

PREPARING TO STAND

Number 79 — April-May-June, 2014

“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3/21/1905

WISE OR FOOLISH?

by Jim Buller

God keeps bringing me back to the parable of the 10 Virgins. (Matthew 25:1-13.) Yes, this is probably one of the most well known of all of Jesus' parables, so I've been familiar with it for a long time. As most of us know, it has an obvious end-time application, both because it is a part of the Olivet Discourse which is largely about the end-times, (Matthew chapters 24 and 25), and because the coming of the bridegroom, and the going in to the wedding, are obvious representations of Jesus' second coming to take His people to heaven. Most of us also recognize that the 'oil' in the parable represents the Holy Spirit, (see Zechariah chapter 4). So the 'foolish' virgins not having enough oil, represents those who aren't prepared to receive the 'latter rain' outpouring of the Spirit. But, even though there is a fairly common understanding of this parable, from time to time, God has kept bringing me back to it.

One of the first things I remember being impressed with is found in *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 411.

The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. 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. Their service to God degenerates into a form. "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Eze. 33:31. The apostle Paul points out that this will be

the special characteristic of those who live just before Christ's second coming. He says, "In the last days perilous times shall come: for men shall be lovers of their own selves; . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

In the middle of this paragraph are a couple of very significant statements. (1) "The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his," (that is, the man's), "desire and consent implanting in him a new nature." Therefore, the amount of the Holy Spirit/'oil' that we have, depends both on how much we "desire," or want it, *and* on how much we "consent," or allow, Him to "implant in us a new nature." It may be possible for us to deceive ourselves into *thinking* that we want more of the Holy Spirit just because we *know* that is what we are supposed to do. But unless we are actually *allowing* Him to change us, it is doubtful that we will have the "extra oil," which makes so much difference in this parable. (2) "The class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work." Even though the foolish virgins *had* 'lamps,' which represent God's word, (Psalm 119:105), and even though these lamps *were* lit, so they must have had at least some 'oil'/Holy Spirit, and even though they were heading to the kingdom/wedding, they were "content with a superficial work." They never really 'went deep' with God. Like the lukewarm Laodiceans, who are just 'hot' enough that it can't be said that they are 'cold,' they are content with a shallow spirituality. As a result, "They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him." No wonder the foolish virgins are shut out of the wedding with the words, "I never *knew* you." And because they have never really gotten to know God, "they do not know how to *trust*" Him. This lack of trust keeps them from making a complete surrender to the Holy Spirit, which would allow Him to make the changes in their character that would fit them for heaven. Because they have been content with shallow spirituality, "their service to God degenerates into a form." So they are 'just going through the motions' of being a Christian, deceiving themselves into thinking that they are prepared to enter the kingdom. Brothers and sisters, let's *not* be content with a superficial spiritual experience. Let's constantly be pursuing a deeper relationship with God.

Another thing that has impressed me are the four parables that the Olivet Discourse ends with. In the last part of Matthew 24 there is the parable of the Faithful/Unfaithful Servant, and chapter 25 is taken up by the parables of the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats. In the past, I had always looked at these parable individually, until one day I felt impressed to look at them as a whole. Come to find out, these four parables have *a lot* in common! In each of them is a master, or bridegroom, who has gone away and then comes back. And in each parable there are two groups. Both groups *consider themselves to be servants*, and both groups *expect to 'enter the kingdom'* at the master's return. Yet, when the master/bridegroom shows up, only one group is praised and rewarded, and enters the 'kingdom.' The other group is rejected and cast out! Brothers and sisters, we need to study these parables diligently. Let's be sure we will be able to enter the kingdom, and not make the same mistakes as those who expected to get in, but were cast out instead!

Then, a while later I realized that the *first* thing Jesus said as He began the Olivet Discourse was, “take heed that no one deceives you.” Thus, His main concern must be about His people being deceived in the end-times, and this concern therefore probably continues to be a theme throughout the entire discourse. And when we look at the discourse with this theme in mind, we quickly recognize that this is indeed the case. For example, in the prophetic part, (Matthew 24:4-31), there are three warnings against false christs and false prophets, and these warnings take up about *one third* of the prophecy!

