

The Christian Race and Other Sermons (1900)

by
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Sermon 15

"THE SECOND ADVENT (THE TEN VIRGINS)"

"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 with 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 is one of the most solemn parables that the Lord Jesus ever spoke: partly because of the time at which it was spoken; partly because of the matter which it contains.

As to the *time*, it was but a few days before our Lord's death. It was spoken within view of Gethsemane and Calvary, the cross and the grave.

As to the *matter*, it stands as a beacon to the Church in all ages. It is a witness against carelessness and slothfulness, against apathy and indifference, and a witness of no uncertain sound. It cries to sinners "Awake," and it cries to saints "Watch."

Now, I must necessarily pass over many points that might be spoken of in handling this parable. I have no time to follow out many trains of thought which it opens up. I stand here not to make a book, but to preach a single sermon; and, this being the case, I shall keep to those points which it most concerns you and me to know.

The marriage customs of the country where the parable was spoken *call for a word of explanation*. Marriages generally took place there in the evening. The bridegroom and his friends came in procession to the bride's house after nightfall. The young women who were the bride's friends were assembled at the bride's house to wait for them. As soon as the lamps or torches of the bridegroom's party were seen in the distance, these young women lighted their lamps and went forth to meet him;

then, having formed one united party, they all returned together to the bride's house. As soon as they entered it, the door was shut, and the marriage ceremony took place; and after that no one was admitted. All these were familiar things to those who heard the Lord Jesus, and it is right and proper that you should understand them.

The figures used in the parable also call for a word of explanation. I give you my own view of their meaning. I may be wrong; but you have a right to know what I think and I will tell you shortly, but decidedly--I have no time to do more.

I believe the TIME spoken of in this parable means the time when Christ shall return in person to the world. The word "then" compared with the end of the twenty-fourth chapter appears to me to settle the question.

I believe the virgins carrying lamps represent professing Christians, the visible Church of Christ.

I believe the bridegroom represents the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I take the wise virgins to be the true believers, the converted part of the visible Church. I take the foolish to be the mere nominal Christians--the unconverted.

I take the oil, which some had and others had not, to be the grace of the Spirit, the unction of the Holy One.

I consider the midnight cry to mean the second coming or advent of Christ into the world.

I consider the going in to the marriage of the wise to mean the reward of the believers. I consider the shutting out of the foolish to mean the final exclusion from heaven of the unbelieving.

And now, without saying anything more of preface, let me go on to point out the great practical lessons which this parable is meant to teach.

- I. Learn first that the visible Church of Christ will always be a mixed body till Christ comes again.
- II. Learn secondly that this visible church is always in danger of neglecting the doctrine of Christ's second advent.
- III. Learn thirdly that whenever Christ does come again, it will be a very sudden event.
- IV. Learn fourthly that Christ's second advent will make an immense change to all members of Christ's Church, both good and bad.

Let me try to set each of these truths before you.

- I. Learn firstly that the Church of Christ will always be a mixed body till Christ comes again.

I can gather no other meaning from the beginning of the parable. I see wise and foolish virgins

mingled in one company--virgins with oil and virgins with no oil all side by side. And I see this state of things going on till the very moment the bridegroom appears. I see all this, and I cannot avoid the conclusion that the visible Church will always be a mixed body till Jesus comes again. Its members will never be all unbelievers; Christ will always have His witnesses. Its members will never be all believers; there will always be imperfection, hypocrisy, and false profession.

I frankly say that I can find no standing ground for the common notion that the Church will gradually advance towards perfection, and that it will become better and better, holier and holier up to the very end. I see no warrant of Scripture for believing that sin will gradually dwindle away in the earth, consume, melt and disappear by inches, like the last snowdrift in spring; nor yet for believing that holiness will gradually increase like the banyan tree, blossom, bloom, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

I have no doubt whatever that true gospel religion admits of ebbs and flows in its progress, of spring tides and of neaps; and that, like the moon, Christ's bride is sometimes full and walking in brightness, and like the same moon is sometimes under an eclipse and scarcely seen at all. That there will always be a vast amount of evil in the world until the second advent, I am fully persuaded. Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The tares and the wheat shall grow together till the harvest. I fully expect that the earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, but I believe that day will be in an entirely new dispensation--will not be till after the Lord's return. Till the Bridegroom comes there will always be wise and foolish in the Church.

