

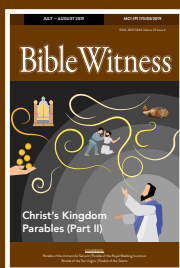
# Bible Witness



## Christ's Kingdom Parables (Part II)

### CONTENTS:

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant | Parable of the Royal Wedding Invitation  
Parable of the Ten Virgins | Parable of the Talents



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*All articles are adapted from Sunday sermons preached by  
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# Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

MATTHEW 18:23-35

*Prabhudas Koshy*

This parable is narrated by Jesus in the context of Peter's self-righteous question about how much he ought to forbear and forgive an offending brother—"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). In the light of Jesus' teaching of restoration in dealing with people's sin, Peter thought forgiving a brother for his repeated offence seven times would have been very magnanimous. Naturally, we are not prone to forgive people; we are all prone to avenge ourselves. We feel a perverse sweet sense of vindication when we get even with people who have offended us. "Serves him right, he deserves it!" That's what we like to say. Certainly, Peter failed to realise that just as "freely ye have received" forgiveness, ye ought also to "freely give" forgiveness to others (cf. Matthew 10:8b). He erred in proposing a (in his conceited mind, quite generous) cap on the number of times forgiveness should be extended. Jesus' measured answer must have put

the arrogant Peter in his place: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). The Lord then put forth this parable to drive home the limitless extent of forgiveness we must give.

## Our Accountability to the Sovereign God

This parable begins with this phrase, "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven ..." (v. 23a). It speaks of the kingdom of heaven as "likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants" (v. 23). This is most apt, as you can't have a kingdom without a king! The king sovereignly exercises his authority over his realm; he decides how the subjects of his kingdom should behave or serve him. No one in his kingdom should live as he likes and offends the king! He is the supreme authority, whose will all must

be concerned about. He assigns peculiar duties to his subjects, who all have to give an account. Nobody is allowed to escape the authority, the supervision, and the reckoning (i.e. examining) of the king himself.

The story proceeds: “And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents” (v. 24). Now, that’s an incredibly large sum of money! A simple comparison will astound the reader. It is said that under the Roman government, the nation of Israel, being roughly divided into four provinces (namely Idumaea, Judaea, Samaria and Galilee), would each year yield a total collection of 900 talents to the Roman government. That’s the amount of annual tax from these four regions. That should work out to 9,900 talents over 11 years. So just imagine, this man’s debt of 10,000 talents was more than 11

years of taxes! This officer owed the king about 11 years’ worth of taxes from these four provinces. That’s a lot of money! It is almost unpayable in one’s lifetime! Interestingly, the word “ten thousand” in Greek (*murion*) is one from which we get the English word “myriad”. Ten thousand was the maximum number that they would count in those days; it is really the largest numerical term the Greek language made allowance for in those days. So when the parable mentions “ten thousand” talents, it could actually mean innumerable! In fact, the New Testament translated this Greek word on a few occasions as “countless” or “myriads”.

The parable is intimating that this man owed the king an incalculable debt! It was so difficult, nay impossible, for him to pay back, as highlighted in v. 25—“But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.” He had nothing to pay the king. This signifies the state of every sinner, who is bankrupt in the sight of God! “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Every thought, every word and every deed, God will judge



one by one. We really have nothing to pay to appease God's wrath against our sins, for which we are accountable. As accountable moral creatures, Scripture tells us that "riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Proverbs 11:4). But "as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

## Our Utter Inability to Pay Our Sin-Debt

Back to the story of our parable. Even if the desperate officer were to comply with the king's command in allowing all his family to be sold into servitude and selling all his possessions, it would still not be sufficient to pay back the king! This represents the infinite sin-debt that every man owes God. Dear readers, the grievousness, the greatness, and the extent of your sins cannot be measured in terms of how many sins you have committed, but against *WHO* you have committed! A simple analogy will help our understanding here. An offensive insult against one's peer, though grievous, is not as grave as that against one's parent; but if it's directed against a judge, the severity increases – he may be put in prison! But because our sins are against God, the Judge of all the earth, the consequences are far more severe. Do realise that your sin, being against an infinite God, makes it infinitely worse. Don't ever make light of our sins! Without divine mercy given to us, there is no way out!

That's the picture the parable is highlighting here. Though this man

realised his inexcusable guilt, he failed to appreciate the magnitude of his immense debt (and thereby his lord's subsequent gracious offer to cancel that debt), as manifested in v. 26—"The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." This is where the trouble is—can he really pay all? Clearly, this particular servant was deluded at that moment. He was not thinking right; he would not be able to pay even if he sold everything that he owned and all his family members went into servitude. Surely, his proposal to his lord—that if his lord would be patient with him, he will repay him all of the 10,000 talents—was out of place!

Well, a lot of us are like that. When we are first convicted of our sin, we say, "Lord, I will never do it again." But then we soon find ourselves doing it again, don't we? We must come to the Lord, humbly confessing, "Lord, I have no power to live a righteous life. I've tried but failed. I don't know how ... in me is nothing good. Please help me." Truly, as Paul admitted, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing ... For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do ... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:18-19, 24-25a). Ours should not be the attitude of that officer. It is all a matter of mercy from the sovereign King. Our becoming a Christian, our living and serving as a Christian, has nothing to do with our own righteousness, but everything to do with the mercy of God only! May God forgive all of our foolish claims!

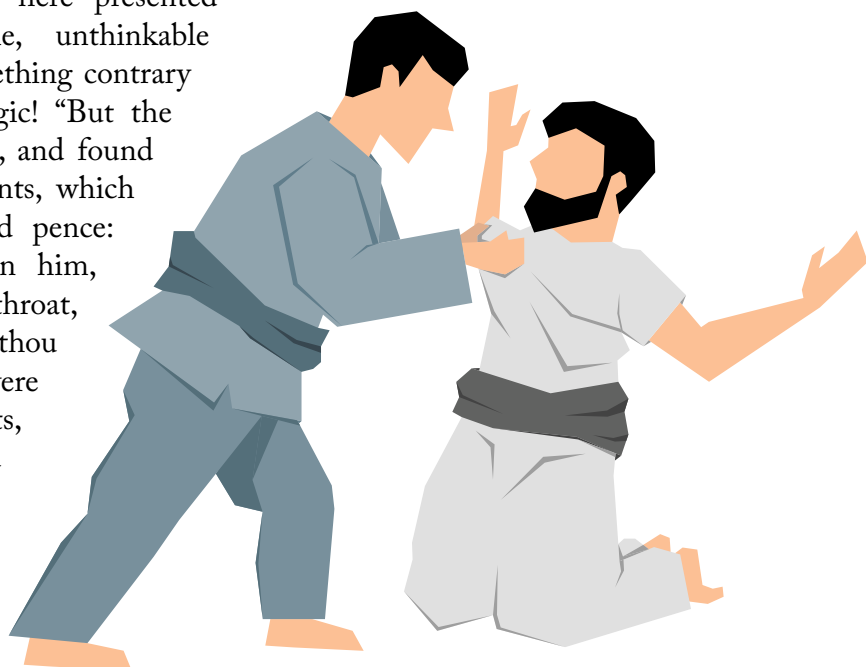
## Our Moral Obligation to Forgive Others

What we read in v. 27 should warm our hearts: “Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.” The king did not chide the man for his foolish and worthless offer; rather, he felt compassion for the poor man and released him. The whole debt of 10,000 talents was cancelled, because he called upon the king’s mercy. That’s what God does with all our sin-debt. Now, Christ’s main purpose for teaching this parable is to make us know God forgives us and therefore we must forgive others. The moment a person acknowledges the sinfulness of his sin and turns to the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, this mammoth debt of sin is struck off. Jesus has paid it all for us – forever. How wonderful is that!

