

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

A SERMON

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“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes.” Matthew 15:13

MY sermon this morning will not be upon the text that I have read to you, but upon the parable out of which our text arises, and upon which it is founded; therefore, take our discourse this morning as merely an introduction to the great subject contained in our text. And in going through this morning the parable of the ten virgins, you must remember that it is but a parable; and we must look therefore merely for some degree of likeness between the things mentioned, and the things intended; without expecting to find the parable the very image of the things intended.

Let us then first look at *the strong features of resemblance between the wise and the foolish virgins*. The first resemblance is that of the name by which they are designated; “virgins.” That means consecration; it is a term, as we see from the apostle’s words in the Corinthians, of consecration to God; hence the apostle says of the church, “That we may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.” Therefore, it means consecration to God. You here see a point of resemblance; that both profess to be consecrated to the blessed God; both profess to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; both profess and seem to be severed from an ungodly world, severed from a world dead in trespasses and in sins and yet, though they have thus, both the true and the nominal, escaped the pollutions of the world, and that by a knowledge of the Son of God, yet the one is merely nominal, and the other is real. That, then, is one point of resemblance. The second point of resemblance is their outward profession; for I would take the lamps as expressive of outward profession; a person takes a lamp to indicate he is about to join this marriage procession; so that the foolish virgins as boldly and as openly owned their religion as did the wise virgins. Here again is another point of resemblance; both outwardly and openly, by all their movements, declare to others around them that they are Christians; that they believe they are Christians; you can see no difference; they seem just alike; all take the lamp of profession, the letter of the word, the Bible; and there seems to be no difference. The third point of resemblance is that of both having one and the same object in view; it was to meet the bridegroom; it was to go forth to the marriage; it was to go forth to meet God in Christ; to go forth to meet God in that relation into which he has been pleased to take sinners; both preparing and expecting to meet the bridegroom. Here seems to be no difference; hence they say, we mean all the same thing. And the next strong point of resemblance is that “They

all slumbered and slept.” See the likeness between the real and the nominal. The Christian very often gets into a sort of slumbering, sleepy state; and so, does the nominal Christian as well. The nominal Christian says, I did not hear well at all today; and the real Christian says the same; they are both sleepy and slumbering; and they seem to be just alike; you can hardly tell the difference between the two; there is a strong point of resemblance. There is a real child of God; and you can see no more life about him, perhaps, than about a mere nominal professor. And then another strong point of resemblance is that of their being alarmed at the midnight cry. The midnight cry here, speaking historically, refers to the primary view of the parable, refers to the coming of the Savior in the destruction of Jerusalem; but we must take it to suit our own circumstances; and then the midnight cry will mean death; and that may well be called a midnight cry. And the foolish as well as the wise were alarmed at it; and who is not afraid of death? The nominal professor is afraid of death; there are times when he is alarmed and trembles at death, at the approach of death. And then they all arose and trimmed their lamps; all preparing for this solemn event, the coming of the Bridegroom. Here again they seem all alike. How many die in this delusion, supposing they are prepared. Now then with these strong points of resemblance, wherein shall we find the difference; how are we to distinguish between him that serves God and him that serves him not? I must now, therefore, after these few remarks, go on to show wherein lies, or wherein lay the essential difference between the two characters. The Savior points out that difference; and this is the great matter that we have to attend to. In the first place, what is meant by the oil? The foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them; the wise took their lamps, but they took oil in their vessels with their lamps. We must therefore find out what the oil is; and then we must find out what the vessels were in which they took the oil; and then we must find out what the light is; for there was the light as well; and these are three of the things that distinguish the wise from the foolish. First, then, the wise took oil in their vessels with them. What are we to understand by this oil? There are, I am aware, a great many opinions as to what it is; but in what I am going to say I think I shall be sure to be right; I think you will all say so; I am sure to embody that which is meant, at any rate, when I say that the oil will mean the gospel of the grace of God. That is the only oil that will keep the lamp burning through life, through death, and through all eternity. So that these foolish virgins did not take with them the gospel of the grace of God. If you ask where my authority is, my answer is, I find it in the 61st of Isaiah; I look upon that as a key to the meaning of the oil.