The wise are those who have that wisdom which the Holy Ghost alone can give. They know their sins, they know Christ, they know how to walk and please God, and they act upon their knowledge. They look on life as a season of preparation for eternity, not as an end but as a way, not as a harbor but a voyage, not as a home but a journey, not as full age but a school. Happy are those who know this!

The foolish are those who are without spiritual knowledge. They neither know God, nor Christ, nor their own hearts, nor sin, nor the world, nor heaven, nor hell, as they ought. There is no folly like soul-folly. To expect wages after no work, or prosperity after no pains, or learning after no diligent reading--all this is folly. But to expect heaven without faith in Christ, or the kingdom of God without being born again, or the crown without the cross--all this is greater folly and yet more common.

Till the Bridegroom comes there will always be some who have grace and some who have not grace in the visible Church. Some will have nothing but the name of Christian, others will have the reality; some will have the profession of religion, others will have the possession also. Some will be content to belong to the church, others will never be content unless they also belong to Christ. Some will be satisfied if they have only the baptism of water, others will never be satisfied unless they also feel within the baptism of the Spirit. Some will stop short in the form of Christianity, others will never rest unless they have also the substance.

Brethren, the visible Church of Christ is made up of these two classes. There always have been such; there always will be such until the end. Borderers and undecided ones, whom man's eyes cannot make out, there must needs be. But gracious and graceless, wise and foolish, make up the whole Church of Christ. You are all written down in this parable yourselves. You are all either wise virgins or foolish virgins; you have all oil of grace, or you have none; you are all either members of Christ, or not; you

are all either traveling towards heaven or towards hell.

See now how important it is that we ministers should divide our congregations in preaching to them. See how we ought to address you as an assembly in which some are converted and some unconverted, some are regenerate and some unregenerate, and some have grace and some have no grace at all. I know well that some do not like it; I know that some fancy that we should address you all as good Christian people. I for one will never do so, and I know not how anyone can do it with the Bible in his hands.

There is a notion abroad that all have grace who have been baptized, and that all congregations of baptized people should be addressed as regenerate. I protest against such a notion as a dangerous contradiction of Scripture; I protest against it as calculated to confound the minds of people as to what real grace is. I protest against the idea of grace which nobody can see, of grace which a man may have in his heart and yet no one be aware of its existence. I know of no such grace in Scripture. Grace or no grace, oil or no oil, living or dead, having the Spirit or not having the Spirit,--these are the only distinctions that I can find. These are the old paths, and in them I advise you to walk. Beware of false prophets! From ministers who do not draw a broad line between having the lamp of profession and having the oil of grace, may the good Lord ever deliver you!

II. Learn, secondly, that the Church of Christ is always in danger of neglecting the doctrine of Christ's second personal advent.

I draw that truth from the solemn words, "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." I am quite aware that men explain that verse in different ways. I stand here to call no man master. I am set for the proclamation of that which I believe in my conscience to be true, and I cannot be bound by the opinion of others.

I do not believe that the words "they all slumbered and slept" means the death of all; though many think so. To my mind such an interpretation involves a simple untruth. All the professing Church will not be dead when Christ comes. St. Paul says, "We which are alive remain (not 'all sleep') unto the coming of the Lord."

I do not believe that the words mean that all the professing Church got into a slumbering and sleeping state of soul, though many think so. Such a view appears to me to wipe away the distinction between believers and unbelievers far too much. Sleep is one of the emblems which the Spirit has chosen to signify unconversion. "Awake, thou that sleepest," etc.

