



Are You Just a Nominal Christian?

MATTHEW 25:1-13

THE KING AND HIS MARRIAGE PROCESSION

Our Lord was still seated, with his disciples, upon the Mount of Olives (see chapter 24:3). The instructive parable that follows was spoken by him in continuation of the discourse we have been considering. It is evidently intended to set forth, under a familiar figure, the need of preparation for the King's glorious appearing when he comes to claim his bride. To those of us who will not be alive at Christ's Second Advent, the midnight cry, "Go ye out to meet him," will sound forth at the hour of death.

Verse 1. THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

According to Oriental custom, the bridegroom is represented as having gone to the house of his bride's father, whence he would conduct his spouse to her future home. The parable opens at the point where some of his professed friends are waiting to join the procession, and go in with him to the marriage-feast. Thus is the nominal Church of Christ waiting for the coming of the Lord. There did not seem to be much difference in the eternal appearance of the "**ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.**" They were all virgins, they all took their lamps, and they all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They all made a profession of attachment to him, which led them to separate themselves from their other companions and acquaintances, that they might go forth to meet him on his wedding-night. There was, however, a vital and essential difference between them: "**Five of them were wise, and five were foolish.**" Let us fain hope that we are not to gather from our Lord's words that one half of the professing Church is composed of those whom he calls "**foolish.**" Yet our Savior would not have spoken of so great a proportion if there were not really a very large admixture of foolish professors with the wise possessors of the grace of God.

Verse 3. Them that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

They may have thought that, if they had lamps that were similar to those carried by others, it would be sufficient. Perhaps they judged that the secret store of oil, being unseen, was unnecessary. They were willing to carry a lamp in one hand; but to devote the other hand to the care of an oil-flask, was more than they were willing to do. It is the want of the oil of grace that is the fatal flaw in many a professor's lamp. Many have a name to live, but have not the life of God within their souls. They

make a profession of attachment to Christ, but they have not the inward supply of the Spirit of grace to keep it up. There is a glitter or a flash, but there is no permanent light, and there cannot be any, for although they have **“lamps”**, they have **“no oil with them.”**

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

They had oil in their lamps, and oil with their lamps. Lamps are of no use without oil; yet the oil needs the lamp, or it will not be used. Grace should reveal its presence, faith in Christ should be avowed; but it is worse than useless to make a profession of love to Christ, unless there is a secret store of grace by which the external part of religion may be maintained even before the all searching eye of the King himself. Unless the Spirit of God be in us, indeed, and of a truth, we may for a while make a fair show in the flesh, but the end will be the blackness of darkness for ever.

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

How sadly true it is, that, in the history of Christ's Church, genuine saints and mere professors have often **“slumbered and slept”** side by side! Those who have the oil of grace are not always wide awake to serve their Master, and watch for his appearing. In the case of even true believers, the delay in Christ's coming causes disappointment, weariness, and lethargy; and his Church falls fast asleep, when she ought to be watching for her Lord. As for the **“foolish”**, whether self-deceived or hypocrites, there being no true life of God in the soul, after a while their apparent earnestness disappears, and Satan drugs them into a fatal slumber.

Verse 6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

That midnight cry, **“Behold, the bridegroom cometh,”** startled all the sleepers. It should be well if we all thought more of the great truth of our Lord's Second Advent. The oftener it is preached, in due proportion with other revealed doctrines, the more likely will it be to arouse both slumbering possessors and sleeping professors of love to Christ. As the midnight of this present evil age approaches, there is increasing need for all to be bidden to listen for the clarion cry, **“Go ye out to meet him.”**

Verse 7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

The suddenness of the alarm made them all start to their feet, and begin to examine and trim their lamps. They could not go to meet the bridegroom without carrying a light; that was an essential part of their preparation for joining the King's marriage procession. Those virgins who had “oil in their vessels with their lamps” soon finished their trimming, and were ready to start; but those who had **“lamps”** but **“no oil”** were unable to perform the necessary trimming. It is a pity that any should have to be trimming their lamps when they come to die, or when the sign of the Son of man appears in the heaven; but if that work is attempted without the Spirit or the grace of God, it will be an eternal failure.