And now take notice of the explanation; “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning;” there it is “The oil of joy for mourning.” I shall presently bring another scripture or two to prove that this oil means the gospel of the grace of God. I dare not here stop to enlarge upon the various uses to which oil is put, or the various senses in which it is spoken of figuratively in the Scriptures; still I must give an instance or two. Just look at the one I have now quoted; “The oil of joy for mourning.” Here is a sinner brought into the house of mourning, clothed with sackcloth, and feeling he is a poor mourning creature, mourning after mercy, mourning after Christ, mourning after God, mourning after his election of God, mourning after God’s presence; he is a poor mourning creature; there he is; but when the gospel comes, when the Lord comes and meets with him, there he is as it were half dead; and the Lord pours in oil and wine; and this oil mollifies the wounds, takes away the pain; his pain is gone because his guilt is gone, his pain is gone because his diseases are gone, his pain is gone because he is out of danger; he sees that he is safe; and here is a Surety for him; like the good Samaritan with the man that fell among thieves, the good Samaritan undertook to be the surety; and so this poor sinner says, ah is it so? Is it possible that the Lord Jesus Christ is my Surety; that he has

poured in this oil, this heavenly grace, and will pardon, and heal, and save me by his grace; and that that is not enough, but that he is my Surety; and the Holy Spirit is the witness thereof, who will never alter his testimonies; and that God the Father also is my Surety; for he has said, "In blessing I will bless you." Ah then, my hearers, if we make a profession of religion, if we are going on to meet the Bridegroom; if we are going on to meet him at death, and at judgment; if we have a welcome to the wedding, and if we become guests there; we must take this oil with us; it must be precious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that will enable us to take with us the gospel of the grace of God. Ah, my hearer, when you come before God, what can stand before him but his own truth? What will stand before him or can stand before him but his own Son? What can stand before him but his own appointed sacrifice? What can stand before him but Christ's righteousness? What can stand before him but his own testimonies? And who can stand before him but those that are brought to stand before him by the atonement of Christ? Those that are thus brought to stand before him by the sacrifice of Christ, by the righteousness of Christ, and by the order of his covenant; these are the persons that are prepared, they are ready, and they will go in with him to the wedding.

Now the other virgins, the foolish ones, never felt their poverty, and therefore never cared about the golden oil of God's grace. The mere professor is never broken-hearted, never feels himself to be in prison, never feels himself in the house of mourning, not truly so; no groaning, being burdened; no sighing; no longing after the manifestation of eternal mercy to his soul; and therefore he goes on without the gospel of the grace of God; he may have it somewhat in the letter of it, but not really in the life of it, in the faith of it; for without faith it is impossible to please God; and I make no hesitation in saying that if the Lord be your teacher, you will feel that you are such a sinner, and that the law is so exceeding broad, that there is not anything can give you confidence in God but these two things, the perfect work of Christ, and the immutability of the blessed God for if that perfect work be imputed to you today, and the Lord says, now there is a perfect work for you, and you shall come eternally into the consequences of that work on certain conditions; I say in that case you would be lost; whereas we are brought into the perfect work of Christ, and the certainty of our enjoying the privileges of that work is founded on the immutability of the blessed God, "I am the Lord; I change not; and therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." Now let me again fall back upon my old-fashioned saying, which people say I am always repeating, and even rather sneer at me for using the term so often; but it is a favorite term of mine, quite a household term; I mean that of *the love of the truth*. Have we ourselves received the testimony of Christ's finished work in the life and love of it; the testimony of his righteousness in the life and love of it; the order of his eternal covenant in the life and love of it? If so, then we are delivered from the folly of the foolish virgins. Herein lies the difference between the foolish and the wise. Therefore, I conclude, then, that the oil means the gospel of the grace of God. Let me take that with me, ah, I can meet anything then; because if I have that with me I have God with me; and hence, all things are possible to the believer; because he that believes, and has the Gospel with him, has God with him; and if he have the everlasting God with him in and by this Gospel, it matters not who may be against him. Perhaps I may name another scripture or two to show, if need be, that the oil is the gospel of the grace of God. "The oil of joy;" I hope and trust it has been the oil of joy to us many, many times. But in Zechariah you find there two olive trees; and these two olive trees are in the 11th of Revelation called "two witnesses." These two witnesses, to my mind, will mean the prophets and apostles, or the ministers of God. They are called two witnesses, because the law required at least two witnesses; and so here the Lord sets forth his ministers as two; and so, he sent his disciples two and two. Perhaps they are set forth as two also to denote that

