

The Ten Virgins

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on 'The Ten Virgins' emphasizes the necessity of spiritual readiness and the distinction between true believers and those merely professing faith as they await Christ's return.

Scripture: Matthew 25:1

Topics: "Readiness for Christ's Return", "The Nature of True Faith"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the distinction between those who genuinely await Christ's return and those who merely profess faith without true longing for Him. He illustrates this through the parable of the ten virgins, highlighting that only the wise virgins, filled with the Holy Spirit, are prepared to meet the bridegroom. The sermon warns against complacency in faith, urging believers to cultivate a genuine desire for Christ's coming and to be filled with the light of the Spirit. Darby stresses that true believers are set apart from the world, which is in a state of judgment for rejecting God. Ultimately, he calls for a heartfelt readiness to meet the Lord, encouraging believers to trim their lamps and be vigilant in their faith.

Transcript

THE TEN VIRGINS

MATTHEW 25 :1-13

There are just two classes of characters which we meet with in the world : first, those who have never heard the way of truth and salvation, and in consequence are not manifestly interested in it ; and, secondly, those who have heard and professed to receive it. But the principles of the latter individually are very different.

The general character of the one part is summed up in the charge brought from scripture-" they profess that they know God, while in works they deny him " ; while the others are really and in truth waiting for His Son from heaven and the kingdom of God. This is what they desire visibly to behold, as is declared in John 3 : 3, " Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God " ; and to be brought into it-as in verse 5, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The perception therefore of this kingdom, and the entrance therein, arise manifestly from their being " born again."

Many are inclined to look upon the new birth, which is here referred to, as a change of views, desires, and sentiments only. It is a change, if indeed that can be called a change which is an entirely new creation ; as it is written, " created anew in Christ Jesus " ; it is a " translation "- hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son "-a transferring, a putting into a different position, which the Gospel of Matthew strikingly brings before us.

The Lord Jesus is represented in different points of view by all the evangelists ; and the reason the Holy Ghost has been thus pleased to exhibit Him is for the manifestation and furtherance of the Saviour's glory ; for He fills up every blessing-all the greatness, wisdom, love, and power of the eternal Godhead are unfolded in Him. In Him dwells all blessedness, and from Him it is communicated; and the believer, who has found and known Him, finds Him to be such ; his delight is in setting his mind on Christ ; he feels and rejoices in his identification with Him in all things, and in his oneness with Him. Christ is his centre of attraction, and he is revolving round Him as the object of supreme delight.

Now the Gospel of John presents Christ to our view as the Son, and delineates all His offices and works as such, having authority, and exercising it as the Son. Luke displays Him as the last Adam-the Lord from heaven-tracing His genealogy, not downwards as Matthew, but ascending to the great original thus, " which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God," going about doing good continually and accomplishing all righteousness. And in Matthew we have Him exhibited as the Messiah, the object of the prophecies, the substance of the shadows and types of the Jewish ritual : and as He was the looked-for seed, typified of old, and promised to Abraham and David as their seed, so we have in this Gospel His descent from Abraham and David according to the flesh. But the mention of the kingdom of heaven is peculiar to this evangelist. In chapter 13 we have it much noticed " To you it is given," said Jesus, speaking to His disciples, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."

Now the disciples, in common with the whole Jewish nation, fully expected an earthly kingdom ; but, as they had entirely overlooked those prophecies which foretold Christ's coming in humiliation, they were bewildered ; and therefore this subject with which the Lord engrossed their minds just met their necessities ; shewing them how the kingdom in mystery would be set up during the absence of their rejected Lord.

Now the -period of the kingdom here referred to must be looked upon as the time of the development of the purposes of God, from His rejection by the world in the Person of His Son, to Christ's coming again in glory, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father-a kingdom into which they are admitted, and none else. And this shews us the complete, entire disunion and dissociation of the children of God with the world.

What is the position of the world as it now stands ? What is its natural positive position ? It is in a state, not merely of hostility against God-not merely in its standing chargeable with alienation from all holiness, of open rebellion and outrage -but in a state of absolute exclusion from the presence of God, absolutely and definitely excluded from God's presence.

