

Learning to Think Biblically

Learning to read the gospels rightly is a lifelong challenge. There's an incredible depth and meaning to them that we're not well-equipped to read. We're equipped to read the Sermon on the Mount separately from the Sermon on the Mount of Olives.

Learning to think biblically requires different reading skills, and Matthew has given us a great system. If we follow his structure it will open up a deeper meaning. As Einstein said, God is in the details, and we must realize that in reading biblical narratives the details matter. This is true for all four gospels. One needs to look for patterns of repetition. If Jesus taught about a lamp earlier, and then uses the lamp image again, is there a relationship?

Consider Matthew chapter 25, the Olivet Discourse, where Matthew gives the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

The kingdom of heaven shall be compared to 10 maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them. But the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight, there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those maidens who rose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out, but the wise replied, perhaps there will not be enough for us. And for you go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came and those who were ready, went in with him to the marriage feast and the door was shut afterward. The other maidens came saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. And he replied truly. I say to you, I do not know you. Watch, therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Some questions to consider:

What elements stand out in this parable?

Specifically, what does the oil represent?

What does it mean that the five foolish virgins run out of oil?

How must we think to find the answer? Hint: Where does this portion of the gospel come from?