they are very few in comparison of the false witnesses who in all ages have been abroad. Well now, these sons of oil, these ministers, these witnesses, are continually taking up golden oil, and pouring it out, and ministering it to these seven lamps; and you know these seven lamps are a figure, as we see in the first part of the Book of Revelation, of the churches; so that by the ministry of these witnesses this golden oil enriches the church, and keeps this light burning. And how true that is. Or I will take the two witnesses, if you like, to mean the Old and New Testament; have it that way; it will mean the same thing. Ever since the New Testament has existed, the Old and New Testament together have united to minister golden oil. How often have we been soothed by the sweet and softening words of the Old Testament; we have there received that golden oil that has indeed made our faces to shine, that has healed our wounds; and the Lord has spoken to us kindly, very kindly, in many parts of the New Testament as well. Therefore, I need not say more; I think it is clear that the oil is the gospel of the grace of God; and we shall see presently how careful the saints in all ages have been to take this oil with them. Let us take for instance Abraham; when the Lord ministered the Gospel to Abraham, how careful he was to take it with him, never parted with it; he did not know what hour the Son of Man would come; he did not know when or where he would meet with him; therefore, he would not part with this oil, for if he had, his lamp would have gone out. Isaac took the oil with him; Jacob took the oil with him all the way to Padan-aram; and when he came to meet Esau, he replenished his lamp with the oil, and it burnt up brightly. Good old Jacob became so happy in the possession of this oil, that he said, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Bless the Lord, he gave me this oil, and my lamp shall never go out, for my hope shall never expire until it is lost in the everlasting vision of the blessed God. The next thing was that they took oil in their vessels. You will at once recognize the importance of having a vessel that will hold the oil. It is not every vessel that will hold oil. It is a very penetrating thing. There was oil used in the tabernacle and the temple, and suitable vessels, golden vessels, were used to hold that oil; they took care the oil should be in such vessels as would hold it. May not these vessels be a figure of the yea and amen promises of the blessed God? I should think so; I should think they are the golden vessels containing the grace of God; the promises that are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Now we want a golden vessel to carry the oil in; that is, to speak plainly, a yea and amen promise. All very well for Jacob to make a promise to God with an if in it; it is very proper we should do so; but if the Lord did so, you would tremble at it; you would say, Oh, Lord, if it is a promise with an if in it, then it is a vessel that will contain no oil; for I am sure to fail in my part; and then when the time shall come that I shall need grace, and need mercy, and I look to the vessel, The vessel is empty; no oil. I cannot rest without a yea and amen promise. Now I ask you, in the sight of the Lord this morning, what was the kind of promise the Lord gave to him who is made the pattern of all that should ever believe, namely, Abraham? Was there any if whatever? Was it not a positive promise? "I will bless you." There is the promise containing the golden oil of grace. Ah, said Abraham, that is the vessel for it to be in; the vessel cannot be lost; it is in Christ; and the vessel itself can never leak, never run out; all the grace, all the mercy that promise contains I shall be sure to have, as circumstances make it needful. It was a yea and amen promise. Was it not the same to Isaac, and Jacob, and David? Does not David, in a dying hour, show the kind of promise that was given to him? Does not good old Simeon, when the Bridegroom was coming to take him home, show that the golden vessel in which he had looked for God's grace, was a yea and amen promise? It was revealed to him that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ; there was no if in it; the matter was certain: there was no fault that could take place in the heart or life of Simeon between the time that the promise was given and the time of its fulfilment, that could create a leakage in the vessel. No! the promise was certain.

He (Simeon) gives us to understand he was a poor, lost sinner; but he says, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation." I am a poor, lost sinner, but your word has revealed this salvation, and your promise contains all the oil I can need. Now, Lord, help me, as I am going to cross the Jordan, to trim my lamp; and cause the light of faith, and love, and knowledge, to burn higher and brighter, and then I shall go triumphantly through in the light of the lamp of salvation, and glory in your holy name. Do you know, my hearer, what it is to seek the Lord, and for the Lord to seal home to you in your heart some promise that you might look upon in future days as your own? The Lord blessed me in this way a great many years ago; that promise has been kicked against by a great many circumstances, especially by the devil; but there is the vessel to this very day as full of oil as it ever was; yes, so that when I have to cross the Jordan, there I have the gospel of the grace of God, the yea and amen promises; there are all the vessels full; not one promise shall fall to the ground. This then is the second difference between the wise and the foolish. The foolish are not so conscious of their poverty as to receive the gospel of the grace of God in the life and love of it; and secondly, the foolish stop short of the yea and amen promises. Hence the Apostle says, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." What does he mean, by that? Why, they came short in their faith; the Apostle went rather too far for them; and his idea is this, if you are not brought to believe the promise now, you will not be brought to enjoy it hereafter; for what God intends his people to enjoy hereafter he brings them to believe now; those who shall have eternal life hereafter are brought to receive Christ as their eternal life now; those who shall not come short, like the foolish virgins, but shall be admitted unto the marriage, these receive the promise, their faith shall not come short of the yea and amen promise; they believe it is yea and amen; and they rejoice that the Lord's word is settled in heaven. That is mark the second, then, of the difference: first, receiving the gospel of the grace of God; and when I say grace, I mean grace; I do not mean what the free will person means, what the duty-faith man means; I mean electing grace, justifying grace, saving grace, infinite grace, almighty grace, eternal grace; that grace that is as certain as is the eternal existence of the everlasting God. As he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself; you cannot separate the grace by which he saves us from himself; he has pledged himself, embodied himself, given himself. That is what I mean by grace. And by the vessels I mean the yea and amen promises that accord with that grace, that make up that glorious gospel.