Alas, what did this forgiven man do subsequently? We are here presented with an unbelievable, unthinkable behaviour; he did something contrary to good sense and logic! “But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest” (v. 28). Both were called fellowservants, not because they held the same position, but because they served the same king. Now, the Greek word (*denarion*)

translated as “pence” signifies a monetary value equivalent to a day’s wage for a common labourer. So, a debt of 100 days’ worth of wages was owed. Irony of ironies! This man, who was forgiven a debt of at least 11 years’ worth of Roman taxes, could not have the decency to deal kindly with a fellowservant who owed him only 100 days’ worth of wages. Oh Christian, beware of your own fierce and misguided anger towards fellow brothers, in the light of how greatly God has forgiven you!

That’s not all. “And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt” (vv. 29-30). Shocking as it was, this forgiven man did not forgive the man who owed him much, much less than he had owed the king! He was even ruthless enough to cast him into prison for not immediately paying up. Oh, how cruel and unsympathetic that is! Just think about it, when a man is put into



prison, how is he able to go out and work, and earn to pay back? Dear Christian reader, if you're unforgiving towards a brother, how will he ever be restored and be helped to change his ways? Rather, "if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). We must constantly be in the kingdom business of "convert(ing) the sinner from the error of his way" (cf. James 5:20). To do so, we must be "peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy" (James 3:17). Oh, how important is this message for us today!

## Our Spiritual Incongruity in Not Forgiving Others

Doubtless, the unforgiving attitude of the unmerciful servant is morally reprehensible and downright inhumane! Even the fellowservants, who "saw what was done, ... were very sorry (i.e. grieved and offended), and came and told unto their lord all that was done" (v. 31). The scene that was playing out before their eyes was shameful and ignoble! They had to report that servant's senseless lack of magnanimity and unsympathetic misdemeanour to the king. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (vv. 32-33). How can a person receive forgiveness from God for his innumerable sins (which are against God's infinite, eternal and unchangeable

holiness), and then turn around saying he will not forgive a fellow believer who has offended him (a finite, puny sinner saved by grace)? Oh Christian, "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8b)!

This parable further intimates that very severe judgment will come upon people who will not show mercy and forgiveness. "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, If ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (vv. 34-35). Forgiveness is an important Christian characteristic. If anyone does not give himself to forgiving others who offend him, he will be chastised by the Lord until he learns the lesson of forgiveness. An unforgiving attitude is incongruent with the new nature of a born-again Christian. The LORD "hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10). The fact that God continually forgives us should oblige us to forgive those who seek our forgiveness. Not to do so is a spiritual incongruity in a forgiven Christian's life. The Bible is absolutely clear: "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). No two ways about this! "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13).

Regarding God's forgiveness towards us, there are two aspects. Firstly, when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our sins—past, present, future—are all forgiven. Judicially, all our sins are forgiven eternally, fully, completely. We



are justified, and therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 8:1). But because we are living in this fallen world, and still dwelling in the flesh, we do fall into sin even after we are saved! "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). So, there is a need for daily forgiveness and sanctification. But God be praised, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This should make us very humble and realise that we must be forgiving to one another because the Lord has dealt with us with great forgiveness!

## Conclusion

The apostle Paul exhorts us, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh

lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:16-17), including forgiving an offending brother. Let the Holy Spirit control our heart to teach it to forgive others. May the forgiveness of God extended to us flow through us to others, that we may learn to gently guide any erring brother. In the light of God's immeasurable forgiveness of our sin-debt, we, as sinners saved by grace, are morally obliged, duty-bound and spiritually empowered to forgive others as well. Brethren, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). Amen.

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# GETHSEMANE MEDIA CENTRE RENOVATION WORKS



## **RENOVATION WORKS AT THE STUDIO ON LEVEL 3**

*Top left: Control room of the new studio*

*Top right: Video recording room of the new studio*

*Bottom: Audio recording room of the new studio*

We thank the LORD that the renovation works have been progressing steadily. On the studio level, the wires for various equipment have been installed. Additionally, the acoustic treatment of the ceiling and walls have been completed as well.

If you would like to aid Bible Witness Media Ministry in the purchasing of new equipment and renovation matters of 33 Ubi Crescent, you may send in your love gifts and cheques to "[GETHSEMANE BIBLE WITNESS LIMITED](#)", 33 Ubi Crescent, Singapore 408584.

# Parable of the Royal Wedding Invitation

**MATTHEW 22:2-14**

*Prabhudas Koshy*

In this parable, we see a king extending a royal invitation to his son's wedding banquet. But those who were given early invitation refused to come. The king had to change his mind as to who then should join the wedding celebration, and he proceeded with his rearrangements. That's the story in a nutshell.

This parable addresses the unacceptable response that Jesus received from the Jewish leaders and people. It was a time of great rejection from the vast majority of Jewish society. Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). He was steadily rejected by the very people whom He came to minister and to call into His kingdom. The Jewish leaders never accepted the teachings and claims of Jesus. Right from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, they came by only to find fault with Him. And when they couldn't find any fault, they would go away thinking how to put a stop to His ministry. The Jews were the main focus of all the three years of His ministry. He addressed their sins directly. He was straightforward, authoritative,

yet at the same time full of compassion and grace. There was never a Teacher like that in that land. But the Jewish leaders, being full of envy and unbelief, were fixed in their rejection and hatred of Christ.

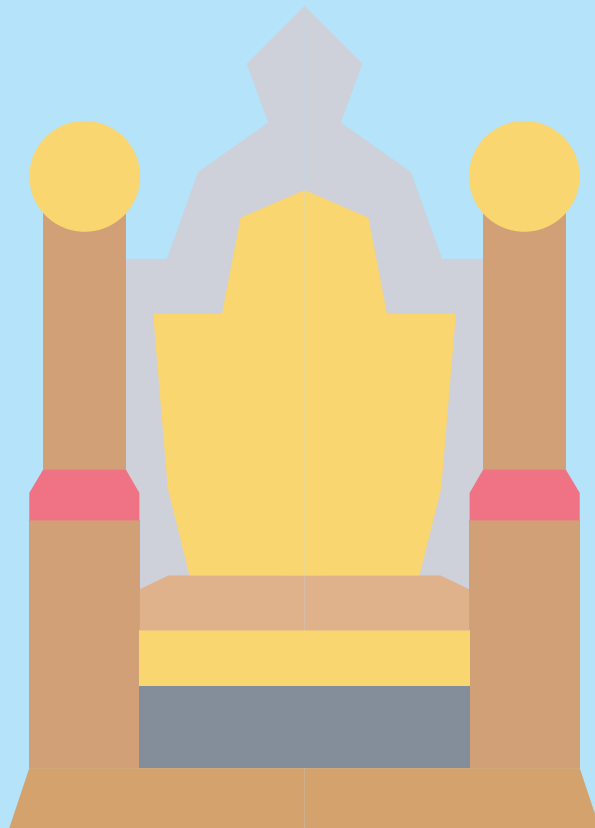
## Blatant Rejection of God's Salvific Call

Here again, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven as "like unto a certain king" (v. 2a). The "kingdom of heaven" is a very familiar phrase to the Jews. The word "heaven" was often used by the Jews as a substitute for the LORD Himself. Instead of saying "the LORD", they would say "heaven" because the LORD is in heaven, and He reigneth from heaven. So, they would sometimes substitute the covenant name of God with heaven. Thus, when Jesus mentioned "the kingdom of heaven", they immediately understood what it referred to. Now, God's kingdom held a special place in the Jewish psyche, because they, having believed that God had made a covenant with them, were proud (but mistaken) to think that the

kingdom of God belonged to the Jewish people exclusively. But Jesus wanted to correct that misconception. He wanted them to understand it is out of God's graciousness that He gave them the covenant (through Abraham and other of their forefathers) that would make them heirs of the kingdom. Now that the King had arrived from heaven, they behaved like they had never known the King! They didn't seem to understand what constituted the kingdom of God. They blatantly rejected the invitation to enter the kingdom!