Looking at the four parables with this theme in mind, we almost immediately remember the group in each of the parable who considered themselves servants of the master and thought they were going to enter the kingdom at the master’s/bridegroom’s coming, but instead were thrown out! They were deceived! No wonder there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth!” Therefore, these parables must all be warnings about deceptions that will be *common among God’s people* in the end-times! With this in mind, it is interesting to note that another thing these parables have in common, is that those who were rejected and cast out all thought that what they had, or what they were doing, was ‘enough’ —which goes together with what was mentioned earlier about being content with a shallow spirituality. Let’s be sure we are not deceived!

Together with these thoughts, I used to think that the foolish virgins were *called* ‘foolish’ because what they *did* was foolish. I asked the question, “What was so ‘foolish’ about not taking extra oil?” Now, because we understand that the oil represents the Holy Spirit, and that the foolish virgins were content with a shallow spirituality, the answer seem almost obvious. But, suppose the bridegroom had showed up ‘on time.’ In that case they would have been able to go into the wedding. Yet, they are still called ‘foolish.’ So I sensed there must be more to it.

After thinking about this some more, I came to realize that all ten girls had the ‘job’ of lighting the way to the wedding —which is how they too are servants. The ‘foolish’ must have thought things would happen the way they were supposed to, and that a lamp full of oil would be enough. So, when things didn’t go according to plan, they were unprepared to do their job. But, how often do things go ‘according to plan?’ —especially at weddings?! Since we all recognize that *rarely* do things go ‘according to plan,’ it’s easy to see that it would be ‘foolish’ indeed to assume that they would.

The way the story unfolds shows that instead of making sure they could get the job done, something else must have been uppermost in their minds. After they had made a few minimal preparations which they thought would be good enough, they were able to focus their attention on other things —things which were really important to them. And so they are rejected because they were not ‘seeking first the kingdom of God.’ (Matthew 6:33.) They were not denying themselves to advance God’s kingdom. (Matthew 16:24.) This points out not only why they are content with a superficial experience, because they have other things on their minds, but also why a shallow spirituality really isn’t ‘good enough’ from God’s perspective.

There is a few other things we can learn from the way the story unfolds, so let’s look at the parable again, this time noticing the sequence of how Jesus tells the parable. The first verse, Matthew 25:1, says,

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Here we just have ten girls going to a wedding. Keep in mind that in Bible prophecy symbols, a 'woman,' represents the church, and these 'women' are called "virgins" which means they profess a pure faith. They also, "took their lamps," which we have already noted represent God's word, "and went out to meet the bridegroom," which we have also already recognized as being symbolic of Jesus at His second coming. So far there is no difference! All 10 girls are going to a wedding. But then verse two simply states,

Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Nothing has really happened in the story yet and they are *already* called "wise" or "foolish." Note that it reads, "Five of them *were* wise, and five *were* foolish." So the reason the 'foolish' *did* something foolish was because they *were* foolish. So, if we are going to enter the kingdom we need to be sure we are not 'foolish.' But, what does it mean to be 'foolish?'

When we have a question about something in the Bible, where should we go for the answer? —to another place in the Bible, because scripture explains scripture. (See Isaiah 28:10,13.) So, where else in the Bible are 'wise' and 'foolish' contrasted? Almost immediately another parable comes to mind —the story about the wise man who built his house on the rock, and the foolish man who built his house on the sand in Matthew 5:24-27. Interestingly enough, there are some definite parallels between these two parables, especially when we include the two verses just before the parable of the two builders! For the time being we'll just point out that in both of these parables the 'wise' do something 'extra,' and the results of the foolish things that the 'foolish' did was disastrous. Some other passages that contains contrasts between 'wise' and 'foolish' can be found in 1 Corinthians, from about chapter 1 verse 17, to about the end of chapter 3, and the book of Proverbs. Here, a *whole book* of the Bible is devoted, "to know wisdom." It is *strongly recommended* that we study these scriptures for ourself to *be sure* that we will be one of the 'wise,' who will enter the kingdom at the Bridegroom's return, and not one of the 'foolish' who are left out. Unfortunately, we simply don't have the time or space to do much more that hit some of the high points.

So let's look at Proverbs 9:10, 2:6, the first part of 15:33, and 1:7. Notice where wisdom comes from, and how the 'foolish' relate to it.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

“The Lord gives wisdom.” The “fear of the Lord” is the beginning of instruction, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. But what does it say about the ‘foolish?’ —they “*despise* wisdom and instruction.” This has some interesting implications about their relationship with God. But before we address this, let’s also look at the following passage from Proverbs 1:20-25.

