

Matthew 25:1–13 (Parable of the Ten Virgins): Trim Your Lamps.

KJV: “Then all those virgins arose, and **trimmed their lamps**” (v.7).

1) Where Jesus says it & what the words mean

- “**Lamps**” = *lampádes* (λαμπάδες) — either small oil lamps or more likely **torches** (rags on a stick) that must be fed repeatedly with oil to keep burning.
- “**Trimmed**” = *ekosmēsan* (from *kosméō*), “**to set in order, make ready, arrange, adorn.**”
→ Not a cosmetic touch; **it’s functional preparation**: cleaning the soot, cutting the wick (*petiláh*), adding oil (*shemen*), so the light burns clean and bright.

Parallel readiness language: **Luke 12:35** “Let your loins be girded **and your lamps burning,**” underscoring continual preparedness.

2) Background from the Hebrew Bible & Temple practice

Hebrew Bible imagery

- “**Lamp**” (נֵר *nēr*): God’s care/presence (Ps 18:28), guidance (Ps 119:105), a person’s inner life: “**The spirit of a man is the lamp of YHWH**” (Prov 20:27).
- **Priestly tending of lamps**: Ex 27:20–21; Lev 24:2–4—the lamps are to burn “from evening to morning;” Aaron “shall **set in order** (וַיַּעֲרֹךְ) the lamps.” Daily service included **clearing charred wick, refilling oil, relighting.**

Second-Temple/Jewish literature

- The daily priestly rite is called **hătavat hanerot** (“**preparing the lamps**”)—i.e., **trimming wicks and setting fresh oil** (Mishnah *Tamid* 3.9; *Yoma* 1.5; also discussed in *Menahot*).
- Household Sabbath lights were regulated: **which wicks and oils work** and which **do not draw well or smoke** (Mishnah *Shabbat* 2.1 “Bammeh Madlikin”). The assumption: a righteous household **prepares the wick and oil before nightfall** so the light will **burn cleanly** through the night.

Takeaway: In Israel’s world, to “trim a wick” = **remove the burnt crust, cut/shape the tip, and add oil** so the lamp gives **steady, smokeless light**. That is exactly the picture Jesus evokes.

3) What the oil and lamp signify (Scripture-first, then Jewish echoes)

Multiple biblical lines converge:

- **Lamp = visible life/witness.** “Let your light shine” (Mt 5:16). “Lamp to my feet” (Ps 119:105). “Spirit of a person is YHWH’s lamp” (Prov 20:27).
- **Oil = what empowers the light.**
 - **Consecration/Anointing** (Ex 30; 1 Sam 16) → enablement for holy service.
 - **Joy & gladness** (Ps 23:5; Isa 61:3).
 - **God’s Spirit** in **Zech 4** (lampstand fed by olives → “**Not by might... but by My Spirit,**” v.6).

Early Jewish commentary often links **mitzvot** to lamps: “**A commandment is a lamp, and Torah is light**” (Prov 6:23), so **obedient deeds** are the “fuel” that makes the lamp useful.

Synthesis (biblically responsible):

- **Lamp** = your life/testimony under God's rule;
- **Wick** = your inner capacity to burn (character/heart) that must be kept clean;
- **Oil** = **God's supplied power—the Spirit's grace**—manifested in **faithful obedience** (mitzvot) that actually keeps the flame going.

4) What Jesus is pressing in Matthew 25

1. **Readiness cannot be borrowed.** The foolish ask, "Give us some of your oil" (25:8). But **reserve oil** (tested character, life with God, Spirit-empowered obedience) is **non-transferable**.
2. **Crisis reveals preparation.** At the Bridegroom's arrival, everyone "arose and **set their lamps in order**" (v.7). Those who lived prepared only need to **trim the wick** and top up; the unprepared **scramble and miss the door**.
3. **Delay is the test.** The story stresses **waiting**; real disciples **maintain the light over time** (cf. Mt 24:42–51).

5) "Trim your wick": a concrete, ancient picture for a modern disciple

What trimming did for an ancient lamp

- Cut off the **charred end** → prevents smoke & dimness.
- **Straighten/shape** the wick → a **steady, bright** flame.
- **Add oil** → ensures **endurance**.

Translated into our practice

- **Repent quickly** (cut away the char): confess sin, reconcile, forgive (1 Jn 1:9; Mt 5:23–24).

