

To Be a Wise Virgin

By Roald Peterson, 26 November 2013

Parable of the Ten Virgins

In Matthew we find the parable of the ten virgins. While it applies to Christians of any era, it can be considered a parable of the last days and second coming of Christ. Here is the parable as recorded in Chapter 25:

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out 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 gone out.

9 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.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: 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 neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

(Matthew 25:1–13)

The Meaning of the Parable

In this parable the bridegroom represents Christ and the virgins represent members of his church or those who have made covenants to be his disciples. The number 10 is symbolic of a complete portion, or in this case, the Lord's portion, further indicating that these are the Lord's covenant people. They were waiting for the bridegroom to come so they could be married to him. Symbolically, to be married to Christ is to be accepted as his disciple and to be an heir to salvation and all he inherits from the Father.

Just as important as the number 10 is the fact that there were five foolish and five wise virgins. At one time I thought this had reference to half to virgins being wise and half foolish. It is a sobering thought to think of half of those who are actively awaiting the coming of Christ falling short of the goal. Since then, I have come to better understand the meaning of five, and I now feel that a 50% success rate is far too optimistic.

The number five is associated with choice. On one hand (five fingers) you can choose this way. On the other hand (five fingers) is another way. It is sometimes overlooked because we see the total number 10 instead of remembering that there are five and five, virgins choosing to be wise and virgins choosing to be foolish. To be wise or foolish is entirely dependent upon the choices we make.

All the virgins had lamps, something to light the way, representing the gift of the Holy Ghost. All

of them did something beyond what the common people of the world do – they went forth to meet the bridegroom. They weren't passive, they were active. It was nighttime and when the bridegroom didn't come immediately they all slumbered and slept. This darkness could easily represent the darkness of this side of the veil, the shadow land of mortality that we live in. That they all slept could be considered mortality where we are asleep to spiritual things. This could also mean the spiritual death that we find ourselves in because of the fall. The only difference between the wise and foolish up to this point is that the foolish brought no extra oil outside of what was in their lamps.

When the call came to go and meet the bridegroom, they all awoke, but the foolish virgins' lamps had gone out because their oil was exhausted. They were thus left in a time of darkness without light to see their way to the marriage – their marriage to the bridegroom. They asked the wise virgins to share their oil but were refused – lest there not be enough. We're not told what the oil represented but it was absolutely essential to enter the marriage. The lack of oil is the only difference between the virgins mentioned before the midnight call to come to the marriage. The real difference had to be some special preparation that happened in their lives before the point where the parable begins. Strangely enough, this absolutely essential piece of information, the key to the parable, is missing. While many people through the centuries have made guesses, even inspired guesses, as to what this special preparation consisted of, we had to wait until the Restoration for an authoritative definition.

While the foolish virgins went to find oil, or finish their preparations, the wise virgins went with the bridegroom into the marriage. No one knew exactly when the Savior would appear but the wise virgins were ready when he came to meet them. Then, ominously, the parable says the door was shut – and when the foolish virgins later asked to enter they were rejected. There is a time of probation given to prepare to meet God and if we waste the days of our probation we will find ourselves shut out from his presence. To procrastinate is to run the risk of not being prepared when it is time to meet the Savior, whether at the second coming, upon our death, or any other time he should choose after giving us ample opportunity to prepare. So what is this preparation?

What It Means To Be Wise

In section 45 of the Doctrine & Covenants the Lord provided a revelation to Joseph Smith concerning the last days. In this revelation he referred to the parable of the 10 virgins and described the preparation that the oil represented. It was something that the wise virgins had done that the foolish virgins had not.

56 And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins.

57 For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.

58 And the earth shall be given unto them for an inheritance; and they shall multiply and wax strong, and their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation.

59 For the Lord shall be in their midst, and his glory shall be upon them, and he will be their king and their lawgiver. (D&C 45:56–59)

The difference between the wise and foolish virgins' preparation – what the oil represented – consisted of three things: first, they received the truth. Second, they had taken the Holy Spirit for their guide. Third, they had not been deceived. Each of these deserves greater elaboration.

Receive the Truth

Jesus received all truth from the Father and is the source of truth for the fallen world. To receive a fullness of truth would include receiving him.

