



Parable of the Ten Virgins

Sermon by George Müller of Bristol

Notes of a Sermon delivered by George Müller in Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, Lord's Day Evening, March 15th, 1874

Matthew xxv. 1-13

The connection in which this portion stands, you know. In the previous chapter, the Lord Jesus had been speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, and about His return, particularly about the latter; and having brought weighty matters in connection with this deeply important subject before His disciples, He then goes on with our parable in the 25th chapter. The very commencement of the chapter shows us the connection, - "*Then*," - at that time, when these things spoken of in the latter part of the previous chapter were coming to pass, at that time the kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins.

With regard to parables, I state again, what I have several times before stated, that we should seek to inquire what is the great truth, or what are the great truths couched under the parable, and intended to beset forth by the parable. Having found out this, to be content with that, and not to seek to press every particular point of the parable, lest we should be led into great errors in doing so: for earthly things never to the full can set forth heavenly things. In seeking to find some great truth couched under every particular point, we are in great danger of being led astray. Nevertheless there are always great points, weighty points, couched under the parables spoken by our blessed Lord. Now the question arises, What are the great points which the blessed Lord meant to bring before the disciples by this parable of the ten virgins? Evidently this: that at the time of His return while there may be the looking for Him, the expecting Him, and the great mass of Christians being stirred up to look for His return the danger will be this, - lest all fall asleep; not only those who have merely the form of godliness without the spirit, but also true disciples, real children of God even; these will be in danger of falling asleep, and not going on waiting and watching. Therefore the great point against which the blessed Lord meant by this parable to warn disciples is, not to go to sleep, but to watch and wait for His return to the very last moment. And we should especially seek to have coupled with this the preparation of heart in which all should be found waiting, looking for, expecting the return of the Lord, and the danger lest persons are occupied with these things connected with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and profess even to wait for His appearing, and yet unprepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We consider now a little more minutely this parable. I have to state before doing so that this parable was given by our Lord Jesus Christ in reference to Jewish customs; and as those to whom He was speaking were intimately acquainted with these customs, He does not enter more particularly into them; but one or the other here present may not know the customs to which our blessed Lord refers. At the time of marriage among the Jews it was the custom that the bridegroom in the evening went out with his male friends to fetch home to his house the bride, while the companions of the bride waited in the neighbourhood of the bridegroom's house for the bridegroom; and then the bride coming with the bridegroom, these companions, coming with the bride and bridegroom, went into the house and partook of the marriage feast. The custom was in the evening to fetch home the bride, and therefore the going to sleep is referred to; therefore the reference is made to the midnight cry.

“Then shall the kingdom, of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.”