I believe that the words are to be explained with a special regard to the great event on which the whole parable chiefly runs--the second advent of Christ; and I believe that our Lord's meaning in this verse of the parable was simply this: that during the interval between His first and second advent the whole Church, both believers and unbelievers, would get into a dull and dim-sighted state of soul about the blessed doctrine of His own personal return.

And I say deliberately that, so far as my own judgment goes, there never was a saying of our Lord's more thoroughly verified by the event. I say that, of all doctrines of the gospel, the one in which we are most unlike the first Christians in our sense of its true value is the doctrine of Christ's second advent.

In our view of man's corruption, of justification by faith, of our need of the sanctifying Spirit, upon these matters I believe we should find that English Christians were much of one mind with believers at Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, or Rome in older times; but in our view of the second advent I believe we should find there was a mighty difference if we could but compare our experience. We should find that we fell woefully short of them in our estimate of its importance and realisation of its nature. We should discover, in one word, that we slumber and sleep about it.

I must speak my mind on this subject, now that I am upon it. I do so at the risk of giving offence and rubbing against prejudices. But speak I must.

I submit, then, that the Church of Christ has gone too long not seeing that there are two personal advents of Christ spoken of in the Old Testament--an advent in humiliation and an advent in glory too, an advent to suffer and an advent to reign. We have got into a vicious way of taking all the promises spiritually and all the curses and denunciations literally. The curses on Jews and Babylon and Edom and Egypt we have been content to take literally; the blessings on Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Israel, and so forth, we have taken spiritually and comfortably applied to the Church of Christ. No man can read sermons or commentaries and not be aware of this. I believe it has been a wrong system of interpreting Scripture. I believe that prophetic denunciations and prophetic promises in their *primary* sense are always to be taken literally. That primary sense we have sadly lost sight of, and by so doing I think we have got into a slumbering and sleeping state about the second advent of Christ.

But I say further, that the Church of Christ has gone on too long putting a strange sense on the passage which speaks of the coming of the Son of man in the New Testament. Some tell us that this expression always means death. No man can read the thousands of epitaphs on tombstones in which the Son of man's coming is thrust in, and not observe how widespread this view is. Some tell us it means the conversion of the world. Some tell us it means the destruction of Jerusalem. That also is a very common way of interpreting the expression with many. They find Jerusalem everywhere in the New Testament prophecies, and like Aaron's rod, they make it swallow up everything else. Now, I have no desire to underrate the importance of death, the conversion of the world, or the destruction of Jerusalem; but I must express my own firm belief that the coming of the Son of man is an entirely distinct subject from any of the three I have mentioned. And the acceptance they have met with I hold to be one more proof that in the matter of Christ's second advent the Church has slumbered and slept.

The plain truth of Scripture, I believe, is as follows. When the number of the elect is accomplished, Christ shall come again to this world, with power and great glory. As He came the first time in person, so He shall come the second time in person; as He went away visibly, so He shall return visibly. Then shall be fulfilled those words of Acts 1: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven"; and the words of Zechariah 14: "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with Thee"; and the words of Enoch in Jude: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints." And the grand shortcoming of the Church in these days has been and is this: that we ministers do not preach enough about this second advent, and private believers do not think enough about it. There are a few, but what are they? Many do not. We none of us live on it, feed on it, act on it, work from it, take comfort in it, as God intended us to do. In short, the Bridegroom tarries, and we all slumber and sleep.

It proves nothing against the true doctrine that it has sometimes been fearfully abused. I should like to

know what doctrine has not. Salvation by grace has been made a pretext for licentiousness; election an excuse for all manner of unclean living; and justification by faith a warrant for antinomianism. But if men will draw wrong conclusions we are not obliged to throw up good principles. We do not give up the gospel because of the extravagancies of Saltmarsh and William Huntington, of Jumpers and Shakers; and we need not give up the second advent because of the Fifth Monarchy men of the Commonwealth or Irvingites of our own time.

Nor yet does it prove anything against the doctrine that it is attended with many difficulties. I do not think there are half so many difficulties as those connected with the first coming, and yet those difficulties were all overcome. I am satisfied there are far more difficulties upon any other system of interpretation, whatever it may be. And after all, what have we to do with the "how" and "in what manner" prophecies are to be fulfilled? Our only question is, "Has God said a thing?" If He has, no doubt it will be done.