That's the first emphasis of this parable: the king's invitation is rejected. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come" (vv. 2-3). The

Jewish leadership thought they, as God's chosen nation, were the real citizens of God's kingdom. Jesus through this parable declared otherwise, because they rejected the invitation. They falsely assumed they were in the kingdom though, in reality, "they would not come" (v. 3b). The invitation to the kingdom of heaven has always been there throughout the history of God's chosen nation, Israel. It was there during the Patriarchal period, the Mosaic period, the Davidic period, the Divided Kingdom period, and even the inter-testamental period. God had constantly bidden the Jews to partake of His grace through repentance and humble submission to His Law via His servants, the prophets. But "this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing" (Matthew 13:15a). When on earth, Jesus exposed the sad reality that the kingdom of heaven / its message,



though being constantly declared to the people, had never really been received. This is corroborated by the first part of this parable, which shows the king's invitation being rejected.

Now, to be invited for a king's son's wedding is a great honour and joy. It's one of the highest honour a man can have in his country. In a similar vein, to be invited into heaven's joy of celebrating the glory of Christ through the Gospel call is an unspeakable privilege. God, in His eternal counsel, has prepared His Son to be the redeemer of a lost people. This grand theme of the kingdom of God has been preached all throughout history by God's prophets. The people who received this salvific invitation most intimately (for close to two thousand years before the Messiah's coming) were the Jews! They had enjoyed this privilege through "the oracles of God" committed unto them (Romans 3:2), through the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, and through the reading of the Scriptures. Every time they read the Scriptures, or heard the Scriptures being read in the temple or in the synagogue, it was a direct invitation to partake of God's salvific grace. And that was the privilege extended to the Jews for almost two thousand years. But what happened? Jesus through this parable said it very plainly, "they would not come."

## **Undue Preoccupation with Earthly Pursuits**

But God, as depicted by the king, is very patient. "Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my

dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage" (v. 4). What amazing graciousness exhibited by the king! Similarly, God gave Israel chance after chance in sending waves of prophets to call them to repentance, culminating in the appearing of the Messiah's forerunner, John the Baptist. "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (v. 5). They went on being preoccupied with their own economic, materialistic and other vested earthly interests. They are, in effect, saying: "No, thanks for the invitation. We've got better things to do!" Tragically, the stiffnecked Jews were just like that.

Dear friends, may you not be so absorbed in the daily mundane things, that they become an obstacle to your positive response to Christ and His salvation. Beware, every time you say you're "too busy" in response to the gracious beckoning of Christ, you are giving undue priority to the temporal things of this world at the expense of Christ's invitation. Do not let your "farm" and "merchandise (business)" cause you to have no time to read the Bible, to listen to God's Word, to fellowship with God's people, etc. Neglect not to prepare for His kingdom and to serve Him, that you may partake of the joy at the Bridegroom's coming (even Christ's second coming). If you think the kingdom of heaven is not valuable enough to give your time and attention to, if study and work are more precious, more urgent, and more necessary than God's Word, then it is a clear sign that you have not received the King's invitation. Be not deceived, and do not be detracted by your relentless

pursuit of earthly endeavours (however legitimate) from heeding Christ's calling to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

## **Unacceptable Maltreatment of the Messengers of God's Grace**

Shockingly, there was a perverse, wicked group among the rejecters. "And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them" (v. 6). Here we have a reference to the malicious response of the bigoted Jews to God's servants, particularly the Old Testament prophets that they had disdained and even killed. This dastardly group would definitely include the hypocrites of Jewish religion, namely the Pharisees, the scribes, and the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who spitefully treated Christ. Now, look at how the king deals with these hardened, wicked rejecters. "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (v. 7).

To put it in a nutshell, in the history of Israel, whenever the nation rejected God's persistent warnings and dealt despicably with His prophets, it ended up in great judgments that God sent. Israel's subjugation by the Assyrian army is one clear example in the Old Testament. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a

charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6). Judah's captivity brought about by the Babylonian invasion is yet another. "Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send ... Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant ... against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof" (Jeremiah 25:8-9). Be not deceived, God is not mocked: "*It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31), who hath said, "Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay" (Romans 12:19b)!

## **Offer of God's Salvific Grace to All on God's Terms**

One thing is for sure: God's (redemptive) plan is not going to be thwarted by the ill-response of His chosen nation, as alluded to by the second part of this parable. "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy" (v. 8). The king is not going to change his intended celebration; he says, "The wedding is ready!" The king's bidding is still urgent: "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good" (vv. 9-10). New guests were invited, "and the wedding was furnished with guests" (v. 10b)! Here we have an allusion to the Gospel offer to the Gentiles, as Paul so succinctly articulated in Romans 11 when he highlighted his countrymen's

failure as a nation to embrace Christ. He maintained that God hath not cast away Israel though they stumbled spiritually as a nation, “but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles” (Romans 11:11b). Hence, Paul declared in Acts 13:46-47, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you (the Jews): but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

The wedding being “furnished with guests” gathered from “the highways ... as many as they found, both bad and good” would signify the Gospel door being opened to Gentiles from all walks of life. Not all may fit your self-righteous label of ‘refinement’ or ‘Christian-worthiness’. Some may belong to the lower strata of society (in terms of education and economic status), or may even come from ill-reputed past background, like the “many publicans and sinners (who) sat also together with Jesus and his disciples ... and ... followed him” (Mark 2:15b). But if they were brought in by Christ from the “highways”, if they heard and responded to the call of Christ, then they are going to be the “guests” in the King’s palace—not you who think highly of yourself! None is deserving to be heaven’s guest—what matters is your humble acceptance of the heavenly King’s invitation.

As we come to the last part of this parable, we are presented with an anomalous occurrence at the wedding feast. “And when the king came in to see

the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless” (vv. 11-12). Someone was there without wearing the appropriate formal attire as befit the occasion. Apparently, this man just turned up thinking about the good food, but not at all conscious of the importance of the event—a royal marriage! You can be sure the king was insulted and offended at this affront to his royalty. “Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 13). Sadly, some so-called Christians come to God’s house and think they can behave as they want. God’s eternal kingdom is offered on His terms, not your terms! Have you put on the righteousness of Christ by faith? Have you trusted Jesus for His righteousness on you? We cannot come to God’s house in any way we want.

Unfortunately, there are some preachers who say, “Since God is gracious, once you’re saved, you can live anyhow, and be whatever you want to be.” Oh, how terribly mistaken they are! There is a spiritual decorum and it’s called holiness. You don’t have it inherently in you—you put on the robe of righteousness provided by God through Christ. When you come before the presence of God, you stand in celebration of His Son’s righteousness, which has earned the salvation for your souls, thereby giving you access to come boldly unto God’s throne of grace. And the more you behold the glory of His Son’s righteousness, the less attractive will be the things of this world to you. Indeed, “every man that hath this hope in

him (and that would mean every man that hath genuinely responded to the heavenly King's invitation) purifieth himself, even as he (the Son) is pure" (1 John 3:3).