Wisdom calls aloud outside;
She raises her voice in the open squares.
She cries out in the chief concourses,
At the openings of the gates in the city
She speaks her words:
“How long, you simple [that is, ‘simple minded’] ones, will you love simplicity?
For scorers delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge.
Turn at my rebuke;
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke.”

From these verses we get the picture that God is offering wisdom and knowledge to all of us. He trying to get us to accept it, even holding it out to us, as if saying ‘Please take it.’ But the ‘foolish’ “despise” and even “hate” what God is offering. 1 Corinthians 2:14 goes along with this idea where it says.

For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.

From these verses, it is fairly obvious that even though the ‘foolish’ may think they want to enter God’s kingdom, they haven’t really connected with Him —which also goes together with what we’ve studied earlier about being content with a shallow spirituality. Proverbs 12:15 and 18:2 tell us a bit more.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
But he who heeds counsel is wise.

A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart.

‘Foolish’ people are those who would rather talk than listen, those who aren’t interested in advice because their mind is already made up. They only want to do what *they* feel like doing at the time. So they don’t have time for God. The counsel and advice He gives are opposite to their thinking anyway. From their perspective, the things of God are foolishness. But in contrast, notice what 1 Corinthians 3:19 says about God’s perspective on this human viewpoint!

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

Indeed, there are many Bible stories where God has had His people do something that from a human perspective is *absolutely ludicrous*! For example, when they were trapped between the mountain, the sea, and Pharaoh's army, God told His people "Go forward." (See Exodus 14.) In your imagination, can you hear what some of the Israelites must have said about how completely stupid this seemed? In a very real way, the issue boils down to, are we going to trust in the Lord, or are we going to lean on our own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5) Which brings to mind another more positive example, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. His humanness is pleading with God, "Let this cup pass from Me." But in trust and surrender He adds, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as You will." (Matthew 26:39.)

Let's look at another verse, from Proverbs 18:6 that helps us understand why the 'foolish' cannot be allowed in God's kingdom.

A fool's lips enter into contention,
And his mouth calls for blows.

Other versions have this verse saying that the things a fool says causes quarrels and make people want to hit him! To fully understand the implications here, we need to put this verse together with James 4:1 which says,

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in you members?

From these last two verses it is evident that foolish people are driven by their selfish desires. And putting what we've seen so far about being 'foolish' together with the last part of Nahum 1:9, it becomes clear why they are not safe to bring into the kingdom, and why they must be separated out.

He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time.

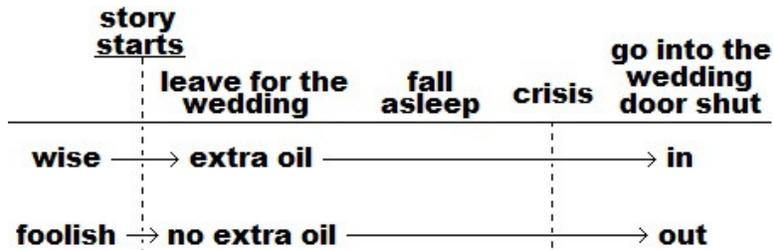
One of God's ultimate goals is to totally do away with sin to insure a secure universe for the rest of eternity, which means getting rid of all selfishness and pride. If the 'foolish' were brought into the kingdom their selfishness would start problems all over again! Sure, eternal life sounds appealing to them, (especially in contrast to eternal death), so it makes sense that there would be 'foolish' people 'going to the wedding.' But as we have seen they are not really interested in what God has to offer, or in His advise on how to do things, much less in submitting to His leadership or seeking first His kingdom. So, even though God loves them, they are not safe to save, and therefore they *must* be separated out.

Now let's be quick to point out that because of our sinful human nature, we all start out as 'foolish.' Left to ourselves, we would be hopelessly lost. Which is exactly why we need a Saviour! And why God is so anxious that we accept His wisdom. So the question comes down to, Are we content to lean on our own understanding, or are we willing to give up our selfish foolishness to accept God's wisdom and grace?