For myself, I can only give my individual testimony; but the little I know experimentally of the doctrine makes me regard it as most practical and precious, and makes me long to see it more generally received.

I find it a powerful spring to holy living; a motive for patience, for moderation, for spiritual-mindedness; a test for employment of time--"would I like my Lord to find me so doing?"

I find it the strongest argument for missionary work. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The gathering out from all nations of a witnessing people will soon be accomplished, and then the King shall come.

I find it the best answer to infidels. I tell them it proves nothing that all the world is not holy after eighteen hundred years; that it was never said it would be in the present order of things; that the King will come one day and then make all bow before Him.

I find it the best argument with the Jew. If I do not take all the prophecy of Isaiah literally, I know not how I can persuade him that the fifty-third chapter is fulfilled. But if I do, I have a resting-place for my lever which he cannot shake.

Who is there that cannot yet receive the doctrine of Christ's second personal advent? I invite you to consider the subject calmly. Dismiss from your mind traditional interpretation; separate the doctrine from the mistakes and blunders of many who have held it; do not reject the foundations because of the wood, hay and stubble; do not condemn it because of injudicious friends. Only examine the texts which speak of it in the same calm way that you weigh texts in the Romish and Socinian controversy, and I am hopeful as to the result on your mind.

Who is there here that receives the doctrine? Try to realize it more. Alas! how little do we feel it at the very best! Be gentle in argument with those that differ. Remember that a man may be mistaken on this subject and yet be a bright child of God. It is not the slumbering on this subject that ruins souls, but the want of grace. Above all avoid dogmatism and positiveness, and specially about symbolical prophecy. It is a sad truth, but a truth never to be forgotten, that none have injured the doctrine of the second advent so much as over-zealous friends.

III. Learn, thirdly, that whenever Christ does come again it will be a very sudden event. I draw that from the verse in the parable: "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him."

I do not know when Christ will come. I am no prophet, though I love the subject of prophecy. I dislike date-fixing, and I think it has done great harm. I only assert positively that Christ will come again one day in person to set up His kingdom, and that whether the day be near, or whether it be far off, it will take the Church and world exceedingly by surprise.

It will come on men suddenly. It will break on the world all at once. It will not have been talked over, prepared for and looked forward to by everybody. It will awaken men's minds like a cry of fire at midnight. It will startle men's hearts like a trumpet blown by their bedsides in their first sleep. Like Pharaoh and his host, men will know nothing till the very waters are upon them. Before they can recover their breath and know where they are, they shall find that the Lord is come.

I suspect there is a vague notion floating in men's minds that the present order of things will not end quite so suddenly. I suspect men cling to the idea that there will be a kind of Saturday night in the world--a time when all will know the Lord's day is near, a time when all will be able to cleanse their consciences, look up their best garment, shake off their earthly business, and prepare to meet the Lord. If anyone here has got such a notion, I charge him to give it up forever. If anything is clear in unfulfilled prophecy, this one fact seems clear, that the Lord's coming will be sudden, and take men by surprise; and any view of prophecy which destroys the possibility of its being a sudden event, appears to carry about with it a fatal defect.

Everything which is written in Scripture on this point confirms the truth that Christ's second coming will be sudden. "As a snare shall it come on the face of all them that dwell on the earth," says one place; "As a thief in the night," says another; "As the lightning," says a third; "In an hour when no men thinketh," says a fourth; "At a time when they shall be saying Peace and safety," says a fifth.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself uses two most striking comparisons when dwelling on this point. He says in one, that as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the days when the Son of man is revealed. Do you remember how it was? In the days when Lot went out of Sodom the men of Sodom were eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage. The sun rose as usual. They thought of nothing but worldly things; they saw no sign of danger. But all at once the fire of God fell upon them and destroyed them.