## Conclusion

Jesus ended the parable with a note of caution: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14). Many hear the Gospel, but they reject. There are some who think they hear the Gospel, but they come on their own terms. Many self-proclaimed professing believers will be like that, tragically. Didn't Jesus warn us, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,

shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). There are many who come pretending that they are invited, but deep in their heart, there is zero love for God, for sanctity, for the truth, for communion with God, for prayer meeting, for the Lord's coming, etc. Oh, repent and heed the Lord's admonition inherent in this parable. Come to God on His terms, realising your undeserving condition, not according to your own specifications and self-righteous criteria. This is the kingdom of heaven, not your kingdom! He that hath an ear, let him hear.

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# Parable of the Ten Virgins

**MATTHEW 25:1-13**

*Prabhudas Koshy*

This parable is uttered by Jesus on Mount Olive, as part of what is known as the Olivet Discourse, where He addressed His disciples' queries regarding the end-times (cf. Matthew 24:3). Jesus used this parable to warn against ill-preparedness that will be prevalent in the last days, and to exhort people not to get caught because of their unpreparedness when the Lord returns.

## **Christ's Coming Likened to Bridegroom's Coming at Jewish Wedding**

The Lord has repeatedly and specifically mentioned in Matthew 24 that nobody knows the exact time of His second coming. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come ... Therefore be ye also ready: for in

such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:42, 44). We are expected to be always ready for His coming, as nobody knows exactly when Christ will appear in the sky for the Rapture of His church. All the exact time aspects of His second coming are not made known. Thus, there must be expectancy, watchfulness, readiness, and faithfulness. However, because of spiritual lethargy and the general casual way in which Christians treat the Biblical prophecies, as well as apostasy creeping into the church, people will not be sharp enough to recognise the time. Jesus saw the need to expound this message of watchfulness, readiness and faithfulness in what is famously known as the "Parable of the Ten Virgins".

The story of this parable is set in the context of a Jewish marriage. Generally, there are two stages to a Jewish marriage in those days. The first stage is known as the time of betrothal. Betrothal is marked by an event where a young man and a young woman meet and get together in the presence of their family members and important people to take

their vow. During this betrothal period, they are considered married (as they have taken their vow), though they may not consummate their marriage and live together. The man will then go back and make sure that he has a work to do—whether it is shepherding, farming, carpentry, or whatever work he can find—and starts saving up money to prepare a place for his bride. During betrothal, both bridegroom-to-be and bride-to-be will remain committed to one another until they physically consummate their vow, which is known as the wedding day—and that's the second stage. Consummation of the marriage will be preceded by a wedding feast. All the relatives and friends will gather together to enjoy that feast. Interestingly, this festivity of feasting, which marks the end of the betrothal period and the start of their life together, can last for almost a week, depending on the wealth of the family.

The wedding will begin with the groom coming with his groomsmen to the bride's house. In the bride's home, there will be many bridesmaids waiting with the bride, as alluded to in v. 1 by the 'bridesmaids-party' comprising "ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom". Upon the bridegroom's arrival, they, together with the bride and groom and groom attendants, will then go through the streets in a joyful, exuberant procession. And they then gather together at the appointed house of celebration to partake in the marriage feast, which is normally held in the night (because in the daytime people would work, and in the evening they would come together). They would come with lights in their hands. They use this light to illumine

their way, and also to let people know a wedding party is taking place when they see all those lights in the dark night. The bride is not particularly mentioned here. This parable does not seek to highlight various aspects of theology, focusing instead on a specific eschatological truth, namely preparedness for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. It is the bridegroom who determines when he will come. He will come as soon as he finishes preparing the house which he has begun doing right after the betrothal. Once it is ready, he'll come; he chooses the time. Everybody must just be ready for the wedding.

## **Wise Preparedness for Extended Wait**

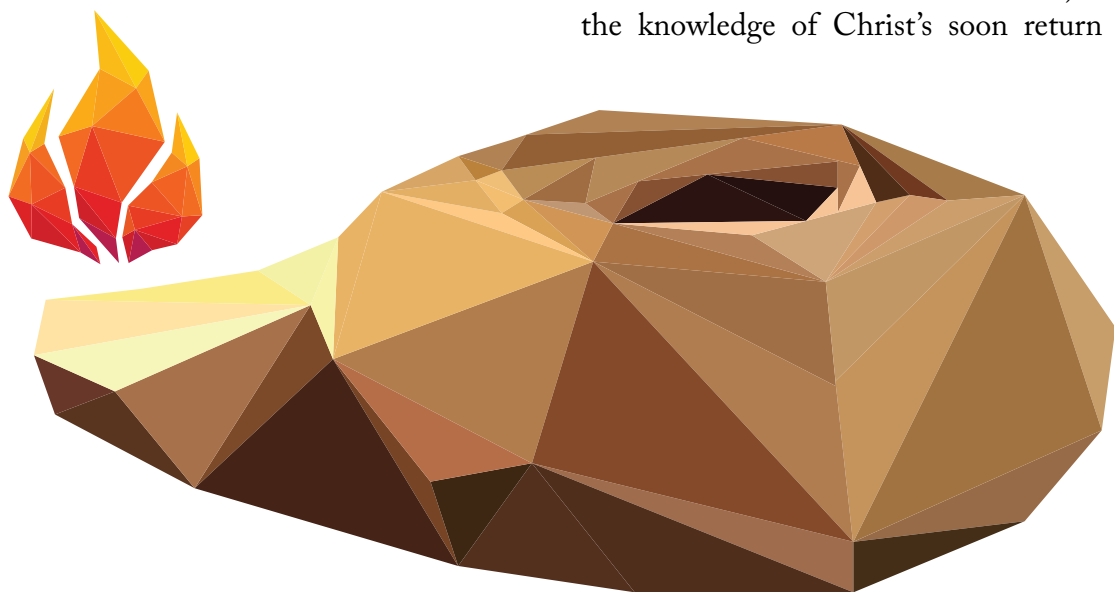
In such a wedding setting, the bridesmaids waiting at the bride's house have a general understanding of the time of the bridegroom's arrival. But they don't know the exact time, because the bridegroom's party may have to travel a long distance on foot as they did not have modern modes of transport like cars or coaches in those days. Travelling at good speed may further be hindered by bad weather. With no easy communication system, there is no way to relay information on the actual time of arrival. The bridesmaids-party will just have to wait patiently—which they normally do by singing songs, chatting cheerily with one another, encouraging one another, or even praying together (if they are believers). There is no complaint if the bridegroom tarries; in fact, a general ready acceptance of extended waiting is the norm. No one gets into a sullen, disinterested mood. Everyone looks forward in great anticipation to

the imminent joy and celebration of the wedding feast, to be held as soon as the bridegroom arrives.

Now, concerning Jesus' first coming, there was this big anticipation among the Jews. They knew the Messiah was coming and yet didn't recognise His Advent. "He came unto his own, and his own received Him not" (John 1:11). Sadly, it won't be different when Jesus comes again. In the last days, people will be spiritually slumbering. Even within the community that purports to be awaiting Jesus' return (due to what they read in the Scriptures), there are many who know in their minds that these are the last days, but there is no watchfulness, no readiness and no faithfulness. This is substantiated by the point Jesus made in the parable. All the bridesmaids knew the bridegroom was coming, but "five of them were wise (ready), and five were foolish (not ready)" (v. 2). These ten virgins represent the professing believers in the church, among whom the five that were wise denote actual believers while the

other (foolish) five signify unbelieving, ill-prepared people.