Let us go on to the next part. The alarm comes: and the foolish virgins said, "Our lamps are gone out;" some would read it, "going out;" it does not matter which; it will mean the same thing in substance; because if you read it, "going out," as in the margin, then it will mean the stony ground hearer; that his joy is dying; and when the stony ground hearer's joy dies, his religion dies; that shows it has no root. Not so with the Christian; the Christian's joy may die, I mean as to the feeling of it; his comforts may die, and he may become as wretched as a man out of hell can be; and yet that man shall not, like the stony ground hearer, despise God's truth, run away from it; but that man shall still remain fast in the truth, cannot go away from it; "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life." And that is the way the Lord tries his people. It is easy, as Berridge says, to remain with him all the time he feeds you well, and treats you well, and clothes you well; but when the Lord is pleased to hide his face, and try us in a variety of ways, and make us, as I have said, as miserable as a poor creature out of hell can be; to abide by the truth then, and to say with Job, "Though he slay me," though he has dealt with me as he has, "yet will I trust in him;" I will not curse him nor give him up even now; I will not give up the truth even now; that is the trial. When the stony ground hearer's joy is gone, his religion is gone; the lamp is gone out. Some people

think they never hear the gospel profitably except when they hear it joyfully; must not think that. Ah, some of the sermons that have made you very solemn, and stirred you up into self-examination, sent you home with a heavy heart, have been some of the most profitable sermons you ever heard; I have found it so. But they said to the wise virgins, "Give us of your oil!" No, cannot do that. What part of the oil am I to give you? Oh, give me this; that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and you may keep election to yourself. No, we cannot divide the gospel. If I were to part with electing and predestinating grace, there would not be enough left to save me then. "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you." Each Christian wants all the gospel to himself; and yet there is this infinite difference between immaterial and material things; I may possess all the gospel, I may possess a whole Christ, I may possess God my all and in all; and yet that does not at all interfere with your possessing him just the same. Now we cannot say that of material things: if one has a part of an apple, the others must have less, each cannot have the whole apple. But it is so in immaterial things, in spiritual things; like the sun, each man as he walks along the street has the whole sun to himself, each man without interfering with the other. And so here, we cannot give our oil. And besides, that is not the way to come by it; that is not coming by it honestly. "Give us of your oil." They will do anything when the alarm of death comes; it is astonishing what alarm will do. They wanted to divide the gospel; not so; none to spare; the Lord orders us to hold fast the whole gospel, every part of it; we shall want it all. Moses was very wise in his answer to Pharaoh; well, you may go, but you must leave so and so, and so and so, Oh, no; not a hoof shall be left; for we know not with what we must serve the Lord our God till we come into the wilderness; that is the place of trial. And so, when we come into the wilderness of Jordan, we shall want all the gospel, and we know not which part we shall most want; and if we part with one part, that may be the very one we shall want. We must hold fast the whole. And there is nothing uncharitable in this, because in holding fast the whole myself I do not deprive another. Therefore, the wise virgins would not consent to a division of Christ, to a division of the truth; they would not consent to part his garments among them; leave the enemies to do that; some take one, some another, and neither can have the whole suit, because they have parted the garments among them; neither can say, I am dressed entirely in Christ's clothes; some have one part, some another; like the Catholics with their relics. The man that is taught of God will never consent to the gospel being divided.