The word of God says, " He drove out the man." He had lost his innocence and purity, and was no longer fit to live in an innocent world. A plain precept had been given, and wilfully, in defiance of God, broken. The matter of fact as to eating the fruit was simple, but involved momentous consequences. Even the fact of its abstract littleness heightened the culpability of the offence ; the action, looked at in itself, was trivial, and yet it was the extent of every possible indignity which, under existing circumstances, could be offered to the majesty of heaven. The less the motive and inducement to sin, the greater is the guilt of it. Such

however was man's depravity ; and the world, as we now see it, is the result of such sin. Man sinned, and God drove out the man, because in his then state he could not dwell in His presence ; " and he placed at the east of the garden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

In this excluded state is the world with which we are conversant-full of toil, sorrow, sin, and misery. But the evil was not of God, it did not originate in Him-this was not God's doing. But after this delinquency and exclusion was there no reaction-no return to purity ? No!-the world was never again to be an innocent world ; what had once become radically guilty could never again become radically pure ; the very source of innocence, being once defiled, could not by any possibility become again holy. Innocence, once lost, is lost for ever. Man could do nothing. God would indeed come to put away sin; but how ? By the sacrifice of His own dear Son, bringing in a new dispensation of unbounded mercy, and setting up a kingdom, and gathering out of the world the subjects of this new dispensation.

The world had sinned, but was not left there. God manifested Himself, and made known His purposes ; first, to Adam, when He called him-" Where art thou ? " and brought his sin before him ; then in the calling out of the world, and preserving Noah, the type of the church, after the flood ; His calling of Abraham and the Jewish nation, giving laws, and exhibiting Himself in types and ceremonies as the object of the believer's faith. At length, when all these displays of superlative love had but more glaringly manifested the total enmity of man's mind, the Lord sent His Son: " I will send my beloved Son; it may be they will reverence him."

In this stage of the world we behold man, as it were, in a fresh position of more determined enmity and fiercer malignity, in league with Satan, and full of deadly animosity. The world's feeling now is, " This is the heir; come, let us kill him." And when was this foul principle exhibited ? When the Lord comes in sympathetic mercy to meet the wants and bear away the sins of His people. It was then they declared they would not have Him. When He comes to reconcile, and to display the tenderness of His sympathetic love, then nothing would do but they must get rid of God. When He comes into the very midst of the sufferings and woes of a world lying in wickedness, they refuse to have Him. He was God, and therefore (as far as man could do it) they turned Him out of the world.

Now in this last act of man we do not see simply rebellion, or even defiance, but absolute rejection of God. They used the opportunity of His humiliation to heap indignity and scorn upon Him ; and at length, as far as they were concerned, drove Him out of the world in which we are now dwelling. " We will not have this man to reign over use " is practically its determination.

Now believers are associated, in thought, feeling, affection, and interest, with Him who is the object of the world's determined enmity; they are subjects of another kingdom and another King ; the King whom the world will not have to reign over them is the King they own and serve. They see that the world which surrounds them is a judged world; that it has been convicted of rejecting all right and truth ; as our Lord Himself says, " Now is the judgment of this world ; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." The judgment was passed when Christ exclaimed, " It is finished " ; in the very act of His crucifixion was their judgment sealed. The most determined and inveterate enmity of man against God was at its height on the cross of Christ ; man's malice could go no farther, and God's love was there also manifested in the highest degree. Sin abounded, but love much more abounded ; the very act which exhibited enmity of the deepest dye on man's part opened the highest love on God's. Here they met, as it were, in a centre-at a point, each drawn to the greatest possible extent ; and here love obtained the victory, triumphed over sin, and brought

in everlasting righteousness.

And this judgment of the world is known to all believers yea, the Holy Ghost Himself convinces them of it. "When the Comforter is come, he shall reprove [or convince] the world of sin," said Christ ; " of righteousness, and of judgment . . . because the prince of this world is judged." So that they are convinced they lived in a judged world, a world found guilty of, and condemned for, rejecting God, but on which sentence has not as yet been executed. It is now just in the position between sentence having been passed and the final execution.