Now, what's the difference between the prepared and the unprepared? "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (vv. 3-4). In case of extended wait should anything go awry, five of the bridesmaids brought along extra oil in their vessels—and were deemed wise, especially considering the terrain conditions of travelling route and lack of fast means of transport. They were prepared for unexpected contingencies. The other five neglected to carry extra oil for their lamps—and were deemed foolish, revealing their presumptuous notion that they did not have to wait for long and reflecting also perhaps their unwillingness to wait right through the auspicious night. In short, they were not prepared for any unexpected contingency. Those who say, "*I just want to get into heaven, that's all; I don't need rewards*", please beware: do not think you can live carelessly, and do whatever you want while here on earth. Dear Christian, if the knowledge of Christ's soon return



is real in your heart, then it will affect the way you live. You are not going to live like the worldly people who have no concern for their eternal souls. Your outward expression of religion must be substantiated by your inner conviction and devotion to Christ. When you have an apparent religiosity that does not have the backing of a godly heart which waits upon the Lord, your religion is in vain. The “oil” here represents preparedness; it is representative of all the necessary things a Christian should possess in his sojourning here on earth, such as sanctification, prayerfulness and service for God, while anticipating Christ’s return. It makes you flourish in your faith and persevere in your service for the Lord so that at His coming, you will be found ready.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept” (v. 5). In view of the bridegroom’s tarrying, the five wise virgins’ thorough preparedness proved crucial. The bridegroom’s delay doesn’t mean he changes his plan. Similarly, Jesus’ tarrying in His second coming doesn’t mean God has changed His eschatological plan. Here, we must take note that the delay is in the mind of the unprepared people. For the prepared ones, it is not a delay because they are ready to wait for as long as it takes. They don’t call it a delay—“It’s expected; Jesus didn’t tell us the time. He just said He’s coming; just be ready!” But to those who are unprepared, it’s a delaying—“I think Jesus will never come. If He was supposed to come, He should have come by now. I’m tired of all these preaching in the church that Jesus is coming soon. Never mind, let’s go out and enjoy ourselves, and live as we want!” The apostle Peter

hit the nail on the head when he warned “that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3b-4). But they fail to realise that “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God is never late, nor too early. His timing is immaculate. His plans will not be thwarted; He will come just as He said, according to plan.

It’s interesting to note that all the ten virgins “slumbered and slept”, not just the five foolish. But some slept with expectancy while others slept without readiness. Both non-Christians and Christians sleep, work, eat and get married. But there’s a big difference in all these. Watchful vigilance in our spiritual walk is very important. We may be involved in life’s mundane activities / responsibilities, but never should a prepared person engage in those mundane affairs without having Christ’s second coming in focus.

## **Personal Responsibility**

### **Imperative against Being Caught Unprepared**

“And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (v. 6). At midnight,

when most people were deep in sleep, the bridesmaids were alerted to the coming of the bridegroom and his team. That underpins the fact of the unexpected arrival of Christ. The bridesmaids were all gathered in the bride's house waiting for the bridegroom, but they were not all prepared to go with him when he actually came. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes again to this earth, all eyes shall see Him, because He comes in the clouds. It will be a majestic and glorious descending of the Great Saviour and King, but not all will be joined to Him, though they will be alerted to His coming.

The sudden announcement, at a most unexpected hour, of the bridegroom's highly anticipated arrival caused the virgins to be all stirred up. "Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps (i.e. put them in due, functioning condition)" (v. 7)—meaning they tried to light up their lamps, which were by then all but flickering (due to the earlier hours of burning)—so as to go with the bridegroom and his entourage. But the five foolish ones couldn't do anything. All their efforts were in vain because they were unaware of the lack of oil. They were never concerned enough to be ready in the first place. The five who were wise were very concerned and they were ready. The other five who were foolish were shocked upon discovery of their waning oil-lamps, and the need now for extra oil. Listen to what the foolish said unto the wise: "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out" (v. 8). "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" (v. 9). The wise virgins' flat refusal to share their oil (because of their own usage needs) and

their counter-suggestion strongly hinted of a rebuke, and reflected their insistence on individual personal responsibility.

Dear reader, seek the Lord and call "unto (him) in a time when (he) mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him" (Psalm 32:6). There may have been many opportunities in the church for Bible study, for fellowship, for prayer, but if you won't come and avail yourself of those means of grace to clear your doubts and grow spiritually, then you are just like the five foolish virgins in their unpreparedness. If you don't follow Christ and never prepare your heart for His coming, you'll be left behind. It's an individual responsibility to make sure you know your Christ and follow Him. When the heavenly Bridegroom comes, it will be too late to prepare yourself! Now is the time to be prepared. Has not God's preacher been telling you that the Gospel and spiritual preparedness are more important than everything you can ever accumulate in this world? This is a personal commitment. You cannot bank on others' good works, godliness, faith to be in good standing before God. Each must make a conscious commitment towards God and His demands / requirements, in order to guard against being caught unprepared when the Lord returns.

## **Sobering Consequence of Not Being Prepared**

The ending of the parable is not difficult to anticipate. "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" (v. 10). Imagine what great joy and happiness the wise and ready virgins would have felt upon having access to the marriage feast! But then the saddest thing happened. "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (vv. 11-12). The foolish virgins, who had gone off looking for oil and were not found in their rightful station when the bridegroom arrived, had missed joining in the procession. Banging furiously on the door, they hoped somehow to be admitted into the marriage feast and be identified with the bridegroom's entourage. But they were denied entry, consequence of the bridegroom's unequivocal dissociation with pretentious servants. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim 2:19b).

Undeniably, the plight of the five foolish virgins alludes to the perilous spiritual condition of professing believers, who are too busy with material and worldly preoccupations to give serious, undivided attention to spiritual things. The door to the kingdom of heaven will be shut in their faces! Ponder Jesus' unmistakable warning: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which

is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not ... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). The lesson here is that we must always be ready for His Return: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13). Be on your guard! Don't let your heart be weighed down by the worldliness, the drunkenness and the worries of this life. Don't let them entrap you. Make the decisions you need to make today, not tomorrow. Time is never on your side. Today, repent of that sin you know; repent of that unbiblical conduct, no matter how much earthly loss it will cost. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day you make sure you are prepared for Christ's coming. Don't say "later!"

The kingdom of heaven is characterised by one important thing: watchfulness, readiness and preparedness for Christ's coming. There is no room for any other behaviour. At the momentous hour of the heavenly Bridegroom's sudden coming, some will be ready to meet Him; some will not. Some will go in to sup with Him; some will be left out. In which group will you be?

*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour  
wherein the Son of man cometh.*

(Matthew 25:13)

# *Parable of the Talents*

**MATTHEW 25:14-30**

*Prabhudas Koshy*





This parable elicits from the Christian hearers / readers a consideration of this question: “What will the Lord say to me when He returns?” The Lord’s return is a day of reckoning for all who claim Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Sadly, not all who profess Christ are genuine believers. They all want to get to heaven. They have no issue in acknowledging they are sinners; they willingly agree that there is only one Saviour who died to take away their sins. But they stop there! Thinking they are saved, they feel they can live in any way they want. Though professing to be saved, they have no commitment to the Saviour. True faith in the Saviour means much more than just mere intellectual assent.

## **Kingdom’s Climax Manifested in the Lord’s Return**

In the earlier chapters of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ parables mostly taught His disciples concerning the beginning stages of the kingdom of heaven with regard to the Lord’s work on earth. For instance, we read of Jesus declaring the kingdom of heaven as like a man who went to sow the seed. This speaks of the preaching of the Word of God and the people receiving the Truth. But in the later chapters, which tie in with the tail end of Jesus’ public ministry on earth, His parables began to touch on the ultimate and final stages of the kingdom of heaven on earth. This parable is a case in point. In fact, it refers to the climax of Christ’s ministry, when He will gather His people to Himself. The focus here now moves towards the ultimate end of our salvation—which is at the Lord’s return.