The kingdom of heaven is used here for the professing Church; this is the meaning of the phrase here. I say advisedly here the professing Church, for there is no reason to believe that the foolish virgins were true disciples, but only professing Christians “which took their lamps;” for this reason, because it was evening, it was after sunset, they had to wait sometimes an hour or two, and as it became dark soon after sunset, therefore the necessity for the lamps. But the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins: the wise not only took their lamps, but in separate vessels took oil, that if necessary they might replenish their lamps; but the foolish had made no such preparation. That was the difference, and only difference between the two. You see the ten went to meet the bridegroom, not the five only. They all had lamps, but there was wanting, with regard to the foolish, the vessel containing the oil, that the lamps might be replenished if necessary. The wise went to sleep like the foolish, but they had the oil, and that was the difference. Now this is one of the points regarding which we rightly judge what is couched under the parable. We have to inquire into it, what is the meaning of the oil? what is set forth by the Holy Ghost with regard to the oil? The one had oil, the other had none. Evidently this is the meaning, - that through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ they were partakers of the Spirit; the others were not partakers of the Spirit, because they had no real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at all. They professed to be His, they professed to care about Him, they professed to go out to meet Him, but in heart they were strangers. And this is the momentous point, "Whether through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we are partakers of the Holy Ghost or not. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His. Whatever we have, if we have not the Holy Ghost, we do not belong to Christ. In whatever way we may seek to resemble the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, - we may be in the habit of reading our Bibles, of bowing our knees, of singing together with them, of meeting together with them, of partaking together with them of the Lord's Supper, we may be reckoned among them as disciples; and yet with all this, far from God; with all this, unregenerate yet; with all this, wanting the Spirit of Christ; with all this, not born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Talkers we may be, in outward appearance like the children of God; but if the heart is unrenewed, if there be no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, through which we are begotten again and renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost, so that the Holy Ghost takes our bodies and makes them His temple, - if this is not the case, we are yet far from God and His kingdom; and therefore the solemn, momentous question, particularly in these days of almost universal profession and discipleship, when there is so much profession and religion in the land, whether it is the form or the reality; whether we are born again, or yet dead in trespasses and sins with all our profession; whether merely in the way of form we bow the knee, and sing His praise, and say Amen to the prayers of others; or whether the heart goes along with the praises and prayers, or whether we only go to this or that meeting, because it is respectable in these days. In the days of the apostles they were cast out as mad; but in these days no man is called a respectable man if he does not make a profession of religion in some shape; and people, therefore, in order that they may be respected would make a profession of some sort or other; and therefore the momentous question is this, - Whether it is a reality? whether it is heart work? whether we be born again? whether it is really taking Christ as our Saviour? or whether it is, after all, only a mere hollow profession? The question is not whether my name is written on the Church book, but whether it is written in the Lamb's book of life; not how my fellow-men look on me, but how God looks on me. Not what is my appearance in the sight of my fellow-men, but in the sight of God. Am I His child? am I born

again? Are the disciples loved by me in the heart, or do I simply by the lips profess to care about them. Before God we should weigh these things, and see that we are not deceiving ourselves. But the simplest believer who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul, feeble and weak though he may yet be, nevertheless having the heart upright, in carrying on warfare against sin, and not in league with the world and the devil, having yet the desire to carry on the conflict against the world, the flesh, and the devil, - all such simply entirely hanging on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, they are the wise virgins, they will be saved at the last, they will assuredly enter with the bridegroom to the marriage supper of the Lamb; while those who simply make a profession, but who cannot appeal to the heart-searching Lord Jesus, and say, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee," will be shut out. Oh! may such be entreated to seek after reality, and not be satisfied with the mere empty name to live, while they are dead in trespasses and sins.

Now to which of the two classes do we belong, - the wise or the foolish? Oh! let us seek to answer before God; and if the matter is unsettled, let us not retire to rest tonight without making the inquiry whether we belong to the wise. You may try to put it off, but it will force itself again upon your heart; therefore ask the question now - To which do I belong? All of us here present belong to one of the two classes. Now let it be answered. Let me beseech and entreat you not to sit down to supper, and far less to retire to rest tonight, without answering the question before God. And if in honesty of heart you have to say, I am among the foolish virgins, then I ask you, how long you intend to continue in that state? That word belongs to you: "The door was shut." You must be regenerated. The door of mercy is open yet; press, press, press into the door while it remains open. Oh! be besought and entreated.

But some may say, How may I press in? Own before God that you are wicked, guilty sinners deserving punishment; if you do not feel that you are sinners, ask God to show it to you, for it is His delight to reveal it to you. Now, then, God tells you that you are wicked, as all men without exception are wicked, and we have to pass sentence on ourselves, and to accept what God so mercifully has provided in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wounded Him, bruised Him in our room and stead. The Lord Jesus in His own person carried our sins, He bore the punishment due to us, and the soul believing in Him, for His sake, on the ground of what the Substitute suffered in the room of the sinner, shall be saved. Then if you find out by the grace of God that you belong to the wise virgins, you have to say to yourself, All praise to God on this account, I am indebted to Him, for it; and now my business is to seek to live to Him, to seek to let my gratitude show that I am sensible of the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that my future business is this, - while the Lord Jesus tarries I seek not to go to sleep, but to wait for the Son of God from heaven.