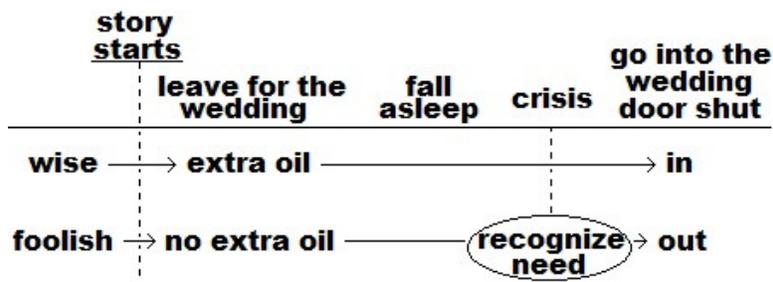
There are a few other points that need to be shared along with these ideas that can probably be best illustrated by making a set of simple diagrams of the sequence of events in the parable. The story starts out with the girls leaving for the wedding. But because of the delay, they all fall asleep. Then, a cry goes out, "The bridegroom is coming!" which brings about the crisis in the story as the 'foolish' discover they don't have enough oil. Then, as the 'foolish' go to buy more, the bridegroom comes, and the 'wise,' who are ready, go in with him into the kingdom/wedding, and the door is shut.. Later, the 'foolish' show up trying to get in, but they are refused entrance.



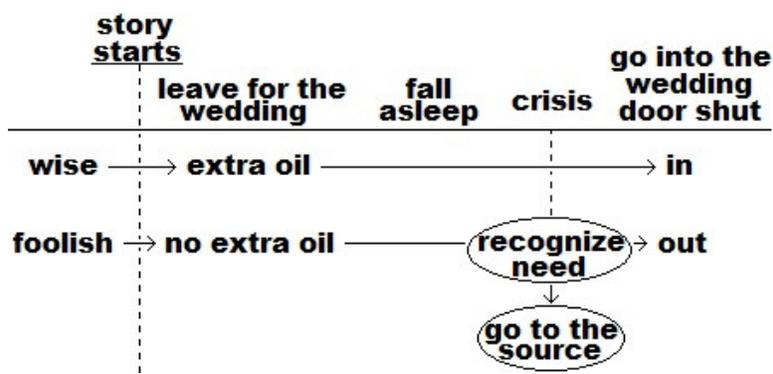
As we have already noticed, the girls were already 'wise' or 'foolish' before they left for the wedding. So let's draw a line marking the beginning of the story, to show that there were already the two groups at that point. Following each group through the story, we find that: As they left for the wedding, the 'wise' took 'extra oil,' which resulted in them ending up 'in' the kingdom/wedding after the crisis in the story. However, because the 'foolish' didn't take any 'extra oil,' they ended up being shut 'out' of the kingdom/wedding. Among other things, this shows us that it is the decisions we are making *now* that will determine where we will end up at the close of probation.



But let's dig a layer or two deeper, and think about *when* the 'foolish' girls recognized their need for more oil. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the 'crisis' in the story. Before the 'crisis,' they *thought* they had 'enough.' Like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17 they felt, "I ... have need of nothing." This also makes us think about the parable of the 'wise' and 'foolish' builders. The foolish man *thought* it was 'enough' to build on the sand. Apparently, from his perspective it wasn't worth the extra time and energy that it would have taken to go to the rock and build there. However, at the crisis in that story when the storm hit and his world was falling apart, he too recognized his need—but it was too late then to go and build on the rock. Like it's been said before, 'It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.'



But let's not stop here, and take things a layer deeper yet and ask, What did the 'foolish' *do* when they recognized their need? —they went to their 'sisters.' This reminds me of an experience I had many years ago. A friend asked me to come over to talk, and as he told me about his problems, several times he mentioned how he needed to get back with the church. At the time I remember thinking that it wasn't so much the *church* that he needed to get back together with, he needed to *connect with Jesus!* The church can't save us, only Jesus can! And as I thought about this, I wondered how many others only have a relationship with the church, and not with God? Evidently this is a much bigger problem than I envisioned back then, as it is one of the major points in this important parable. This point is further emphasized by the response of the 'wise' to the request of the 'foolish' for oil. They are wise enough to tell them that *they* are not able to supply their need, that instead, they needed to '*go to the Source!*' No human can supply the 'extra oil' of the Spirit, we can only get the Holy Spirit by connecting with God.