The expectation of the glory that Christ offers to us at His return should have a decided impact on our service for Him while we sojourn on this earth. This is why Paul assured “all them also that love (the Lord’s) appearing”, that “henceforth there is laid up ... a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give ... at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). It goes without saying that those who have this expectation would, like Paul, be diligent to fight a good fight of faith and to finish the course (cf. 2 Timothy 4:7). We cannot act as though we are a people with no responsibility or duty on this earth. It’s sad to see so-called professing Christians being largely disinterested in exerting spiritual diligence or in setting their affection on things above. By their spiritual lethargy, they act as if they do not have to give account at the end of their life or at Christ’s coming. Scripture exhorts Christians to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10b). That means you cannot live ill-disciplined lives, where spiritual opportunities are wasted. The day of reckoning is at hand when the Lord will soon come and you will be judged against your lost opportunities and neglected responsibilities, as this parable warns. In fact, the parable intimates that the Lord will cast such a spiritually negligent person out (cf. Matthew 7:21)!

## Spiritual Responsibilities Proportioned / Discharged While Awaiting the Lord's Return

In this parable, we see a man going away on a journey for a long time, maybe many months. He “called his own servants” to commit the work of his estate and entrust his goods to them. “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. 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” (vv. 14-15). Now, the phrase “his own servants” implies that this parable is not referring to people outside the church or those who are disinterested about church activities, but pertains to people who will at least make themselves appear as the people of God. We see the master giving three of his servants his goods, “every man according to his several ability” (v. 15b). The master was very mindful of each one’s ability, according to which he assigned them their duties. The emphasis here is that the importance is not about the number of talents received, but that they all received a certain proportioned responsibility. In the parables, the word ‘talent’ normally refers to money. The point is not so much the number or the quality of the treasure, but about the responsibility the master chose to give to his own slaves.

Likewise, it doesn’t matter how many ‘talents’ God has given you. If, by God’s grace, you have greater abilities, you

are given more responsibilities. If you have less ability, God has given you less. In this parable, Jesus only mentioned three servants as a representative figure. This parable is a representation of the larger truth. Jesus is the Man going away. The affairs of God’s kingdom on earth are now in our care. Each of us is given a responsibility according to his ability—that is what matters. What are we doing about it in the meantime? In God’s church, we must have a sense of love, commitment, dedication and consecration to the Lord and His kingdom. Anything and everything can be our service for the Lord—washing a cup, or helping to carry things, visiting brethren in hospital, calling / praying for them, cooking for them when they are sick, etc. God’s servants feel a burden for others, knowing that together we, who are “one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”, ought to be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in ... serving the Lord” (Romans 12:5, 10-11).

The first two servants were eager to serve their master. “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two” (vv. 16-17). They immediately went and traded them, and gained five more and two more talents respectively. Both men represent the genuine believer, who is always excited to serve his Master. He doesn’t need any further encouragement, other than the Lord’s words to him. Unquestionably, both men demonstrated supreme commitment to their master. They showed their commitment by

making the most of what they had, and maximised their God-given opportunities. Realise you will not have another life to live all over again, and today will not come back again. What has to be done today, must be done in the very best way. A preacher cannot preach half-heartedly—"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Likewise, musicians must make use of God-given opportunities to train their voices and practise their musical instruments, that they may offer their best in God's service. The same applies to other areas of service in God's church. Give of your best to the Master!

## **Commendation and Reward of Faithful Service**

It was a sufficiently long time before the master returned to settle accounts with his servants. "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (v. 19). Our Lord Jesus is coming again (though some 2000 years have since passed). He is not a careless or forgetful Master. He is not one who doesn't bother what His servants do. There is a reckoning to come. We will be held accountable for how we spend every day to serve the Lord. Everyone has a duty to discharge properly. It is totally wrong to think that we don't have to give an account—even pastors! Those who serve full time in the church must be the best servants / employees in the whole world. Anything less is shameful and unacceptable. Likewise, elders and

deacons must work hard, and not take their position as some sort of fame. Brethren, the Lord is coming and He will reckon how well we have done, and reward accordingly.

"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. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (vv. 20-21a). "Well done!" The master was commending the slave's attitude, more than just his accomplishments. He did not say anything about the number of talents earned, but about the attitude. Note the adjectives used to describe the servant—"good", i.e. morally and spiritually good; "faithful", i.e. he had kept the master's word, achieving what he wanted. Every faithful saint can expect the Lord's commendation when He comes again (cf. 2 Timothy 4:8). Those who love the appearing of Christ are the ones who labour for that day in faithfulness and readiness, rendering themselves in service each day.

The master not only praised him, but also highly rewarded him. The man with two talents was also commended, with very similar reward (cf. vv. 22-23), for both were faithful. He said, "thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (vv. 21b, 23b). When we get to heaven, we will not be lazy people. Some think of heaven as a boring, unexciting place. Not so! Heaven is a place where all will have greater responsibilities. God, who created this beautiful world, will not lose

His ability to have a better world than this in heaven. It will be a beautiful place, with many ways to serve the Lord and be “ruler over many things”! There will be many things to do in heaven in relation to the joy of the Lord. We cannot fully fathom that in this sin-plagued world because heaven will be a pure and holy place, where no sin can enter, no wicked person will be around, and no ungodly plans or purposes can ever be found.

## Condemnation and Judgment of Spiritual Negligence

Now, a word of caution: do not behave like the third slave, who “went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money” (v. 18). To us, hiding the money in the ground seems strange. Today, we would put our money in banks. But in those days, it was common practice for people to hide their treasure / valuables in the ground. (That is why archaeologists find precious things when they dig into the ground.) The ground was their safe deposit box. There were not many better options at that time, so it seemed like a sensible thing to do. The third servant merely wanted to keep safe the money somewhere, not trade it. Although he did not have the same number of talents as others had, he had the same obligation as them to use his talent to the maximum, not the least. Similarly, Christians should not merely do the minimum. Such attitude is completely disgusting in the face of your Master who has given His life to save your soul!

Note the terrible things the third slave said to the master on the day of

reckoning: “Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine” (vv. 24-25). He was, in effect, branding the master as exploitative and unfairly demanding—if only the master had chipped in more! It is sad that many, who claim they are “directed by God to serve Him”, complain they cannot do more for God because they are not getting enough resources and money. Why should God give more to one who has never shown interest to do the work? Never stand in pride and accuse God of being an unfaithful taskmaster. Remember, it was out of the master’s grace and consideration that he did not overburden the servant, but gave him (one talent) according to his ability. Similarly, when God gives you an opportunity to do a small work, do it well, joyfully, humbly, faithfully. Do not merely do the minimum, or else you incur the condemnation of the Lord: “*Thou* wicked and slothful servant” (v. 26)!

The servant’s negligent attitude was not only condemned, but also punished. “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents ... but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (vv. 28-29). On the day of the Lord’s reckoning, the all-knowing God will expose the reality. If He finds us unfaithful in our service, doing things for filthy lucre’s sake, He will take away our reward and give it to those who have been faithful. The faithfulness, not the length, of service is the issue here.

The lord’s judgment on the third servant sounds ominous for the

spiritually negligent. Heaven is not for lazy, murmuring or complaining people, but for those who are ever willing and joyful to be the Lord's servant. An unprofitable servant will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven, but be cast "into outer darkness", where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30). Such a man was not saved in the first place—the phrase "outer darkness" is used commonly in the New Testament

to refer to hell, for "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The message is unmistakable: pretentious servants, in taking on responsibilities they never carry out, are not going to be in heaven—they shall be "cast ... into outer darkness"! Dear Christian, the Son of Man is coming in glory (cf. v. 31), to reward His good and faithful servants. Let's pray, "Lord, teach me to be a faithful servant." Amen.

