

N.T. LESSON 22

INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU

(Matthew 25)

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Please e-mail me with suggestions, questions, concerns and comment at tedgibbons@yahoo.com. I would love to hear from you.

As I have been working on this lesson I have been impressed with how little of the material that is contained in these weekly blocks can be explored and discussed in the few pages and few hours that are available for this presentation. I have a great fear that someone will one day say, I learned the New Testament from Ted Gibbons's lessons at LDSLIVING. If you mean to learn the New Testament, you must invest your time in the book, in the verses and the words and the footnotes (especially the JST footnotes), and the other study aids, together with the words of the living prophets. The most that these lessons can do for you is to give you a brief glimpse of some of the treasures contained in this repository of Christian History.

I will accept the responsibility to conduct a guided tour through the chapters designated for each lesson, attempting to point out and explain some of the scriptural landmarks and historical insights and personal applications associated with the journey. But we will never have time to stop and explore every significant point, especially since the interests of those traveling with us vary so widely. So make a careful, initial journey by yourself. Take a marking pencil and a pad of paper and a simple prayer along. Call it a treasure hunt. And let the Holy Spirit teach you in the way that teaching really ought to happen.

I. JESUS PRESENTS THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (Matthew 25:1-13)

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.

The parable is based on an accurate if sketchy account of a typical mid-eastern wedding celebration. The ten virgins—bride's maids—waiting for the wedding party found the length of the wait unexpected. "The bridegroom tarried." Thus those who had only the oil in their lamps found themselves in darkness when they awoke to an announcement of the imminent arrival of the bridegroom. Knowing that time was critical, and that once the bridegroom passed it would be difficult to catch up with him, they pled with those who had brought both vessels of oil and lamps filled with oil, to share. This the wise would not (could not!) do. Their generosity might cause all of them to be left in darkness. While the foolish went to collect more oil, the bridegroom came, the wise went with him into the marriage, and the foolish, when they arrived found themselves barred from participation.

The central issue of this parable of preparation is oil. . . oil that has something to do with being prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom, which is certainly the Second Coming of Christ. And since it is a parable, the oil must refer to something other than the pure olive oil burned in the small clay lamps or soaked rags of flaming torches used then to light the darkness. D&C 45 offers this explanation of the matter:

39 And it shall come to pass that he that feareth me shall be looking forth for the great day of the Lord to come, even for the signs of the coming of the Son of Man.

44 And then they shall look for me, and, behold, I will come; and they shall see me in the clouds of heaven, clothed with power and great glory; with all the holy angels; and he that watches not for me shall be cut off.

45 But before the arm of the Lord shall fall, an angel shall sound his trump, and the saints that have slept shall come forth to meet me in the cloud.

47 Then shall the arm of the Lord fall upon the nations.

50 And calamity shall cover the mocker, and the scorner shall be consumed; and they that have watched for iniquity shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.

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. *(Emphasis added)*

These passages make clear that this precious oil that prepares us to meet and greet the Lord is symbolic of our access to and our sensitivity to the prompting and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The issue here is this one: "Have we taken the Holy Spirit for our guide?" 2 Nephi 32:5 promises that if we "receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do." But how do we acquire the oil? Spencer W. Kimball explained:

In the parable, oil can be purchased at the market. In our lives the oil of preparedness is accumulated drop by drop in righteous living. Attendance at sacrament meetings adds oil to our lamps, drop by drop over the years. Fasting, family prayer, home teaching, control of bodily appetites, preaching the gospel, studying the scriptures—each act of dedication and obedience is a drop added to our store. Deeds of kindness, payment of offerings and tithes, chaste thoughts and actions, marriage in the covenant for eternity—these, too, contribute importantly to the oil with which we can at midnight refuel our exhausted lamps. (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, p.256)

This explanation makes it clear why those who were prepared could not fill the lamps of

those who were not. If this oil is acquired by personal righteousness, then it is impossible for one to share with another. I cannot go to sacrament meeting for my sons, not can I say personal prayers for my daughters. I can pray for them, but those are my prayers, not theirs. And if someone should suddenly determine that the coming of the bridegroom is at hand, they might not have time to re-evaluate, repent, re-supply and return before the door closes.

The approach of the new millennium has caused many stores to stock lamps and the oil to light them. Buy a bottle of this oil (it comes in several beautiful colors) and place it on the table in your kitchen. Let it serve as a reminder of the importance of having a sufficient supply ready at all times. You might even consider a family activity in which the family searches for an "oil well" together—a place to serve and bless the lives of others, and then performs a selfless, even secret act of service for someone else.