Verse 8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

They now began to value what they had a foretime despised; they had been so foolish as to think that oil was unnecessary, now they saw that it was the one thing needful. Hence their request to their wiser companions: **“Give us of your oil.”** They gave a dreadful reason for their request: **“for our lamps are gone out,”** or, going out; the dry wick flickered a while, and then died out in darkness, like the snuff of a candle. Those are terrible words, **“our lamps are gone out.”** It is worse to have a lamp that has gone out than never to have had a lamp at all. **“Our lamps are gone out.”** The foolish virgins seemed to say, “We thought everything was ready for tonight, we even gloried in our lamps, we promised ourselves a bright future, we thought all was well for our share in the marriage-supper; but our lamps are gone out, and we have no oil with which to supply them.” May no reader of this page ever have to utter this bitter lament! Those who are putting off their repentance till their dying hour are like these foolish virgins; their folly has reached its utmost height. When the death-sweat lies cold on the brow, the neglected oil of grace will be valued. Then will come the despairing cry “Send for a minister to pray for me, get in some Christian people to see what they can do for me.”

Verse 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,

No believer has more grace than he needs: “the wise” virgins had no oil to give away. They gave the best advice they could under the circumstances, although it was of no avail: “Go ye rather to them

that sell, and buy for yourselves.” There is a proper place where the oil can be bought at the right time: we are bidden to “buy the truth,” grace is sold in God’s market on gospel terms, “without money, and without price;” but when the midnight cry is heard, the day of grace has closed, and buying and selling are over for ever.

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.

Undoubtedly, there are death-bed repentances; but it is to be feared that, in the great majority of cases, people who wake up so late to a true conviction of their condition will find that, while they go to buy the long despised grace, “**the bridegroom**” will come. The poor head may be so distracted with pain that the mind may not be able to catch the idea of what faith in Christ is; mental capacity may wholly fail in that dread hour. The risk is so great that none but the fatally foolish will postpone till then the preparation for the King’s coming. “**They that were ready went in with him to the marriage:**” their readiness consisted in having lighted lamps, or flaming torches; our preparation for death or Christ’s coming, is the possession of grace in the heart. “**And the door was shut:**” when that door is once shut, it will never be opened. There are some who dote and dream about an opening of that door, after death, for those who have died impenitent; but there is nothing in the Scriptures to warrant such an expectation. Any “larger hope” than that revealed in the Word of God, is a delusion and a snare.

Verse 11 & 12. 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.

“**The other virgins**” were not “**ready**” when the bridegroom came; and there is no hint in the parable that they were any more ready when they came and clamored at his closed door, “**Lord, lord, open to us.**” “We came to meet thee, we carried lamps, we were with the other virgins; Lord, Lord, open to us!” His answer tolled the knell of any vain hope of admission that they might have cherished: “**Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.**” “**If any man loveth God, the same is known of him.**” (1 Corinthians 8:3, R.V.) The Good Shepherd says, “**I know mine own, and mine own know me.**” (John 10:14, R.V.) Those whom Jesus Christ knows in this sense, he loves; and they love him because he has first loved them. The foolish virgins had professed to be the bridegroom’s friends, yet they were proved to be not even his acquaintances. May none of us ever hear from the blessed lips of the heavenly Bridegroom that terrible death-sentence, “**I know you not!**”

Verse 13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Our Lord again enjoins upon his followers the duty of watchfulness, as in chapter 24:42; and repeats, in a slightly-altered form, the reason previously given: “**For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.**” It is idle to say that we may find out the year, if not the day and hour, of Christ’s coming. The time of the end is hidden, and shall not be known until suddenly, he shall appear “**in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory.**” It should be our one great concern to be sure that we shall be ready to meet him whenever he may come.

A commentary by *C.H. Spurgeon*