### **Will Jesus Find Us Watching?**

*(A hymn by Fanny Crosby)*

When Jesus comes to reward His servants,  
Whether it be noon or night,  
Faithful to Him will He find us watching,  
With our lamps all trimmed and bright?

#### Chorus:

Oh, can we say we are ready, brother?  
Ready for the soul's bright home?  
Say, will He find you and me still watching,  
Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?

If, at the dawn of the early morning,  
He shall call us one by one,  
When to the Lord we restore our talents,  
Will He answer thee—"Well done"?

Have we been true to the trust He left us?  
Do we seek to do our best?  
If in our hearts there is naught condemns us,  
We shall have a glorious rest.

Blessed are those whom the Lord finds watching,  
In His glory they shall share;  
If He shall come at the dawn or midnight,  
Will He find us watching there?

# Jim Elliot

## (1927-1956)

### Part II

(Retold from "Jim Elliot - He is No Fool" by Irene Howat, published by Focus Publications, Scotland, the United Kingdom;  
"Jim Elliot - Missionary to Ecuador" by Susan Martins Miller, published by Barbour and Company, Inc, Ohio, the United States;  
"He Changed Them" by David Porter, published by Christian Focus Publications, Scotland, Great Britain.)

*Retold by Jenny Lok*

*Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy*

In his third year at Wheaton College, Jim Elliot met Elisabeth Howard, sister to his friend Dave. They were seated on opposite sides of the aisle in class. By now, Jim had grown into a fine young man of close to 6 feet tall. Often dressed in his favourite light blue sweater and grey trousers (which matched his grey-blue eyes), he looked every inch a very fit athlete. Both Jim and Elisabeth got along very well, but they were careful to keep their friendship warm yet casual.

Once, just before Christmas, Dave invited Jim to his home for a short stay. It was a joyous time with the Howard family. Jim noted that the family was godly as they would make time for family worship before turning in for the night. They also attended church regularly. The younger siblings of Dave and Elisabeth proved to be fun companions, whom Jim enjoyed sledging and ice-skating with in the deep snow. They discovered what a great athlete he was! The Howards truly liked Jim very much, because he was such a great helper, especially with household chores. They were also amazed at the good number of hymns he had memorised and the way he sang so heartily.

After a wonderful stay with the Howards, Jim was back at Wheaton, ready to plunge into a never-ending session of lectures, reading and studying. Though Jim enjoyed talking to and studying with Elisabeth occasionally, he decided that he would not be hasty to follow what the majority of his friends were doing, that is, to court the girl they liked. He wanted God to show him the way; as far as he was concerned, he would remain single till God showed him otherwise.



In the meantime, Jim had already come up with a timetable for himself so that everything he needed to do would have its slot in his schedule. Without fail, in the morning, he would spend an hour reading from the Old Testament while in the evening, he would read from the New Testament. During lunch, he would find some time to meditate on one of the Psalms. To him, the entire Bible is the Word of God and every verse in it is of utmost importance. To help himself remember God's Word, he would write Bible verses on his 'little text cards', so that if he had a single moment or two to spare at any time, he would commit them to memory. This gave Jim greater encouragement than sitting around, chit-chatting about worldly things. To ensure that he did not fail to keep his word to pray for certain people, he had a prayer list which included the names of people he wanted to pray for each day of the week.

## MY DAILY SCHEDULE



*Psalms 27:4*

*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.*



*Psalms 119:105*

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*



*Psalms 1:1*

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

*Psalms 23*

*The Lord is  
shall not want.*



Despite his hectic schedule, Jim still found time to lend a helping hand to pack relief packages (containing food, among other things) to be sent to Britain and Europe some time after the World War II. He simply liked to be useful to others and would not mind giving his time and efforts without expecting any rewards. His act of compassion did not stop here. He was even more concerned about the salvation of others around him. Sunday afternoons were spent on the platforms of one of Chicago's main railway stations. Without fail, Jim would be actively speaking to strangers waiting for trains.

A fellow student once asked him, "How do you begin a Christian conversation with a stranger? Is it not embarrassing?" Jim replied, "Jesus Christ died on the cross so that my sins could be forgiven. I know one day, I will go home to Him in heaven when I die, or when He comes again. Do you think he was embarrassed bearing my sins on the cross?" His fellow student was speechless. Jim continued, "And I will not be embarrassed to talk to strangers about the One who can be their Saviour. It's the best news in the whole wide world, the best news there ever has been or ever will be. And until everyone has heard it, I will keep speaking to people I know, and people I don't know, about Jesus." Such was Jim's amazing enthusiasm for God's work that he always filled his free hours with opportunities to reach out to others with the Gospel.

Sometime in April 1948, he was part of a student gospel-team travelling to speak at a meeting. What happened later was truly a great reminder of God's mercy upon their lives! The car in which they were travelling suddenly stopped in the middle of a level crossing at the railway track. There was a problem with the engine. It just wouldn't work. One of the students shouted, "Let's get out of the car!" Immediately, the students tumbled out of the car and when all were safely out of the way, a freight train came straight into the path of the abandoned car and smashed right into it. Visibly shaken, the students could only stand by the railway track and breathe a word of thanks to God Almighty for saving their lives in the nick of time. Jim realised that to serve God, one has to be prepared for the unexpected, sometimes even the loss of one's life.

Later that year, Elisabeth graduated but Jim had one more year to go. By then, both realised that they did love each other, but they wanted to wait upon God before deciding if they should get married in the future. Elisabeth planned to take up a linguistics course in the University of Oklahoma. Like Jim, she hoped that this would help her to study the unwritten language of the primitive tribes. After that,



she would be heading to Canada for missionary work in rural areas. They promised to write to each other regularly.

During his June break, Jim joined another gospel-team for a series of Gospel outreach to the Midwestern States. They were representatives of the Foreign Missions Fellowship. Jim was thankful he could spend his holidays sharing the Gospel with strangers along the way. He always desired that "He (God) will let (him) preach to those who have never heard the name of Jesus." When Jim reached 21 years of age on 8 October 1948, his birthday prayer was that God would lead him to Peru or Brazil before his next birthday.

The time came when Jim prepared himself for his final year before graduation from Wheaton College. He pondered over his future; he had thought of spending a year back home – preaching in his local Assembly (a Plymouth Brethren group),



helping to carry out maintenance work in the Assembly Hall and if possible, to do some school teaching. Just as he was still mulling over his options, his brother Bert, who was recently married, invited him to assist in building a house for his family. That would take about 3 months and Jim was glad for this experience, which he felt would prepare him for missionary work. To top it off, Dad Elliot also invited Jim to join him in his preaching. Jim's aim was to "cram the year full of experiences that will help [him] in [his] mission work".

21st Oct, Friday

*"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."*

On 21 October 1949, the year that Jim graduated, Jim wrote in his journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." To Jim, giving his life to God to do as He pleases was the best decision for him because he was convinced that he could not keep his earthly life forever. One day, he would be in heaven in Christ and no one could take that from him. That was all that mattered to him.

Every day since graduation, Jim had been waiting upon the Lord to show him where he should serve as a missionary. He busied himself with reaching out to some teenagers in a detention home, entertaining them with interesting stories he had heard as a young boy. At the end of the session, he attempted to share some Bible stories with them, hoping that the Holy Spirit would work in their hearts. Many became interested in the Gospel. He also taught them how to build a model of a sailing ship, famously known as 'The Sovereign of the Seas'. Jim's passion in making model sailing ships was put to good use. From there, he launched into the story of how Jesus stilled the wind and the waves, explaining how powerful Jesus was, He being the sovereign Lord of everything on earth.