The request of the five foolish virgins to *borrow* oil for their lamps has led to interesting and powerful comments from church leaders over the years. Consider the following prophetic insights about borrowed light:

We will not be able to travel through life on borrowed light. The light of life must be part of our very being. The voice we must learn to heed is the voice of the Spirit (James E. Faust, "The Voice of the Spirit," *Ensign*, Apr. 1994, 8).

Our number one responsibility is to see that we are converted, and then to convert others. . . . The time is here when each of you must stand on your own feet. Be converted, because no one can endure on borrowed light. You will have to be guided by the light within yourself. If you do not have it, you will not stand (Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye In Holy Places*, p.95).

. . . we say to all the Latter-day Saints, these trials through which we are now passing will have the effect to prove the Saints and those who are only Saints in name. Those who have been careful to keep oil in their lamps, now have the needed light to guide them; and those who have been living in borrowed light, or in that furnished by others, may find themselves in perplexity and uncertain as to the path to pursue (James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, Vol.3, p.17)

Let me say to you, that many of you will see the time when you will have all the trouble, trial and persecution that you can stand, and plenty of opportunities to show that you are true to God and his work. This [p.450] Church has before it many close places through which it will have to pass before the work of God is crowned with victory. To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. The difficulties will be of such a character

that the man or woman who does not possess this personal knowledge or witness will fall. If you have not got the testimony, live right and call upon the Lord and cease not till you obtain it. If you do not you will not stand . . . Remember these sayings, for many of you will live to see them fulfilled. The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand? (Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, p.450)

II. JESUS PRESENTS THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Matthew 25:14-30)

14 ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering

where thou hast not strowed:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The happy coincidence of the word the Savior uses in this parable [talents] being the very word in our language these talents represent (talents) is an added blessing. President Kimball taught that the message of this parable is that “God expects us to use our talents.” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.149)

The parable seems to teach that we do not all have the same number of talents, or talents of the same apparent value. I attended a stake conference years ago with a non-member acquaintance with whom I hoped to do some missionary work. The speaker, an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, was not a particularly gifted orator and my friend said as much when we left the meeting. I had invited him to hear one of the Lord’s anointed servants, and he had only heard a man who did not speak with great power. Other General Authorities might have given more dramatic sermons. But the fact is that not all of us have the same talents, nor the same number of talents. It is also true that some talents are much more obvious than others. Some of those talents we may not ever recognize as gifts from our Heavenly Father.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton taught:

Let me mention a few gifts that are not always evident or noteworthy but that are very important. Among these may be your gifts—gifts not so evident but nevertheless real and valuable.

Let us review some of these less-conspicuous gifts: the gift of asking; the gift of listening; the gift of hearing and using a still small voice; the gift of

being able to weep; the gift of avoiding contention; the gift of being agreeable;; the gift of avoiding vain repetition; the gift of seeking that which is righteous; the gift of not passing judgement; the gift of looking to God for guidance; the gift of being a disciple; the gift of caring for others; the gift of being able to ponder; the gift of offering prayer; the gift of bearing mighty testimony; and the gift of receiving the Holy Ghost. (C.R., Oct. 1987, p. 23, or Ensign, Nov. 1987, p. 20)

But whatever those talents might be, the Lord has told us to use and develop them, and he has suggested how to do so. In D&C 46, the Lord, speaking of gifts of the Spirit, says that they are given, "That all may be benefited . . ." (46:9); "that all may be profited thereby" (46:12); "given to every man to profit withal" (46:16); "that every member may be profited thereby." (46:29)

This remarkable parable teaches that even though the number and apparent value of talents may differ, the reward for employing them usefully is precisely the same. Both the servant with five who returned ten, and the servant with two who returned four were told, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21,23) But for that servant who had but one talent and buried it, the response was terrifying: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30) President Kimball, speaking of this, taught:

Likewise, the Church member who has the attitude of leaving it to others will have much to answer for. There are many who say: "My wife does the Church work!" Others say, "I'm just not the religious kind," as though it does not take effort for most people to serve and do their duty. But God has endowed us with talents and time, with latent abilities and with opportunities to use and develop them in his service. He therefore expects much of us, his privileged children. The parable of the talents is a brilliant summary of the many scriptural passages outlining promises for the diligent and penalties for the slothful. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.149)

Orson F. Whitney summarized beautifully:

This, brothers, sisters, and friends, is the whole history of the world in a nutshell. This is what you and I are doing day by day--either adding unto and upon that talent which God has given us, be it small or great, or we are neglecting it and are preparing to meet just such a judgment as was pronounced upon the unfaithful steward in the parable. No one on this broad earth, will have it to say truthfully at the judgment seat of God, "Father, you gave me nothing; I have nothing to render up." All men have

received something from the Great Creator. All men have received a measure of light and intelligence, and it is not for an individual or any set of individuals to sit in judgment upon the dispensations of the Almighty and say, "You have given me something so small that it was unworthy of improvement, and I have added nothing to it." (Collected Discourses, Vol.1, Orson F. Whitney, June 24, 1888)

III. JESUS PRESENTS THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (Matthew 25:31-46)

31 ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 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:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave

me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

These three parables delivered on the Mount of Olives during the week of the atonement are probably intended to demonstrate the ways in which we must be prepared at the coming of the Lord if we hope to escape the burning and be permitted to remain with him on earth. The first teaches us that we must be obedient, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The second teaches us that we must build the kingdom. This third parable, called the parable of the sheep and the goats, teaches us that we must serve our fellow men.

I have taught on occasion that the clearest evidence of our discipleship is the response we have to those who are in misery. What do we do when we discover those who are hungry or thirsty or strangers or naked or sick or in prison? When we find ourselves in the vicinity of a soul consumed by sorrow, how do we react? If in fact it is Lucifer's goal that all men should be miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:18,27), and if it the Savior's goal that we should have joy (2 Nephi 2:25), then the discovery of a soul in anguish is a call to action. The Lord has talked about this many times in the scriptures. Consider the following:

- ' (Deut. 15:11) Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.
- ' (Luke 3:11) He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.
- ' (Luke 6:35) Lend, hoping for nothing again.
- ' (Luke 11:41) Give alms of such things as ye have. . .
- ' (Luke 14:13) But when thou makes a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.

- ' (1 Tim 6:18) Do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute . . .
- ' (Jacob 2:17) Be familiar with all and free with your substance . . .
- ' (Mosiah 4:16) Succor those that stand in need of your succor . . . administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need.
- ' (Mormon 8:39) Why do ye . . . suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?
- ' (D&C 104:18) Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.

What the Lord expects of us in practical application can be read in much of our literature.

Elder Monson, for example, shared this story in General Conference in 1981:

Old Bob came into our lives in an interesting way. He was a widower in his eighties when the house in which he was living was to be demolished. I heard him tell my grandfather his plight as the three of us sat on the old front porch swing. With a plaintive voice, he said to grandfather, "Mr. Condie, I don't know what to do. I have no family. I have no place to go. I have no money." I wondered how grandfather would answer. Slowly grandfather reached into his pocket and took from it that old leather purse from which, in response to my hounding, he had produced many a penny or nickel for a special treat. This time he removed a key and handed it to Old Bob. Tenderly he said, "Bob, here is the key to that house I own next door. Take it. Move in your things. Stay as long as you like. There will be no rent to pay and nobody will ever put you out again." (P.66)

This is a wonderful example of the phrase, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." (Matthew 25:35)

We are not permitted not to care. If we have a hope of heaven and a longing for that promised heavenly embrace, then the sorrows and problems and agonies of others must be our sorrows and problems and agonies. But we live in a society where "the love of many shall wax cold" (JS-M 1:10); and where people "are without affection" and "hate their own blood" (Moses 7:33); and where men are "lovers of their own selves" and "without natural affection." (2 Tim. 3:2,3)

Years ago I attended a graduation at BYU in which Elie Weisel, a great humanitarian,

was awarded an honorary doctorate. In the citation for that degree I read these words, written by Mr. Weisel:

If there is one word that describes all the woes and threats that exist today, it's indifference. You see a tragedy on television for three minutes and then comes something else and something else. Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil. The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of care is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference. (One hundred and fourteenth summer commencement exercises at Brigham Young University, August 17, 1989.)

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Lord has condemned indifference in even more dramatic terms. We must care for the lonely and the lost and the hungry and the stranger and the incarcerated and the naked. We must fight misery in every way that we can.

CONCLUSION

One day, the Lord will call a halt to misery, and put a final end to the ability of Lucifer to disrupt and disturb the affairs of men.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

But until that time we are responsible to wipe away the tears, to ease the sorrow and the crying and the pain. Brigham Young testified:

You cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be preparing for celestial glory, while the meanest menial under your charge or control is in want of the smallest thing which God has given you power to supply. (From a proclamation declaring January 1, 1852 a "Day of Praise and Thanksgiving." Reprinted in the Ensign, November 1971, pp. 40,41)

And remember that we must take the Holy Spirit for our guide if we mean to have oil in our lamps when the bridegroom comes.

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