

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

25:1-13

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The chapter we have now begun is a continuation of our Lord's prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives. The time to which it refers is plain and unmistakable: from first to last, there is a continual reference to the second advent of Christ and the end of the world. The whole chapter contains three great divisions. In the first, our Lord uses his own second coming as an argument for watchfulness and heart-religion: this he does by the parable of the ten virgins. In the second, he uses his own second coming as an argument for diligence and faithfulness: this he does by the parable of the talents. In the third, he winds up all by a description of the great day of judgment: a passage which for majesty and beauty stands unequalled in the New Testament. The parable of the ten virgins which we have now read contains lessons peculiarly solemn and awakening. We see for one thing that the second coming of Christ will find his church a mixed body, containing evil as well as good. The professing church is compared to ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. All of them had lamps, but only five had oil in their vessels to feed the flame; all of them professed to have one object in view, but five only were truly wise, and the rest were foolish. The visible church of Christ is just in the same condition: all its members are baptized in the name of Christ, but not all really hear his voice and follow him; all are called Christians, and profess to be of the Christian religion, but not all have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, and really are what they profess to be. Our own eyes tell us that it is so now: the Lord Jesus tells us that it will be so when he comes again. Let us mark well this description. It is a humbling picture. After all our preaching and praying, after all our visiting and teaching, after all our missionary exertions abroad, and means of grace at home, many will be found at last dead in trespasses and sins! The wickedness and unbelief of human nature is a subject about which we all have much to learn. We see for another thing that Christ's second coming, whenever it may be, will take men by surprise. This is a truth which is set before us in the parable in a very striking manner. At midnight, when the virgins were slumbering and sleeping, there was a cry, The bridegroom cometh go ye forth to meet him! It will be just the same when Jesus returns to the world. He will find the vast majority of mankind utterly unbelieving and unprepared; he will find the bulk of his believing people in a sleepy and indolent state of soul. Business will be going on in town and country just as it does now; politics, trade, farming, buying, selling, pleasure-seeking will be taking up men's attention just as they do now; rich men will still be faring sumptuously, and poor men murmuring and complaining; churches will still be full of divisions, or wrangling about trifles; theological controversies will be still raging; ministers will still be calling men to repent, and the vast majority in all congregations will still be putting off the day of decision. In the midst of all this, the Lord Jesus himself shall suddenly appear. In an hour when

no man thinketh, the startled world shall be summoned to break off all its employments and to stand before its lawful King. There is something unspeakably awful in the idea: but thus it is written, and thus it shall be. Well might a dying minister say, "We are none of us more than half-awake." We see in the next place that when the Lord comes again many will find out the value of saving religion too late. The parable tells us that when the bridegroom came, the foolish virgins said unto the wise, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." It tells us, further, that as the wise had no oil to spare, the foolish went to buy for themselves. It tells us, finally, that they came when the door was shut, and asked in vain for admission: "Lord Lord!" they cried, "Open unto us!" All these expressions are striking emblems of things to come. Let us take heed that we do not find them true by experience, to our own eternal ruin. We may settle it in our minds that there will be an entire change of opinion one day as to the necessity of decided christianity. At present, we must all be aware that the vast majority of professing Christians care nothing at all about it: they have no sense of sin; they have no love towards Christ; they know nothing of being born again. Repentance, faith, grace and holiness are mere words to them; they are subjects which they either dislike, or about which they feel no concern. But this state of things shall one day come to an end. Knowledge, conviction, the value of the soul, the need of a Saviour, shall all burst on men's minds one day like a flash of lightning. But it will be too late! It will be too late to be buying oil when the Lord returns. The mistakes that are not found out till that day are irretrievable. Are we ever mocked, and persecuted, and thought foolish because of our religion? Let us bear it patiently and pray for those who persecute us: they know not what they are doing; they will certainly alter their minds one day. We may yet hear them confessing that we were wise and they were foolish. One day the whole world will acknowledge that the saints of God made a wise choice. We see lastly in this parable that when Christ returns, true Christians shall receive a rich reward for all they have suffered for their Master's sake. We are told that when the bridegroom came, they that were ready went in with him to the marriage. And the door was shut. True Christians shall alone be found ready at the second advent. Washed in the blood of atonement, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by the Spirit, they shall meet their Lord with boldness and sit down at the marriage supper of the lamb, to go out no more. Surely this is a blessed prospect. They shall be with their Lord: with him who loved them and gave himself for them; with him who bore with them and carried them through their earthly pilgrimage: with whom they loved truly and followed faithfully on earth, though with much weakness, and many a tear. Surely this is also a blessed prospect. The door will be shut at last, shut on all pain and sorrow; shut on an ill-natured and wicked world; shut on a tempting devil; shut on all doubts and fears; shut to be opened again no more. Surely we may again say, this is a blessed prospect. Let us remember these things: they will bear meditation; they are all true. The believer may have much tribulation, but he has before him abounding consolations. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (i.e. Psalm 30:5). The day of Christ's return shall surely make amends for all. Let us leave this parable with a settled determined never to be content with anything short of indwelling grace in our hearts. The lamp and the name of Christian, the profession and the ordinances of Christianity, are all well in their way, but they are not the one thing needful. Let us never rest till we know that we have the oil of the Spirit in our hearts.

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