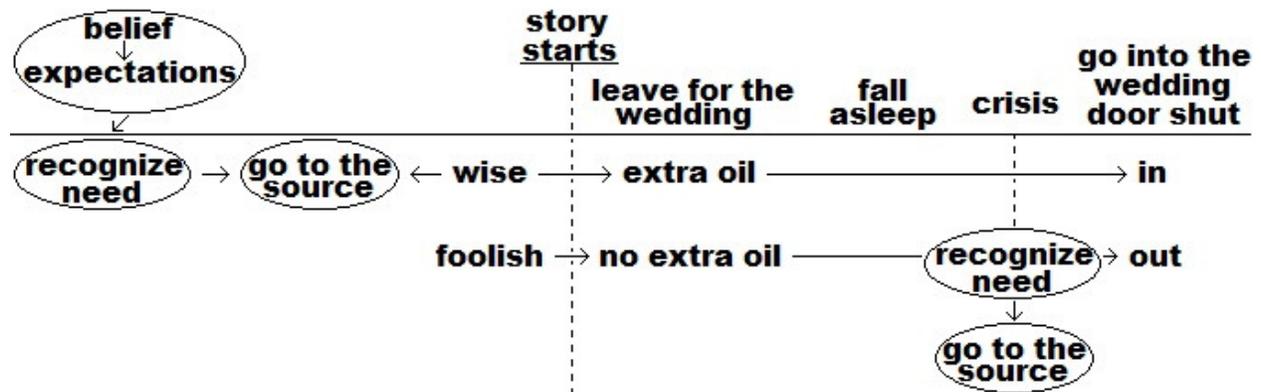
Turning to their 'sisters' in their crisis shows that the 'foolish' weren't used to leaning on God and going to Him in the trials of their lives. Thus, it is evident that they do not have a relationship with Him, and that the sentence, "I do not know you," pronounced as the reason for them being kept out of the kingdom/wedding is accurate.

Like the foolish man who built on the sand, they had chosen to live their lives apart from God. They only feel their need for Him when there was a major crisis. But then it is too late. At the crisis, there isn't time to learn to trust God enough to make the complete surrender to Him which is necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to "implant in [us] a new nature." Neither is there any time for this "new nature" to be developed in us.

Looking at when the 'foolish' recognized their need also raises a question about the 'wise' —When did *they* recognize their need? and, When did *they* 'go to the source?' Since they had taken extra oil when they left for the wedding, it must have been before the story even began. Evidently, as they listened to the advice of others, and thought about the wedding, their responsibility to light the way, and how things rarely go as planned, they must have recognized their need to take along some extra oil. So, before they knew there would even be crisis, they spent the necessary time and energy to go to the source.

In the same way, the wise builder looked over the situation before he built his house. He listened to advise, and recognized that from time to time storms happen. Sure, it would be easier to haul materials to a location on the sandy flats, and it would be much closer to work and the market once the house was built. But storms happen. And a storm would spell disaster for a home on the sand. So building on the rock was the only safe thing to do.

We must consider one more question as we continue this chain of thought —Did the wise virgins and the wise builder only make their ‘extra’ preparations ‘just in case?’ The answer to this question depends on what they believed, and what these beliefs led them to *expect*. The ‘wise’ virgins believed the advise of others, and possibly their own previous experience which emphasized that rarely do things go according to plan. So they at least *expected* that there would be a good chance that they would need extra oil. However, the case of the ‘wise’ builder is even more clear on this point. Because of what he had heard and possibly even observed about the weather patterns, and because of the evidence he could see of past storms in the lay of the land, he believed that storms happen. And when they did, anything that was built on the sand would get washed away! So, even though it may have been a long time since there had been a storm, and even though it may have been an exceptionally dry year when he built his house, he *expected* that sooner or later *there would be a storm*, and therefore he *must* build on the rock.



This brings us to the often overlooked *message* of the parable of the wise and foolish builders. In Matthew 7:24 and 26, Jesus says,

Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock.

And,

Now, everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

A big part of the problem is that ‘foolish’ people don’t think they are ‘foolish.’ As it says in James 1:22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” So, brothers and sisters, what about us? Are we content with a shallow understanding of the meaning these parables and just listening to their warnings? Are we so caught up with our own agendas and our own interpretation of life that we are willing to deceive ourselves into being content with leaning on our own understanding and having a superficial spirituality? Or do we recognize our need to build our lives on *the Rock*? Are we willing to submit and surrender to the ‘oil’ of the Holy Spirit so He can not only implant but develop in us a new nature, and make us safe to bring into God’s eternally secure kingdom? Do we believe the advice God has given us in His word, and

expect that the storm predicted in His prophecies will indeed happen soon? Are doing what we can to prepare both spiritually and physically for the coming crisis? Let's prayerfully follow the advice in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." Let's be sure our faith and trust is in God and His word, and be sure we that we *know* Him.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliess, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:11-12.

"Preparing to Stand"

Jim Buller

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