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¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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“Double Witted”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Almighty and loving God, we come from the cruel dark world seeking your light today. Illuminate our eyes and warm our hearts with your Holy Word this day. In Jesus’ precious Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **40 miles** south east of here, along the banks of a sleepy little meandering creek, a fellow named **Colonel Edwin Drake** drilled the first successful oil well 168 years ago for the **Pennsylvania Rock Oil Company**, and the world has never been the same since. Oil is as indispensable part of our everyday lives; in fact, so indispensable, that today, hiccups in the price of crude oil immediately send **shockwaves throughout the global economy**. That’s how utterly dependent on oil we’ve become in the last century and a half. And yet **when Colonel Drake** was drilling his well, all he was doing was looking for a reliable source of kerosene so people could keep their lanterns burning at night.

So where did those 5 foolish bridesmaids go to buy oil for their lamps in the middle of the night some 2,000 years ago. Why to the first century equivalent of the 19th century’s Colonel Edwin Drake. Back then, the energy tycoons weren’t yet extracting oil from rocks, hence its name **mineral oil**. They were extracting oil from olives, hence its name **vegetable oil**. But be the oil from minerals or vegetables the purpose was still the same—to fuel the lamps that **create the light** which so effectively chasses the darkness away.

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As I was reading the *Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*, I got to wondering about where those foolish bridesmaids went in the middle of the night to buy oil. Where there first-century equivalents to **Country Fair's** and **Kwik Fills** that were open 24/7? **Well there must have been**, because Jesus tells us those five foolish bridesmaids came back with their lamps filled, but when they knocked on the door to join the wedding feast, the groom sternly called out from behind the locked door, **"I don't know you!"** **And there was weeping**, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Oil is, and always has been, an indispensable part of people's lives.

PAUSE

Move I.

Now the parable isn't really about the bridesmaids and their oil or lack thereof. In a parable, the storyteller uses things in one realm to illustrate things in another realm. So, in Jesus' "*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*," Jesus is using experiences of first-century Jewish wedding customs to illustrate something that isn't about bridesmaids, or weddings, or lamps, or oil at all. **So, what exactly is the "*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*" all about?** Well, we don't have to look very far to find the answer. In fact, in the very first line of the parable Jesus tells us exactly what the parable is about. **In Matthew 25:1 (NRSV) Jesus says, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom."** So, what the "*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*" is real really about is what's it's like in God's kingdom, the **kingdom of heaven**. Jesus is using things in the earthly realm to illustrate things in the heavenly realm.

Here in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has actually been telling lots of parables all aimed at illustrating some aspect of what it's like in the kingdom of heaven. If you scan through Matthew's Gospel, you'll find that the "*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*" is the tenth and final of Jesus' parables about what it's like in God's kingdom. These parables are easy to spot because they all start using the exact same phrase. **"The kingdom of heaven is like..."**

1. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed... (Mat 13:24)
2. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... (Matthew 13:31)
3. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast... (Mathew 13:33)
4. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field... (Mat 13:44)
5. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls... (Mat 13:45)
6. The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake... (Ma 13: 47)
7. The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasurers as well as old... (Mat 13:52)

I love how Matthew runs through that series of parables in rapid fire succession. There inside the span of just 28 verses, Matthews has compiled seven complete parables each illustrating a different aspect of what it's like in the kingdom of heaven. **Now Matthew is a Jew** writing for Jews so the way he organizes things frequently has meaning that while obvious to most Jews, would likely slide right past us non-Jewish gentiles. To a good Jew the number **seven is the number of spiritual perfection**. So, it's more than just a coincidence that Matthew consolidates these seven parables together, the very number of parables themselves—seven—serves to illustrate the spiritual perfect that exist within the kingdom of heaven.

But a moment ago, I told you that *The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids* is the tenth and final of Jesus' parables recorded in Matthew's Gospel. The remaining parables are each longer than the first seven, but they too start with that same familiar phrase. **"The kingdom of heaven is like..."**

8. The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard... (Mat 20:1)

9. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son... (Mat 22:2)

And that brings us to our Bible lesson today in here in Matthew 25.

10. The kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids... (Mat 25:1)

Once again it's no coincidence that **Matthew adds these more parables bring the total to 10**, because every good Jew knows that 10 is the number of **physical perfection**, so the kingdom of heaven isn't only perfect in the spiritual realm its perfect in the physical realm too.

Yes, the parable of the ten bridesmaids really isn't about the bridesmaids and their oil or lack thereof.

End I.

Move II.

Rather the parable is about living both now and forever. Over the centuries, there have been thousands and thousands of sermons preached on the ***“Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids.”*** And I’m sure that most of those sermons picked up on the parables’ **eschatological overtones**. Can anyone tell me what **eschatology** is? (Wait for answer.) Well, any word ending in **“ology”** means **“the study of.”** So, eschatology is “the study of” the **escaton** and escaton is a Greek word meaning **“the end.”** So, putting it together, something with eschatological overtones is something that hints at what it will be like at the end of time.

Throughout the New Testament, the Bible writers use marriage as an analogy to describe the relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church. This analogy pictures Jesus Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as Christ’s bride. All of human history serves as a long courtship between Jesus Christ and the Church or more generally between God and humanity. But at the end of time, the marriage is finally consummated, and the bride and groom and their wedding guest head off to the mother of all wedding receptions. **Most brides** will select the most beautiful hall they can possibly afford for their reception.