Then look at the counsel the wise virgins gave to the foolish; they did not advise them to go and borrow; they knew they could not repay it again if they did; they were too wise to give them that advice; and too honest to advise them to go and steal it; but, "go you to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." I just notice here, remember this is a parable; and we must expect only a kind of outline likeness, and not the very image of the thing; still this is not at all a difficult part; the thing is to come by it honestly; that is the idea. Hence you have similar language in the 55th of Isaiah; "Ho every one that thirsts, come you to the waters; you that have no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." And therefore, the advice of the wise to the foolish would be, well, you profess to belong to the Bridegroom; yes; you profess to be looking for his coming; yes; you are alarmed at his coming, you know not what to do; your lamps are gone out, your oil is exhausted; and now you want to compromise with us; no, you must get the oil honestly. And so, they went to buy; where they went, I don't know; not to the right place, you may depend upon it; no man ever went to the right place for God's grace yet until God himself taught him where to go. Perhaps you will say, where is that place? The answer is very simple. "Every one that has heard and learned of the Father comes unto me;" there is no grace, no oil, anywhere else. "No man can come unto me except the Father which has sent me draw him."

Now the Bridegroom came; those that were ready went into the marriage; they were ready. But there is another difference I have not noticed yet; and that is, what the light was of the wise, which the foolish virgins did not possess. I think that light will mean four things; first, that which is indicated in the word *wise*; they were wise; it will mean *knowledge*; they understood the law of the matrimonial procession; the law that none was to join in that procession without a burning lamp; if persons came without a burning lamp, it would look as though they were no good; no business there in the dark. Oh, but the light of others would do for me, sir. Oh well, if I don't know, my priest knows. Ah, that's dangerous work! Oh, if I, don't know, my church minister knows; oh, if I don't know, my Puseyite minister knows. Ah, that's poor work; you must have a lamp of your own, a light of your own, sir; or else you will never join in the matrimonial procession of the church home to everlasting glory. What then was the light? First, knowledge; they knew the Bridegroom, they understood the order of the marriage, understood the great subject of the eternal oneness of Christ and the church. The others did not. That is reckoned dangerous; must not dwell too much, say they, upon the indissoluble union between Christ and the church; we believe it, but must not talk too much about it. How do you believe it, sir? You believe it with your head, sir, but not with your heart, sir. I make no hesitation in saying, I do not care who the man is, or where he come from, or what he is; that man into whose soul is brought the eternal oneness between Christ and the Church, that truth will so fill that man's soul with love to God and decision for him that out of the abundance of his heart he will speak of that great theme which fills his heart. Tell me that your heart is full of Christ, full of God's eternal love, full of his eternal testimonies, full of him in that revelation made of him in Christ; and yet not say much about it! No; "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." I knew a young woman years ago when I was a boy, a little boy; I was in the field where she was at work, and her parents said something cross to her; and she said, "I'm off; and when you see me again I will ride in my carriage;" and sure enough in about six months she did come back in her carriage; she was married to a rich man, and he built a house, and there they are to this day; and so pleased was she with the fulfilment of this prediction that she has talked about it ever since. And I am sure, friends, if we, poor sinful creatures as we are, are taken up from the dust and from the dunghill, and made kings and priests unto God, in eternal union with God and Christ, we shall never, never be weary of talking about it and dwelling upon it. None were allowed, then, to join in the procession but those that had light. So now, none must join the church but that man into whose heart God has shined, to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It was the downfall of the Corinthian church in receiving persons into that church that knew not God and, says the apostle, "Some have not the knowledge of God;" I speak this to your shame receiving persons from worldly and carnal motives, or from the mere aim to swell out numbers; when at the same time, they have not the real knowledge of God. That was the downfall of that church, and it has been the downfall of many churches, within the range of my knowledge in my little day. Thus, then, the light will mean knowledge, the wise possessed it; the others thought they had it, but it proved to be ignorance, and their hope turned into despair. Second, the light will mean the Lord himself: "The Lord is my light;" that is a lamp that will never go out; "The Lord is my light, and my salvation; he is the strength of my life; whom shall I fear?" Oh, what damps, what blasts, what winds, what floods, can extinguish this lamp? Brought to know the Lord, he shall be your light and your everlasting glory. Third, the light will mean also God's salvation. "For Zion's sake, I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof goes forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns." Fourth, it will mean God's Word, "Your word is a

light unto my path, and a lamp unto my feet.” Shall that man say, My lamp is gone out; I am become ignorant of God’s salvation? Never. Shall that man say, God’s salvation is extinguished. Never. Shall he say, “The word of the Lord has come to nothing?” Never. “The words that I speak unto you are spirit and life.” They shall go on living to all eternity.