As I said before, the danger lest true disciples, real children of God, such who have begun in heart to wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, lest they should be found slumbering and sleeping when the Lord comes. It pleased God about forty-four years ago to arouse the Church in this land with regard to the truth concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was in the year 1829. Since that time many a true servant of Christ who was stirred up has been taken away, has fallen asleep in Jesus. The blessed One has delayed His return. Many others have been in danger, and not only in danger, but have actually gone to sleep with regard to the return of the Lord Jesus. And therefore the great point is, that we seek in heart and spirit, in life and

deportment, to let it be seen that we are waiting for the return of the Lord, like the Thessalonians of old. What delight it will give to the heart of Jesus when He comes again and finds our hearts ready to receive Him. Not only to have been stirred up for a little time to talk about His return, but practically and experimentally to look for His return. But seeing here that the wise virgins slumbered and slept, we should not hide it from ourselves that we are in danger of sleeping.

“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.”

In such an hour as this, no faith of the one will do for the other. No possession on the part of the one will do for the other; it is an individual matter. We must have Christ in our hearts the hope of glory; we must be partakers of the Holy Ghost for ourselves; we must be born again as to ourselves, others have none to spare. No parents can believe on the part of their children. The son and the daughter need the Holy Ghost as well as the father and mother. No godly children can believe on the part of their father and mother; the parents must believe for themselves. The father must have the Spirit, and the son, and the daughter. Except it be so, that the individuals are partakers of the Holy Ghost through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they will have no admission, the door will be shut. Oh! the awfulness of the case; to think the door shut, and to be without. But remember, the door is not shut yet; it is open wide now, and the Lord Jesus, this very evening, with open arms is standing in our midst, and saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink;” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The blessed Lord Jesus is delighted to receive sinners, - the oldest, the most hardened sinner, if he but believes in Him, trusts in Him. And therefore remember, any who have to say to themselves, I am among the foolish virgins; I have been born in the house of godly people, have been educated among godly people, and yet I am among the foolish virgins; remember, it is not too late, but do not remain undecided, lest you find it is too late at the last.

“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.”

What is the great practical lesson to be gathered? Evidently this, - That if people put off to care about their souls to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is too late. That is not the time. While He tarrieth, that is the time; while He is carrying on the high-priestly work of intercession, that is the time. But when once the Master of the house has risen up, when once He has come, then to care about the soul is too late, too late, too late then. Oh! that this may be deeply impressed on the hearts of my dear friends and fellow-sinners here present. Did you ever, with reference to your own hearts, consider this word, “The door was shut”? If you never did, let me entreat you to do it now, - you my dear girls there, and you my dear little boy, and you my dear little girl, and all here present who have never pondered this word, “the door was shut,” “the door was shut,” “the door was shut.” And, oh! if this were to be my place, if I had to stand outside, if I had to knock; oh! what would be my pain if the door was shut? Oh, the solemnity of this! Oh! who can describe the feelings of those persons who used to say, - Ah! it is only a dream, it is only a fancy, it is all right; God will not be so particular? and now find that God is very particular, and that the Lord Jesus is as good as His word, Oh! what then? what then? to stand outside and find that it is shut, and shut for ever? Oh! the solemnity of the position. But it is open yet. The very fact that we are assembled here is a proof that it is not shut. If it were

shut, the poor servant of Christ now addressing you would not be allowed to speak a word. Now, then, will you delay yet? Will you remain undecided yet? Oh! be besought not to remain undecided, but to close this night with Christ. If you leave it till to-morrow, it may be too late, and the difficulties will be greater than they are now.

The word "Müllers" is written in a large, black, cursive script font. The letters are connected and have a fluid, handwritten appearance.

Müllers is a working name of the
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