We imagine for a moment a wedding reception held in the halls of heaven. The **streets are paved with gold**, a **fountain flows clear as crystal** from the middle of the room, and the **tables are set with the finest silver and the best china**. This truly will be the mother of all wedding receptions because it won’t just be stunning and spectacular; it will literally be downright “heavenly.” This is the banquet we refer whenever **we take communion** when we look forward to the time when *“Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.”* This is the time Jesus is talking about in his *“Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids.”* The time at the end of time when the long courtship has finally come to an end **and the much-anticipated marriage has begun.**

Of course, the “*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*” is really an allegory—an extended metaphor. Jesus is using things on earth to represent things in heaven. So, let’s match up this wedding allegory. We already know that **bridegroom is Jesus Christ**, and that **the bride is the Church**, spelt with a capital C. But who exactly are the 10 bridesmaids? We most commentators agree that the bridesmaids represent the people within the Church. I trust you’re all following this allegory thus far.

But the part of the allegorical parable that I want to **focus in on today are the roles of the lamps and their oil**. What do these simple earthly things represent in the heavenly realm? As I looked at the interpretations of a number of Biblical commentators, I noticed that none offered an interpretation for **the lamps and their oil**. So, my engineering mind began to fill in the gap. First century lamps were **clay pots** used to channel fuel, **olive oil**, to a spout where it **burns** giving off light. So here the lamp—the clay pot—represent the **physical** body. After all, lamps are made of simple earthly elements, and bodies are made of simple earthly elements too. And you must have the lamp to produce the light.

On the other hand, the oil is the shapeless fluid that fuels the fire. So, if the lamp represents the physical, the oil must represent the **spiritual**. And that’s what **human life** is, the coming together of the physical and the spiritual. And when the lamp and the oil come together—they produce that glowing flame that chases the darkness away. So, the lamp and the oil lead us to understand that in heaven just as on earth, **we are** simultaneously and inseparably physical and spiritual beings. But it takes both, the physical and the spiritual to **enter the great wedding feast** at the end of time. So, the “*Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*” isn’t about the bridesmaids, or the lamps, or the oil. **Rather the parable is about living both now and forever.**

End II.

Move III.

So, live as fully in God’s Spirit as you live in God’s world. The **ancient Greek philosophers** taught that the physical is corrupt, possibly even evil while only the spiritual is wholesome and good. This led those Greek philosophers to believe that the object of life was to **shed the physical while embracing the spiritual.** I’ve long been amazed at how much those ancient philosophies continue to dominate people’s thinking today. All I can tell you is that has never been what God has **revealed in the Bible.** **God made a body for Adam** out of the dust of the earth and God and breathed into that body the breath of life and God declared that it was good. God never said the physical is bad while the spiritual is good. No, God has made for each of us a body and a soul, and together with the rest of God’s created in **Genesis 1:31 (NRSV)** “**God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.**” God has given each of us a clay pot—a body—to live in and God has likewise given each us some oil—a spirit—to make that body alive. When the body and the spirit come together, there is life—there is light.

As I was reading about “*The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids,*” one of the interpretations I came across **attributed the oil** as being a reservoir of good deeds that each individual builds up. Equating oil to “good works” or “obedience” finds its roots in the ancient commentaries of **the old Jewish rabbis** called Midrash. Remember the Bible never made this connection, this was the old Rabbis interpreting the Hebrew scriptures. Then as I was looking on **YouTube** for videos about “*The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids,*” I can across a video with more than 70,000 views that equates the oil with “good deeds” too. This high-production value music video is called “*They that Are Wise*” and probably cost in excess of \$100,000 to produce.

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{**Play Video: “*They that Are Wise-Clip.wmv*” [0:50]}**}

A drop for an act of kindness
 A drop for a righteous deed.
 Another drop is given, for helping those in need.
 A drop of oil is added, for every time we care.
 For every hour of selfless service
 For every humble prayer.
 And when we wake at midnight
 To go and meet the Lord.
 Lives lived by righteousness, lead us to our reward.

As great as that song sounds, I found that interpretation of Jesus’ parable disturbing. I can’t recall Jesus ever teaching anything like that. In fact, it actually flies in the face of important verses in the Bible like **Titus 3:5 (KJV)** “**Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.**” I then looked a bit further and found that that music video was produced by the **Church of the Latter-Day Saints**, you know the Mormons.

What you need to remember about “*The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*” is that **both** the wise and the foolish bridesmaids were friends of the bride. They **both** had been faithful and they **both** were expecting the bridegroom to come. And when the bridegroom’s arrival was delayed, they **both** fell asleep. Both were relying on their wits. But the **foolish bridesmaids** were single witted, being wise in the ways of the world. They were relying on their own limited supply of righteousness, which had run out leaving them as **empty clay pots**. But the **wise bridesmaids** were double witted. They were wise in the ways of the world, but they were also wise in the ways of God. They had tapped into Christ’s limitless supply of righteousness and were **fully alive** in both body and soul. So, when the bridegroom arrived, he saw their lights and let them **feast with him** at his heavenly banquet table. **So, please live fully in God’s Spirit as you live in God’s world.**

End III.

Conclusion: Oil is an indispensable part of our everyday lives. Oil from Drakes' well to keep our earthly lights burning, and oil from Christ's well to keep our spiritual lights burning. *The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids isn't about the bridesmaids and their oil or lack thereof. Rather the parable is about living both now and forever.* It's about the kingdom of heaven. **So, please live fully in God's Spirit as you live in God's world.** When Jesus comes don't be found as a single witted empty clay pot, be found as a "*Double Witted*" spiritual child of God with Christ's oil in your lamp, and your flame glowing brightly.

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your Son Jesus who supplies us with spiritual oil so we can live not only here on the earth, but also in the halls of heaven. Come Lord Jesus, come. **Amen!**

10:30 Closing Hymn: "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" Red Hymnal No. 452

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Are you an empty clay pot? Have you been trying to produce your own oil, only to have your flame sputter out when you grow weary? Then let Jesus give you oil in your lamp. Go forth and keep on burning, burning, burning, till the light of Day. **And all of God's people said...Amen!**