trials and a timing delay.

The foolish virgins expected Jesus to come early in their schedule.¹⁸ The “evil servant” over-estimated when Jesus would return. These virgins underestimated when he would come. Thus, the imperative to “watch” – be always ready for that anticipated event.

“The coming of the bridegroom was at midnight – the darkest hour. So the coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth’s history. The days of Noah and Lot pictured the condition of the world just before the coming of the Son of man. The Scriptures pointing forward to this time declare that Satan will work with all power and ‘with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

“It is at midnight that God manifests His power for the deliverance of His people. The sun appears, shining in its strength. Signs and wonders follow in quick succession. The wicked look with terror and amazement upon the scene, while the righteous behold with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Everything in nature seems turned out of its course. The streams cease to flow. Dark, heavy clouds come up and clash against each other. In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: ‘It is done.’ Revelation 16:17.”²⁰

“A marvelous change has come over those who have held fast their integrity in the very face of death. They have been suddenly delivered from the dark and terrible tyranny of men transformed to demons. Their faces, so lately pale, anxious, and haggard, are now aglow with wonder, faith, and love. Their voices rise in triumphant song: ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.’ Psalm 46:1-3.”²¹

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¹⁸ Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 597.

¹⁹ White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 414.

²⁰ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 636.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 639.