

The Olivet Discourse Part 2b - Christendom: the Ten Virgins

by C.H. Mackintosh

C.H. Mackintosh's sermon emphasizes the critical distinction between true and false Christian professions through the parable of the ten virgins, urging believers to be spiritually prepared for Christ's return.

Scripture: Psalm 49:7, Matthew 25:1, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 1:8, Ephesians 5:14, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 2:27, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Christian Living", "Holy Spirit"

Description

C.H. Mackintosh delves into the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, emphasizing the importance of true Christian profession and readiness for the return of the Bridegroom. The parable highlights the distinction between wise and foolish virgins, representing genuine believers with the oil of the Holy Spirit and mere professors lacking spiritual life. Mackintosh urges believers to examine their hearts and ensure they have a genuine, personal relationship with Christ, warning against a false sense of security in religious activities without true faith.

Transcript

Matthew 25:1-13.

We now approach that solemn section of our Lord's discourse in which He presents the kingdom of Heaven under the similitude of "ten virgins". The instruction contained in this most weighty and interesting parable is of wider application than that of the servant to which we have already referred, inasmuch as it takes in the whole range of Christian profession, and is not confined to ministry either within the house or outside. It bears directly and pointedly upon Christian profession, whether true or false.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom". Some have considered that this parable refers to the Jewish remnant; but this idea is not borne out, either by the context in which this parable occurs or by the terms in which it is couched.

The more closely we examine the entire context, the more clearly we shall see that the Jewish portion of the discourse ends with chapter 24:44. This is so distinct as not to admit of a question. Equally distinct is the Christian portion, extending from chapter 24:45 to chapter 25:50; while from 25:31 to the end, we have the Gentiles. Thus the order and fulness of this marvelous discourse must strike any thoughtful reader. It

presents the Jew, the Christian, and the Gentile, each on his own distinct ground, and according to his own distinctive principles. There is no merging of one thing in another, no confounding of things that differ. In a word, the order, fulness, and comprehensiveness of this profound discourse are divine, and fill the soul "with wonder, love, and praise". We rise from its study, as a whole, with those words of the apostle on our lips, "O, depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways"!

Then, when we examine the precise terms made use of by our Lord in the parable of the ten virgins, we must see that it applies not to Jews but to Christian professors - it applies to us - it utters a voice, and teaches a solemn lesson to the writer and the reader of these lines. Let us apply our hearts thereto.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom". Primitive Christianity was especially characterized by the fact here indicated, namely, a going forth to meet a returning and an expected bridegroom. The early Christians were led to detach themselves from present things and go forth, in the spirit of their minds and in their hearts' affections, to meet the Saviour whom they loved, and for whom they waited. It was not, of course, a question of going forth from one place to another; it was not local, but moral, and spiritual. It was the outgoing of the heart after a beloved Saviour whose return was eagerly looked for day by day.

It is impossible to read the Epistles to the various churches and not see that the hope of the Lord's sure and speedy return governed the hearts of the Lord's dear people in early days. "They waited for the Son from heaven". They knew He was to come and take them away, to be with Himself forever; and the knowledge and power of this hope had the effect of detaching their hearts from present things. Their bright, heavenly hope caused them to sit loose to the things of earth. They looked for the Saviour. They believed He might come at any moment, and hence the concerns of this life were just to be taken up and attended to for the moment - properly, thoroughly attended to, no doubt - but only, as it were, on the very tip-toe of expectation.

All this is conveyed to our hearts, briefly but clearly, by the expression, "They went forth to meet the bridegroom". This could not be intelligently applied to the Jewish remnant, inasmuch as they will not go forth to meet their Messiah - on the contrary, they will remain in their position and amid their circumstances until He comes and plants His foot on the mount of Olives. They will not look for the Lord to come and take them away from this earth to be with Him in Heaven; but He will come to bring deliverance to them in their own land, and make them happy there under His own peaceful and blessed reign during the millennial age.

But the call to Christians was to "go forth". They are to be always on the move; not settling down on the earth, but going out in earnest and holy aspirations after that heavenly glory to which they are called, and after the heavenly Bridegroom to whom they are espoused, and for whose speedy advent they are taught to wait. Such is the true, divine, normal idea of the Christian's attitude and state. And this lovely idea was marvelously realized and practically carried out by the primitive Christians. But alas! we have to do with the spurious as well as the true in christendom. There are "tares" as well as "wheat" in the kingdom of Heaven; thus we read of these ten virgins, that "five of them were wise, and five were foolish". There are both true and false, genuine and counterfeit, real and hollow, in professing Christianity.