- 24 And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;
- 25 And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.
- 26 The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;
- 27 And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.
- 28 He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:24–28)

All the virgins must have received truth or they would not have been waiting for the Bridegroom. So the difference between the virgins must be how much they were willing to receive and what they were willing receive. Since some of the virgins saw the Bridegroom and the foolish did not, the wise received knowledge which allowed them to see Deity. There is a lesser gospel and a greater gospel. The lesser is sometimes known as preparatory, and the greater is known as the fullness. A revelation on the priesthood given to Joseph Smith contrasts these two Gospels and gives an example of what happens when people reject the fullness.

- 19 And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God...
- 22 For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.
- 23 Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;
- 24 But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath ... swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.
- 25 Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;
- 26 And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;
- 27 Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments... (Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–27)

Jesus states that his purpose is to bring men unto the Father. To reject the fullness of the gospel which brings us to the Father is to reject truth and to receive a lesser portion, along with its lesser reward.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

It is a sad fact that few people, even among the members of the Lord's kingdom, seem to be willing to receive the fullness.

Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7:14)

The Lord adds more detail to this verse in the Doctrine and Covenants:

For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. (D&C 132:22)

These verses state that people who do not find the path to exaltation and receive Christ in the world do not find the way to exaltation. Since the Lord has promised that if we seek we shall find, we have to conclude that the reason people do not find a fullness is because they are not seeking for it, or they are not seeking with sufficient faith. Nephi saw this as a common characteristic of most people and exclaimed,

And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be. (2 Nephi 32:7)

Many members of the church think of nonmembers as Gentiles and apply the following verse to them because they reject the Book of Mormon, thinking that the Bible is sufficient. What some members do not realize is that the Book of Mormon's use of the term Gentiles also applies to them, and their refusal to receive greater truth can be summarized by reading the same verse while substituting the word "gospel" for "Bible."

And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. (2 Nephi 29:3)

Receiving the fullness of the gospel is so important that the rejection of it by the Gentiles will signal the time of the gospel being taken from the Gentiles and given to the house of Israel.

10 And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

11 And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them. (3 Nephi 16:10–11)

Wise virgins seek greater truth, and when they find it they incorporate it into their lives and diligently strive to live according to the truth. This pattern allows them to receive a fullness of knowledge.

9...It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. (Alma 12:9-10)

Take the Holy Spirit for Your Guide

An integral part of receiving the truth is determining whether things we hear and learn are really true. We shouldn't receive something as true unless we successfully test it. Is it from a reliable source, such as a prophet? Does it come from canonical works (the scriptures) and do we understand it correctly? However, the most reliable test is whether it is confirmed or taught by the Holy Ghost.

19 And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

20 If it be some other way it is not of God. (D&C 50:19–20)

While God will not force knowledge upon his children, he never intended for us to go through life without his guidance. We have three sources of revelation – a triad of truth. To rely on only one or two of these sources leaves us vulnerable. All three legs are required for a reliable and stable foundation. The first is scripture, the writings of prophets and inspired men who have dealt with God in the past. The second source of revelation is living apostles and prophets. The third and most important source is personal revelation. While it can culminate in a visitation by Christ and even the Father when we reach a certain point in our spiritual progress, its primary mediums are the Light of Christ and the whisperings of the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Godhead.

Liahona Teaches About the Holy Ghost

When Lehi and his family journeyed from Jerusalem to the promise land they were guided by a sacred compass known as the Liahona. Not only would it point the way, words would appear on it from time to time to provide other instructions, according to the heed and diligence they gave to it.

28 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

29 And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things. (1 Nephi 16:28–29)

In the first part of their journey, direction by the Liahona was given "from time to time." But in the second part of the journey, as they traveled by ship upon the ocean, they would have had to look at the Liahona constantly throughout the day and night. A ship's compass is always placed where the helmsman can see it.

This is a wonderful allegorical type of receiving guidance from the Holy Ghost. When we first start out, guidance comes from time to time. But as we learn to follow his direction in our journey to Christ, the real promise land, it becomes more frequent until we are constantly directed day and night by the Holy Ghost. This is what is meant by taking the Holy Spirit as one's guide.

Just as some are diligent in following the Spirit, there are those who are slothful and do not seek guidance, or do not follow guidance when it is given. When that happens their progress to the promise land falters and they do not reach their desired destination.