- **Order your life** (shape the wick): regular Word & prayer (Ps 119; Acts 2:42), Sabbath rhythm, accountability—habits that keep the flame stable.
- **Keep oil in reserve:** seek continual filling of the Spirit (Eph 5:18), and convert belief into obedience (Prov 6:23; Jas 1:22).
- **Guard against smoky religion:** zeal without inner cleansing just smokes (cf. Isa 1; Mt 23). Trimming = removing what blocks clear witness.

6) A simple teaching outline

- **Text:** Matthew 25:1–13; Luke 12:35; Zech 4; Ex 27:20–21; Lev 24:2–4; Prov 6:23; Prov 20:27; Ps 119:105.
- **Image:** Priest prepares the menorah (hătavat hanerot) every day; wise disciples do the same with their lives.
- **Big idea:** Prepared light, not occasional sparks. Readiness = a lifetime of trimming and refilling, so when the Bridegroom comes, your lamp is already bright.

Quick FAQ

Is “oil = the Holy Spirit” the only valid reading?

It’s a strong biblical association (Zech 4), but Matthew 25 emphasizes preparedness evidenced in obedient living. Best synthesis: **the Spirit supplies the power; obedient faith keeps the flame fed.**

Why can’t the wise share their oil?

Because you can’t loan out **habit, character, repentance, or intimacy with God** at midnight. Those are formed **over time**, not at the knock on the door.

So what does “wicks trimmed” mean for us today?

Live in a continual cycle of **repentance (trim)**, **order (set in place)**, and **dependence (add oil)**—so your life gives **clean, steady light** while you wait for the King.

Is the Oil the Holy Spirit?

1. The Case *For* Identifying Oil with the Spirit

Several NT passages directly connect **oil / anointing** with the Spirit:

- **Luke 4:18 (quoting Isa. 61:1):**
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me...”
→ Jesus equates being **anointed with oil** in Isaiah with being filled with the **Holy Spirit**.
- **Acts 10:38:**
“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”
→ Explicit connection: **anointing = Holy Spirit**.
- **1 John 2:20, 27:**
“You have an anointing from the Holy One... the anointing which you received from Him abides in you.”
→ The “anointing” is the Spirit Himself teaching and empowering.

Thus: **anointing oil** → **symbol of the Spirit**. In NT thought, you cannot miss that link.

2. Why Some Say Oil ≠ Just the Spirit

However, Matthew 25 **isn't as simple as “oil = Spirit”** because of two problems:

1. Can the Spirit be “bought” or “borrowed”?

- The foolish virgins “went to buy oil” (Mt 25:10).
- But in Acts 8:18–20 Simon Magus tried to buy the Spirit, and Peter rebuked him: *“May your money perish with you... you cannot buy the gift of God with money.”*
→ If oil = Spirit, the parable could be misunderstood as Spirit-for-sale.

2. The Spirit is given freely at conversion (Acts 2:38; Eph 1:13).

- But the parable stresses **ongoing preparedness**.
- This suggests the oil is not simply “receiving the Spirit once,” but **maintaining Spirit-filled, obedient life**.

3. NT Balance: Oil as Spirit in Practice

The NT itself helps us nuance the picture:

- **Spirit-filled perseverance:** Eph. 5:18 *“Be continually filled with the Spirit.”*
→ Like oil that must be **topped up daily**, not a one-time deposit.
 - **Good works as “fuel”:** Mt. 5:16 *“Let your light shine... so they may see your good works.”*
→ Works are the **evidence of Spirit-life**; the oil empowers the lamp to burn bright.
 - **Preparedness as Spirit-fruit:** Gal. 5:22–23 (fruit of the Spirit).
Without Spirit, the lamp sputters; with Spirit, there is enduring flame.
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4. Theological Synthesis

- **Yes:** Oil symbolizes the Spirit—this is deeply biblical (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20).
- **But in Matthew 25, oil is not the Spirit in the abstract.**
It represents **the life of Spirit-filled obedience and readiness.**
 - The wise virgins have cultivated lives continually supplied by the Spirit.
 - The foolish have lamps (outward religion) but no ongoing inner supply.

• **Therefore: Oil = the Holy Spirit's empowering presence manifest in obedient, prepared discipleship.**

✓ **Bottom Line (teaching point):**

- The **lamp** is your visible life.
- The **wick** is your heart/character.
- The **oil** is **the Spirit's presence**, not as a one-time gift, but as a **continually replenished supply** that fuels faith, obedience, and endurance until the Bridegroom arrives.