He says in another place, "As it was in the days of Noe [Noah], so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." Do you remember how it was in the days of Noah? Stay a little, and let me remind you.

When the flood came on the earth there was no appearance beforehand of anything so awful being near. The sun rose and set as usual; the day and night followed each other in regular succession. The grass and trees and crops were growing; the business of the world was going on; and though Noah preached continually and warned men of coming danger, no one believed him.

But at last one day the rain began and did not cease; the waters ran and did not stop. The flood came

and the flood swelled; the flood went on and covered one thing after another, and all were drowned who were not in the ark. Everything in which was the breath of life perished.

Now, as the flood took the world by surprise, just so will the coming of the Son of man. It will come on men like a thunderclap. In the midst of the world's business, when everything is going on just as usual, in such an hour as this the Lord Jesus Christ will return.

See here what solemn thoughts the Lord Jesus Christ's return should raise in every mind. Think for a moment how little prepared the world is for such an event. Look at the towns and cities of the earth, and think of them. Mark how absorbed are men in the business of their callings. Banks, shops, law, medicine, commerce, railways, banquets, balls, theatres,--all and each are drinking up hearts and souls, and thrusting out the things of God. Think what a fearful shock would be the stoppage of all these things,--the sudden stoppage which will be in the day of Christ's appearing. Yet one day it shall be.

Look at the rural parishes of such a land as ours, and think of them. See how the minds of the majority are buried in farms and allotments, in cattle and corn, in rent and wages, in digging and sowing, in buying and selling; and then fancy the awful effect of a sudden cessation of all these things,--the final cessation which must be when Christ comes again to finish all things. Yet remember one day it shall be. Picture these things to your mind's eye; picture your own home, your own family, your own fireside,--picture, above all, your own feelings, your own state of mind. And then remember that this is the end to which the world is hastening; this is the way in which the world's affairs will be wound up. This is an event which might possibly happen in your own time; and surely you cannot avoid the conclusion that this second coming of Christ is no mere curious speculation, but is of vast moment to your soul.

Ah! some will say, I have no doubt: "This is all mere cant and nonsense. This is all extravagant fanaticism. Where is the likelihood, where is the probability of all this?"

Do not say so. Men said the same in the day of Noah and Lot; but they found to their cost that Noah and Lot were right. Do not say so. The apostle Peter foretold that men would talk so in the latter days. Do not fulfil his prophecy by your unbelief.

Where is the cant and fanaticism of that which I have seen saying? I calmly say the present state of things will come to an end one day. Will anyone deny that? Will anyone say we are to go on as we do now forever? I calmly say that Christ's coming will be the ending of the present state of things. I have said so because the Bible says it. I have calmly said that Christ's coming will be a sudden event, whenever it may be, and might possibly be in our own time. I have said so because thus and thus I find it written. If you do not like it, I am sorry for it. One thing only you must remember: you are finding fault with the Bible, not with me.

IV. Learn, in the last place, that Christ's coming will make an immense change to all members of Christ's Church, both good and bad.

I draw that from the concluding portion of the parable, from the discovery of the foolish virgins that their lamps were gone out, from their anxious address to the wise, "Give us of your oil," from their vain knocking at the door when shut, crying, "Lord, Lord, open to us," from the happy admission of the wise

who were ready to the marriage supper, in company with the bridegroom. All these points are food for thought. But I have no time to dwell on them particularly. I can only take one single broad view of all. To all who have been baptized in the name of Christ,--converted or unconverted, believer or unbeliever, holy or unholy, godly or ungodly, wise or foolish, gracious or graceless,--to all, the second coming of Christ shall be an immense change.

It shall be an *immense change to the ungodly*, to the mere nominal Christian.

They will see the value of real heart-religion if they never saw it before;--"Give us of your oil," they will cry to the godly, "for our lamps are gone out."