38 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.

39 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness.

40 And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

41 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

42 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

43 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

44 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promise land.

45 And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promise land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. (Alma 37:38–45)

Will we have enough light and truth for the darkest part of our journey? Will we progress until we are ready to meet the bridegroom? It all depends on how well we receive the words of Christ through personal revelation. Do we seek active communication with the Holy Ghost, or are we content with passive inspiration only? Or do we ignore it altogether?

Holy Ghost is Sanctifier

While it is not often taught, the Holy Ghost is not only a comforter and a revelator, he is also the Sanctifier. If we wish to prepare for the presence of Christ we need to be sanctified, or holy. This is the end result of spending a lot of time with the Holy Ghost; our spirits and physical bodies are renewed from a telestial state to a terrestrial or higher state.

33 For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

34 They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

35 And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord; (D&C 84:33–35)

Women, although not priesthood holders, nevertheless make covenants via the priesthood both in and outside the temple, and are not excluded from similar blessings.

To take the Holy Spirit as our guide is to be actively led to Christ, and to be prepared to stand in his presence when he appears.

Be Not Deceived

The third attribute of wise virgins is to not be deceived, and it rightfully follows the other two attributes. If we do not receive the full truth because we reject parts of it, we are deceived. If we do not complete our journey to Christ under the guidance of the Spirit because other things are more important, we are deceived. If we receive and embrace false doctrines, we are deceived.

In Lehi's dream of the tree of life (Nephi 8) there was a rod of iron leading to the tree. The rod represented the word of God, and a person could follow it all the way to the tree as long as he continued pressing forward and kept his hand on the rod. But the rod also passed through a perilous environment. On one side was a river of filthy water that people could fall into and drown. It also passed through mists of darkness which represented the temptations of the adversary, used to blind men and turn them from the truth. To successfully reach the tree a person had to press forward holding to the word of God. To press forward is not simply moving along a path, but also implies continually receiving greater knowledge of the path and its destination. The temptation to say we have enough truth and reject further light and knowledge is to take our hand from the iron rod and wander in darkness.

11 And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:11)

We may be members of the church, fully active and involved in church programs, but unless we are actively seeking and following the words of Christ given through his prophets, the Scriptures, and the Holy Ghost, we will find our focus is too much upon the things of the world to be chosen. We must be involved in doing the right things for the right reasons.

34 Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

35 Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men... (D&C 121:34–35)

Another dangerous deception is the embracing of pernicious doctrines. Satan has had many centuries to practice leading people away from the truth. His lies are not confined to the “realm of religion,” but can be found in all areas of knowledge, such as politics, science, literature, art, music, economics, ethics, and social science. If we do not know the doctrines of the gospel as we should we can be easily led astray. There are many lies masquerading as knowledge which may seem reasonable on the surface, or even a path to a higher plateau, but instead they lead us away from following the true path and they create holes in our spiritual armor which allow the adversary to attack our testimony of Christ and his Gospel. If we know our Scriptures because we have spent time searching them, and if we are familiar with the voice of the Spirit because we have been following it, when we look carefully at pernicious doctrines and follow them to their logical conclusion, we find that they cannot stand in the light, but that they deny the power of resurrection, the power of the atonement, or the perfection of God. Or they cloud the gospel path or tempt people to procrastinate their preparations to meet God, etc.

Conclusion

We cannot afford to judge our attitudes or our actions by the attitudes and actions of the others, even other members of the church, for there will be wise and foolish virgins together, side-by-side, until the very end.

53 These things are the things that ye must look for; and, speaking after the manner of the Lord, they are now nigh at hand, and in a time to come, even in the day of the coming of the Son of Man.

54 And until that hour there will be foolish virgins among the wise; and at that hour cometh an entire separation of the righteous and the wicked; and in that day will I send mine angels to pluck out the wicked and cast them into unquenchable fire. (D&C 63:53–54)

If we are to be counted wise virgins we must be actively pursuing the true gospel path, continually learning and growing, following the Spirit, and not allowing ourselves to be led astray by following the temptations of the world. We must look unto Christ in all things and at all times, until his word and Spirit reign supreme in our renewed hearts.