22nd Oct, Saturday

Though Jim was much tied up with many activities each day, there were some people in his community who felt that he could do better by going out to preach the Gospel to those who were unreached in the jungle. There was also some talk among the people that he was lazy and not using his time fruitfully. This was far from the truth! In fact, Jim had spent much of his waking hours helping to paint the worship hall of his church in Portland and making himself useful to his parents at home, doing daily chores. Besides, he also occupied himself with "odd jobs, substitute teaching and random evangelism". Above all, he was constantly meditating on God's Word and seeking His will concerning his area of mission work.

Dad Elliot asked Jim, "Is it more important to please God and do what you believe He wants you to do, or to please men and do what you think they want you to do?"

Without hesitation, Jim replied, "My heart is the Lord's, and my aim in life is to please Him."

"So take no heed of what people say... what's important is that you do what the Saviour tells you to do."

Jim encouraged himself by reading stories of great missionaries, such as Jonathan Goforth, Hudson Taylor and David Brainerd, whose unwavering faith in God truly inspired him. Jim's conviction was further reinforced: he wanted nothing more than to be like them.

*(To be continued...)*

# Bible Trivia — Numbers 9 & 10

*Sarah Yong*

Read the respective verses from Numbers 9 & 10 and fill in each blank with the right answer. Then, complete the crossword puzzle to the right by using the answers corresponding to the respective question numbers.

## Numbers 9

1. The children of Israel followed the Lord's \_\_\_\_\_ in their journey (v. 18).
2. When the cloud was upon the \_\_\_\_\_, they travelled not (v. 19).
3. They rested in their \_\_\_\_\_ while the cloud abode (v. 20).
4. Whether day or night, when the cloud was taken up, they \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 21).

## Numbers 10

5. Moses was instructed to make two \_\_\_\_\_ of silver, to be used for calling the assembly (v. 2).
6. They were to be blown to gather the \_\_\_\_\_ together (v. 7).
7. When necessary, an \_\_\_\_\_ could be sounded to move the various camps (vv. 5-6).
8. When used in war, the children of Israel would be remembered by God, and be \_\_\_\_\_ from their enemies (v. 9).
9. When used on special solemn days, the offerings and sacrifices during such occasions would serve as a \_\_\_\_\_ before God (v. 10).
10. When the cloud was taken up on the 20th day of the 2nd month in the 2nd year, they journeyed from the \_\_\_\_\_ of Sinai to Paran. (v. 12)

## BIBLE WITNESS MEDIA MINISTRY: UPCOM

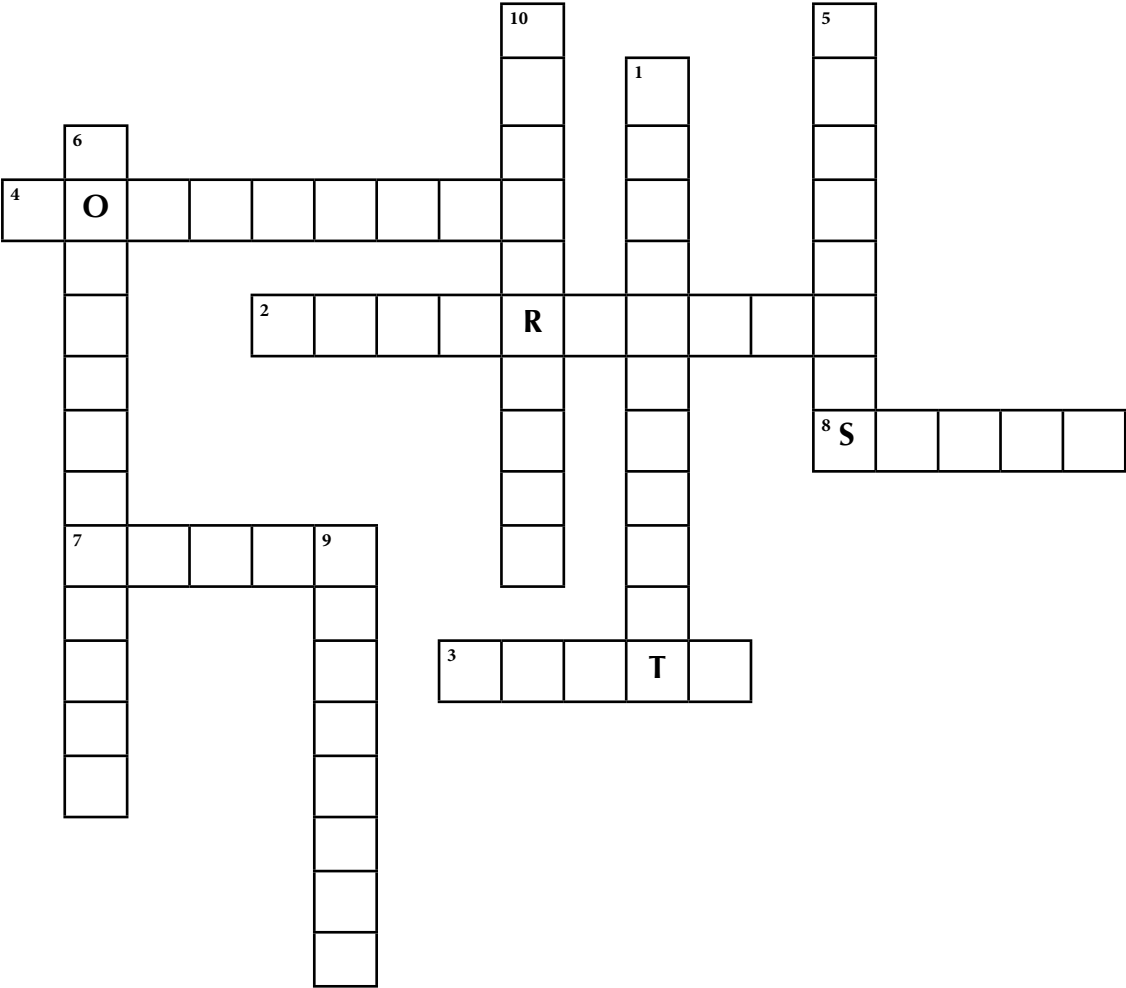
**September 2019**

17th Bible Witness Retreat on  
"Church — A People in Prayer (Part II)"



Bible Witness  
Volume 19 Issue 5

**October 2019**



**ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - NUMBERS 3 (VOLUME 19, ISSUE 3, P.27)**

Part 1: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar, priests, tabernacle, fathers, one month  
Part 2: [Gershon] 7,500, tent, hanging, curtain; Kohath, southward, 8,600, ark, candlestick, vessels; Merari, northward, 6,200, boards, sockets, pillars

**ING EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS FOR 2019**

**November 2019**

Bible Witness Calendar for 2020  
Dedication of Gethsemane Media Centre



Bible Witness Volume 19 Issue 6  
My Soul's Delight (Vol. 1 Expanded)

**December 2019**



# 17th Bible Witness Retreat

## “Church — A People in Prayer (Part II)”

### A Study of Prayers in the Acts of the Apostles

**Speaker:** Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

**Dates:** 11th to 13th September 2019

**Venue:** Hotel Jen Puteri Harbour, Johor, Malaysia

Please pray for a blessed time of fellowship and learning of God's Word during this Retreat.

*For updates on Gethsemane Media Centre's renovation progress, some photographs are published on **page 9**. For a list of upcoming events and publications by Bible Witness Media Ministry, you may refer to **pages 34 and 35**.*