In the very act which thus displays man's rage the believer sees also his own perfect acceptance ; that God, in whom he delights, and in whom he rests, has risen in mercy above man's depravity and triumphed in love over the bitterest hatred. The summit of malevolence the most abominable, when the Saviour's side was pierced, was met by a tide of blood and of water, to sanctify and to purify the unclean : this is the glory, the blessedness, of the child of God.

But from the parable before us of the ten virgins we necessarily perceive that there are those who, though associated with the people of God in profession and outwardly appearing to belong to them, are not in reality alive to God. They appear to be looking for His coming, but they are not longing to behold Him or to go in with Him to the marriage. It is not the earnest desire of their hearts to behold Him as He is ; their souls have not gone forth, crying, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. They more resemble those servants who exclaimed, " My Lord delayeth his coming," and then followed on in their own pleasure. But they know not the delight, the joy, the heavenly happiness of waiting in longing expectation to see His face, and dwell with Him for ever!

But we have in this account of the ten virgins an evidence of the extent to which even outward profession may go. Though there were but five wise, yet they all went forth to meet the bridegroom-yes, ostensibly for the same purpose, 'they all " went forth." They were alike in companionship; they had all the lamps of profession. In what then did they differ ? In this : they had not just the one thing, the only thing, that fitted them to receive the bridegroom. They were without the light wherewith to usher in the Lord ; they wanted the very thing which alone could make them suitable companions for the Master ; namely, the participation of the divine nature, the impartation of light, the indwelling of God the Holy Ghost. They wanted the fixedness of the affections wrought in the soul by the oil of gladness, the unction of the Spirit, which filled the souls of the wise virgins, and which waited but for the appearance of the bridegroom to emanate in a flame of glory. This was what they wanted; this is what the believer has ; and this it is that makes the mighty difference between him and the world.

At midnight the cry came the heavenly virgins arose. Though conscious of much weakness in themselves, they rise at the cry of their beloved ; for there is that in them which answers to the cry. The foolish virgins trimmed their lamps ; but their lamps failed to burn! And is there no remedy then ? None! According to the Saviour's awful declaration: " He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

Here finishes the total distinction between the tares and the wheat. Now it is openly seen that their objects, hopes, and associations were totally different-opposite and irreconcilable. One is of the world, the other of God - one is quickened by Christ, the other is reserved to be burned. " Bind the tares in bundles, and burn them ; but gather the wheat into my garner."

And why are the wheat still spared, but as witnesses of the grace of our Lord. ; to display to the world the image Of Him, whose they are, and whom they serve; to manifest the inseparable union existing between them and their glorious Head, as He said Himself, " that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me " ?

And are you, believers, thus distinguished in the midst of a world judged guilty of the crime of rejecting the Lord of glory, and turning Him out of the world ? You are walking in a condemned world, on which sentence has been passed, but the execution of it is still averted, until the last of Christ's saints is gathered into the garner. Are you conscious of this, and yet are you, can you, be living in association of pursuits, feelings, desires, or appearance with them ? The believer's delight is the Lord's glory. Where is the Lord's glory-in an association in any way with His enemies ? No. The saint that looks with delight to his Lord's coming is one with Him in feeling and desire-the Lord's will is his. Now do you contemplate the time when He will come to receive you to Himself and when subsequently all that off-ends Him shall be swept away, and His own shall reign with Him ? Can you contemplate with delight that period, when all that oppose the truth of God, everything that you now behold belonging to the world, shall be destroyed by the brightness of His coming, shall be consumed by the breath of His mouth? All things that offend shall no longer dwell there.

This is the saint's whole delight ; this is what he is looking and longing for, and hastening unto, namely, the coming of the Lord. Is this your personal desire ? Is this your habitual experience ? Then are you crying, Tarry not; come, Lord Jesus : even so, Amen ? Then are you aiming at greater meetness for your heavenly Master and Bridegroom ? and are you trimming your lamps to have them in readiness to meet and light your Lord when He shall appear ?

Let this be your desire, your joy, your delight : that you may be found watching and waiting to go in unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

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