Yes, and this is to continue unto the time of the end, until the Bridegroom come. The tares are not converted into wheat, nor are the foolish virgins converted into wise ones. No, never. The tares will be

burnt and the foolish virgins shut out. So far from a gradual improvement by the means now in operation - the preaching of the gospel and the various beneficent agencies which are brought to bear upon the world - we find, from all the parables, and from the teaching of the entire New Testament, that the kingdom of Heaven presents a most deplorable admixture of evil; a corrupting process; a grievous tampering with the work of God, on the part of the enemy; a positive progress of evil in principle, in profession, and in practice. And all this goes on to the end. There are foolish virgins found when the Bridegroom appears. Whence come they if all are to be converted before the Lord comes? If all are to be brought to the knowledge of the Lord by the means now in operation, then how is it that when the Bridegroom comes, there are quite as many foolish as wise? But it will perhaps be said that this is but a parable, a figure. Granted; but a figure of what? Not surely of a whole world converted! To assert this would be to offer a grievous insult to the holy volume No, the parable of the ten virgins teaches, beyond all question, that when the Bridegroom comes, there will be foolish virgins on the scene, and clearly, if there are foolish virgins, all cannot have been previously converted. A child can understand this. We cannot see how it is possible, in the face of even this one parable, to maintain the theory of a world converted before the coming of the Bridegroom.

But let us look a little closely at these foolish virgins. Their history is full of admonition for all Christian professors. It is very brief, but awfully comprehensive.

"They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them". There is the outward profession, but no inward reality - no spiritual life - no unction - no vital link with the source of eternal life - no union with Christ. There is nothing but the lamp of profession, and the dry wick of a nominal, notional, head belief. This is peculiarly solemn. It bears down with tremendous weight upon that vast mass of baptised profession which surrounds us, at the present moment, in which there is so much outward semblance, but so little inward reality. All profess to be Christians. The lamp of profession may be seen in every hand; but ah! how few have the oil in their vessels, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Holy Ghost dwelling in their hearts. Without this, all is utterly worthless and vain. There may be the very highest profession; there may be a most orthodox creed; one may be baptised; he may receive the Lord's supper; be a regularly enrolled and duly recognised member of a Christian community; be a Sunday-school teacher; an ordained minister of religion; one may be all this, and not have one spark of divine life, not one ray of heavenly light, not one link with the Christ of God.

Now there is something peculiarly awful in the thought of having just enough religion to deceive the heart, deaden the conscience, and ruin the soul - just enough religion to give a name to live while dead - enough to leave one without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world - enough to prop the soul up with a false confidence, and fill it with a false peace, until the Bridegroom come, and then the eyes are opened when it is too late.

Thus it is with the foolish virgins. They seem to be very like the wise ones. An ordinary observer might not be able to see any difference, for the time being. They all set out together. All have lamps. Moreover, all turn aside to slumber and sleep, the wise as well as the foolish. All rouse up at the midnight cry, and trim their lamps. Thus far there is no apparent difference. The foolish virgins light their lamps - the lamp of profession lighted up with the dry wick of a lifeless, notional, nominal faith; alas! a worthless - worse than worthless - thing, a fatal soul-destroying delusion.

Here the grand distinction - the broad line of demarcation - comes out with awful, appalling clarity. "The foolish said to the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out". This proves that their lamps had

been lit; for had they not been lit, they could not go out. But it was only a false, flickering, transient light. It was not fed from a divine source. It was the light of mere lip profession, fed by a head belief, lasting just long enough to deceive themselves and others, and going out at the very moment when they most needed it, leaving them in the dreadful darkness of eternal night.

"Our lamps are going out". Terrible discovery! "The Bridegroom is at hand, and our lamps are going out. Our hollow profession is being made manifest by the light of His coming. We thought we were all right. We professed the same faith, had the same shaped lamp, the same kind of wick; but alas! we now find to our unspeakable horror, that we have been deceiving ourselves, that we lack the one thing needful, the spirit of life in Christ, the unction from the Holy One, the living link with the Bridegroom. Whatever shall we do? O ye wise virgins, take pity upon us, and share with us your oil. Do, for mercy's sake, give us a little, even one drop of that all-essential thing, that we may not perish forever".

