

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

By J. W. Byers

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. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil in them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." 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." 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. 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. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." - Matt. 25:1-13.

This parable is associated with the parable of the talents. The theme of this one is *watchfulness* that of the talents, *faithfulness*. Both refer to the time of the end when the coming of Christ is imminent. Practically, there are many profitable lessons in these parables, which apply to the children of God in all the centuries since the day they were spoken; but especially do these words of warning apply to the saints of God today, upon whom the ends of the world are come. While in all generations past the earthly life of each person was liable to come suddenly to an end, and thus all opportunities of faithfulness and watchfulness cease, this equal liability is upon each of us today. But there is yet the still greater ONE-the sudden coming Christ and the end of the world when all opportunities for preparation will have forever ceased. Our condition at that moment will seal our eternal destiny, for joy or for sorrow.

Jesus gives faithful emphasis to this important subject, and concludes the parable with the final warning, "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." The ten virgins represent that class of Christian professors who claim to believe in the coming of Christ, and are looking for this stupendous event to burst in upon their slumbering

world at any time. They took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom, thus telling to the world that they are looking for His immediate appearing.

The lamps represent our profession. All these virgins possessed a lamp, which was certainly one of the necessities for this occasion. Every child of God must have a profession, without which none can consistently expect to be saved. The profession of all the ten virgins as doubtless the same in appearance; but in reality there was a vast difference, for five of them were wise and five were foolish. The foolish seemed to be perfectly satisfied with their profession, and no doubt felt as secure and certain of their safety as the wise.

The oil represents the love of God. The vessels represent our hearts. The foolish were such because they took no oil in their vessels with their lamps. The question of oil had not seemed to concern them. They professed to be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, but were unconscious of the fact that they were destitute of one the absolute necessities. What a true picture is this today of many who profess to be ready for Christ's coming! Their hearts are so full with the love of the world, self, or the praise of men, that the love of God is not in them. How faithfully we are warned against

these things in the word of God! "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."- I John 2:15, 16.

Truly the love of God cannot exist in a heart that holds any of these things. Consequently no one is ready to enter into the presence of God while in such a condition. The language of the parable bears the import of the possibility of these foolish virgins once having had oil in their vessels. They took no oil with them. They may once have possessed oil, and because of not being watchful and prayerful, permitted the cares of this life, the love of the world, or the lust of other things to cause the love of God to leak away, leaving them under the deception that they were still ready and had plenty of oil.

They apparently were unconscious of the fact that they had no oil, until they came to the act of trimming their lamps in the critical moment when the oil was indispensable. They were not ready because they had not watched, neither in respect to losing what oil they may have had, nor being certain that they possessed a good supply in their vessels constantly while waiting. Their foolishness consisted

in their carelessness. They rested secure in the consciousness of simply possessing a lamp, and were not awakened to their fatal mistake until the time of actual test.

“But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” Their wisdom consisted in their carefulness to make every necessary preparation upon going out to meet the bridegroom, and their watchfulness while waiting, in seeing that the oil was kept in good supply. They kept themselves in the love of God. The apostle Jude so appropriately admonishes us in this respect of wisdom: “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

The apostle Paul also teaches us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of

the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:15-17). These wise virgins were thus watchful and diligent in their expectation of the sudden coming of the bridegroom. The tarrying of the bridegroom represents the period of time in which we are now living. We are looking for His coming, and if wise, we are ready at any moment for the cry of His sudden appearance. The world goes on in its maddened struggle of greed and gain, buying and selling, building and planting, eating and drinking, planning, with no thought of the awful calamity that is hanging over it and the sudden end that is certain to be ushered in at the coming of the bridegroom. None but the virgins are apprised of the true condition of the times in which we live.

“They all slumbered and slept.” This represents the attitude of the virgins while the tarrying time continues. It does not signify that this period was entirely occupied in literal sleep or slumber; but rather, that they, while waiting, are occupied in the necessary avocations of life, busy with their hands, and yet with watchful hearts, ready at any moment to meet the bridegroom. The cry of His coming was made at “midnight.” This represents the time when the world will be the least expectant. It also signifies a time of the greatest spiritual darkness, and consequently the greatest

necessity of bright, shining lights to guide the virgins to their desired place. They "arose and trimmed their lamps" which would cause them to shine brighter. "Our lamps are gone out." The foolish now saw their sad mistake. They had, during the time of waiting, neglected to attend to the necessity of a plentiful supply of oil. Now the dismal cry, "Our lamps have gone out." They have no time to lose in this emergency, and as a natural result, in their timed perplexity they call upon their companions to share their oil with them. But their disappointment is increased when they find that the wise have no oil to spare. If they would obtain oil they must go and buy for themselves. How true this is of the love of God! One cannot impart it to another, neither can any one spare any for another's use. Our hearts may be filled to overflowing with this heavenly love, so that others will feel the effect of it and thus be won to God; but each must come direct to God and through a personal faith in Christ obtain an individual supply.

Those foolish virgins may have thought, while waiting for the bridegroom, that they might easily obtain oil from their companions, in case of need. They perhaps saw the abundant supply they had and consequently felt secure against the sudden event for which they were looking. There was oil in

their company, they were certain, and, without fail, they would have what they needed. I meet professing Christians who have no lack in form of worship. They seem to enjoy the society of the saints, and in the congregation are usually in attendance. They are generous and charitable in their dealings with their fellow men and claim to believe in the coming of Christ and every other scriptural doctrine. They seem to have no lack in certain lines of work, and yet there is a sad lack somewhere. As it was said of the church of Ephesus, so it is to this class of professors, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for Thy name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Revelation 2:2-4) The great lack in their hearts is caused by the absence of the love of God. Poor foolish virgins! Should Christ come, or if while in this condition they were suddenly brought into the presence of God, they would find themselves utterly unprepared -destitute and void of the love of God. No matter what may have been the spiritual condition of the heart in years past, the all

important question with us all is: Have we the oil in our vessels with the lamps trimmed now?

While these poor, perplexed souls went to buy, the bridegroom came. The wise were ready and went in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut. We do not read that the foolish obtained any oil when they went to buy. It would be very unreasonable to expect to buy oil at the hour of midnight, yet there was no alternative. If they were to get any they must go and search for it. While groping through the darkness in this condition, the bridegroom came and they were not prepared to go in with Him. The parable infers that these foolish virgins afterward came seeking entrance into the marriage without oil. They beg for admittance while in their unprepared condition, and in addition to their disappointments and perplexities, hear these heart sickening words, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Their empty, smoked, and blackened lamps in hand and their hearts faint with despair and disappointment, they turn away from the door, rejected and lamenting, into eternal darkness.

Dear brother and sister, Jesus has given us this parable as a warning against carelessness. Continual vigilance and prayerfulness on our

part is our only safety. The great Word has been spoken by the Master, published by the apostles, and sent down through every generation, until it has been oft repeated in our ears. Obedience to it will secure our abundant entrance into the everlasting presence of the Bridegroom. WATCH.

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