14 Parable Of The Ten Virgins

Synopsis

In Matthew 25:1 et seq., there were ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom to come. Five still had oil for their lamps when the groom came. The other five were running out. Their lamps were beginning to go out just before the groom came. Thus, the second five were not prepared as the crucial time approached. They had the oil for a time, but then they ran out (“their lamps were going out”). So these five determined just before the groom came that they would try to get more oil. To their shock and dismay, the groom came when their oil was barren. They were in the midst of hoping to get more. The door is then shut and they are excluded from the wedding feast.

The moral of the story is it was then too late. Their good intentions were not enough. They postponed getting the extra oil too long. The door was shut. When the second five heard the groom arriving, they turned back from their shopping trip. These five tried knocking on the door for entry. However, they found they were excluded from the banquet. They suffer weeping and gnashing of teeth outside. Jesus then says this should teach us “you will not know the day nor hour.” So the lesson is we must always be ready for our Lord’s return. We cannot rest on our good intentions to some day get the extra oil we need. Instead, God will absolutely require sufficient oil burning when that time comes.

To whom is this parable directed? A Christian or a non-Christian?

Oil in Scripture typically represents the Holy Spirit.
A virgin in Scripture usually symbolizes a blameless person. A saved person. The term virgin is never used elsewhere to describe the lost. It also makes no sense to refer to a lost person as a virgin.

Jesus closes this parable saying we must be ready and watch for when He returns because you know not the day nor hour of His return. (Matt. 25:13.)

The Passage

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. (2) And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. (3) For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them: (4) but the wise took oil in their vessels [jars] with their lamps. (5) Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. (6) But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. (7) Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. (8) And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. (9) But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. (10) And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. (11) Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. (12) But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. (13) Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour. (Matt. 25:1-13 ASV.)
Cheap Grace Spin Of This Parable

The Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace responds by simply denying the Parable of the Ten Virgins has any parabolic meaning. This approach is clearly set forth in the evangelical The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (1989):

There is no point in seeing hidden meanings in the oil...

The oil cannot easily apply to...the Holy Spirit. It is merely an element in the narrative showing that the foolish virgins were unprepared for the delay...

The point is not these girls’ virginity, but simply that ten...maidens [were] invited to the wedding. (Vol. VIII at 512, 513).

So the cheap grace defenders cannot permit any secondary meaning to the word oil or the word virgin. They try to recast the virgins as simply maidens. The reason is that The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states it is aware that otherwise a condition exists upon the virgin being accepted in the kingdom: “there must be behavior acceptable to the master, the discharge of allotted responsibilities.” Id., Vol. VIII at 512. If this parable had any meaning we could uncover, the Expositor’s Bible realizes grace would become costly. It would not be free. Thus, only if this parable is left a complete mystery can the gospel of cheap grace survive, and that is where Expositors dumps the parable: into the unknown.

However, if we accepted the obvious that the virgin represents a Christian, and the oil represents the Holy Spirit, we would have a dilemma. The cheap grace defender would have to accept that Jesus expressly taught that a Christian will not go to Heaven absent “behavior acceptable to the master, the discharge of allotted responsibilities.” Jesus would contradict the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Rather than ever question their paradigm thinking that assumes belief alone is correct, these cheap grace defenders would prefer taking
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the outrageous step of saying Jesus had no parabolic intent in a parable. This, of course, leaves the parable utterly meaningless. This is frankly shocking.

Conclusion

The solution in this parable is easy: oil is the Holy Spirit and the word virgins means cleansed and washed Christians.

The meaning is, as the Bible’s Expositor’s reluctantly admitted, that a virgin’s “behavior [must be] acceptable to the master, the discharge of allotted responsibilities.” Id., Vol. VIII at 512. Otherwise, the virgin is denied entry and denied being known by the Master.

As Frederick G. Lisco (1791-1866), a German evangelical minister from Berlin, taught in The Parables of Jesus (trans. from German by Rev. Fairbairn) (Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 1850), the “parable of the virgins mainly teaches...there is also necessary a kind of working...because it is only through such an exercise of principle in the daily life, that the disposition [of heart] can be preserved and strengthened, which otherwise would languish and die.” Id. at 178. He calls this “working” the “works of faith.”

Luther similarly said in Miscellaneous Sermons 18:34 that these (pure) virgins are “fools” because they “hear the gospel, but do not follow it.” Luther adds this applies to those in ministry who “possess the highest gifts of God.” (Quoted in Lisco, supra, at 184.)

Hence, faith with a good beginning (virginity) that later runs out of works (behavior acceptable to the master — the discharge of allotted responsibilities) does not save. You will be spewed out of Jesus’ mouth. Whether we prefer calling these works by the name of works of faith or simply works, it adds up to the same principle. Following Christ’s principles are necessary for salvation. Works of obeying Jesus. Thus, Christ again has falsified the principles of the modern gospel of cheap grace. His is one of costly grace.