It is all in vain. No one can give of his oil to another. Each has just enough for himself. Moreover, it can only be had from God Himself. A man can give light, but he cannot give oil. Oil is the gift of God alone. "The wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves. 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". It is no use looking to Christian friends to help us or prop us up. No use in flying hither and thither for some one to lean on - some holy man or eminent teacher - no use building on our church, our creed, or our sacraments. We want oil. We cannot do without it. But we cannot get it from man, nor from the church, nor from the saints, nor from the fathers. We must get it from God; and He, blessed be His name, gives freely. "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord".

But, mark, it is an individual thing. Each must have it for himself. No man can believe, or get life, for another. Each must have to do with God for himself. The link which connects the soul with Christ is intensely individual. There is no such thing as second-hand faith. A man may teach us religion, or theology, or the letter of Scripture; but he cannot give us oil; he cannot give us faith; he cannot give us life, "It is the gift of God". Precious little word, "gift". It is like God. It is free as God's air; free as His sunlight; free as His refreshing dew-drops. But each one must get it for himself and have it in himself. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever,) that he should still live forever, and not see corruption" (Psalm 49:7-9).

What do you say to these solemn realities? Are you a wise or a foolish virgin? Do you have life in a risen and glorified Saviour? Or are you a mere professor of religion, content with the ordinary routine of church-going, having just enough religion to make you respectable on earth, but not enough to link you with Heaven?

We earnestly beseech you to think seriously of these things. Think of them now. Think how unspeakably dreadful it will be to find your lamp of profession going out and leaving you in obscure darkness - darkness that may be felt - the outer darkness of an everlasting night. How terrible to find the door shut behind that brilliant train which shall go in to the marriage; but shut in your face! How agonizing the cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us"! How withering, how crushing the response, "I know you not".

O, do give these weighty matters a place in your heart now, while yet the door is open, and while yet the day of grace is lengthened out in God's marvelous long suffering. The moment is rapidly approaching in which the door of mercy shall be closed against you forever, when all hope shall be gone, and your

precious soul be plunged in bleak and eternal despair. May God's spirit rouse you from your fatal slumber, and give you no rest until you find it in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and at His blessed feet in adoration and worship.

Before closing, we shall for a moment glance at the wise virgins. The great distinguishing feature which, according to the teaching of this parable, marks them off from the foolish virgins, is that when starting at the first they "took oil in their vessels with their lamps". In other words, what distinguishes true believers from mere professors is that the former have in their hearts the grace of God's Holy Spirit; they have gotten the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in them as the seal, the earnest, the unction, and the witness. This grand and glorious fact characterises now all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ - a stupendous, wondrous fact, most surely - an immense and ineffable privilege, which should ever bow our souls in holy adoration before our God and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose accomplished redemption has procured for us this great blessing.

But how sad to think that, notwithstanding this high and holy privilege, we should have to read in our parable, "They all slumbered and slept"! All alike, wise as well as foolish, fell asleep. The Bridegroom tarried, and all, without exception, lost the freshness, fervor, and power of the hope of His coming, and fell fast asleep.

Such is the statement of our parable, and such is the solemn fact of history. The whole professing body fell asleep. "That blessed hope" which shone so brightly on the horizon of the early Christians, very speedily waned and faded away; and as we scan the page of church history for eighteen centuries from the Apostolic Fathers to the opening of the current century, we look in vain for any intelligent reference to the Church's specific hope - the personal return of the blessed Bridegroom. In fact, that hope was virtually lost to the Church; nay, more, it became almost heresy to teach it. And even now, in these last days, there are hundreds of thousands of professed ministers of Christ who dare not preach or teach the coming of the Lord as it is taught in Scripture.

True it is, blessed be God, we notice a mighty change within the last half century. There has been a great awakening. God is, by His Holy Spirit, recalling His people to long-forgotten truths, and among the rest, to the glorious truth of the coming of the Bridegroom. Many are now seeing that the reason why the Bridegroom tarried was simply because God was long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Precious reason!

But they are also seeing that, despite this long-suffering, our Lord is at hand. Christ is coming. The midnight cry has gone forth, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him". May millions of voices re-echo the soul-stirring cry until it passes in its mighty moral power, from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth, rousing the whole Church to wait, as one, for the glorious appearing of the blessed Bridegroom of our hearts.

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