Who does not know that spiritual religion never brings a man the world's praise? It never has done, and it never does. It entails the world's disapprobation, the world's persecution, the world's ridicule, the world's sneers. The world will let a man go to hell quietly, and never try to stop him. The world will never let a man go to heaven quietly--they will do all they can to turn him back. Who has not heard of nicknames in plenty bestowed on all who faithfully follow Christ?--Pietist, Methodist, saint, fanatic, enthusiast, righteous overmuch, and many more? Who does not know the petty family persecution which often goes on in private society in our own day. Let a young person go to every ball and theatre and racecourse, and utterly neglect his soul, and no one interferes; no one says "Spare thyself," no one says "Be moderate--remember your soul." But let him begin to read his Bible and be diligent in prayers, let him decline worldly amusement and be particular in his employment of time, let him seek an evangelical ministry and live as if he had an immortal soul,--let him do this, and the probability is all his relations and friends will be up in arms. "You are going too far," "You need not be so very good," "You are taking up extreme lines,"--this is the least that he will hear. Alas that it should be so, but so it is. These are ancient things. As it was in the days of Cain and Abel, as it was in the days of Isaac and Ishmael, even so it is now. They that are born after the flesh will persecute those that are born after the Spirit. The cross of Christ will always bring reproach with it. If a man will become a decided evangelical Christian he must make up his mind to lose the world's favors; he must be content to be thought by many a perfect fool.

But, brethren, all this will be at an end when Christ returns. The light of that day will show everything in its true colors; the scales will fall from the poor worldling's eyes. The value of the soul will flash on his astonished mind; the utter uselessness of a mere nominal Christianity will burst upon him like a thunderstorm. The blessedness of regeneration and faith in Christ and a holy walk will shine before him like "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres" on the wall. The veil will fall from his face; he will discover that the godly have been the wise, and that he has played the fool exceedingly; and just as Saul wanted Samuel when it was too late, and Belshazzar sent for Daniel when the kingdom was departing from him, so will the ungodly turn to the very men they once mocked and despised, and cry, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps have gone out."

But again: the ungodly will seek salvation earnestly when Christ returns, but not find it. They will find that opportunities once let slip shall never be regained. They will seek the oil of grace, they will knock at the door for admission, they will cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but all in vain.

Who does not know that thousands are urged to pray now, who never attempt it? They mean to do so one day, perhaps; they fancy it will never be too late to seek the Lord.

But there is a time coming when prayer shall be heard no longer. There is a time when the door by which Saul of Tarsus and Magdalen entered in shall be shut forever. There is a time when men shall know the folly of sin, but, like Judas, too late for repentance; when they shall desire to enter into the promised land, but, like Israel at Kadesh, not be able; when they shall see the value of God's favor and covenant blessing, but like Esau, when they can no longer procure it; when they shall believe every jot and tittle of God's revealed word, but, like the miserable devils, only to tremble. Yes! beloved brethren, many come to this, and many will come to this in the day of Christ's reappearing. They will ask and not receive, they will seek and not find, they will knock and the door shall not be opened to them. Alas, indeed, that it should be so! Woe to the man who puts off seeking his manna till the Lord's day of return! Like Israel of old, he will find none. Woe to the man who goes to buy oil when he ought to be burning it! Like the foolish virgins, he will find himself shut out from the marriage supper of the Lamb.

But as Christ's coming will be a mighty change to the ungodly, so also will it be a *mighty change to the godly*.

They shall be placed in a position of perfect safety. "The door shall be shut." They shall no longer be vexed by temptations, persecuted by the world, warred against by the devil. Their conflicts shall all be over. Their strife with the flesh shall forever cease. They shall be where there is no Satan, no world, and no sin. Ah! brethren, the second Eden shall be better far than the first. In the first Eden the door was not shut; but in the second the Lord shall shut us in.

Furthermore the godly shall be placed in a position of perfect blessedness. They shall go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage; they shall be with Christ. Faith shall be swallowed up in sight, hope shall become certainty, knowledge shall at length be perfect, prayer shall be turned into praise, desires shall receive their full accomplishment, fears and doubtings shall not rise to mar their comforts, the thought of parting shall not spoil the pleasure of meeting; the company of saints shall be enjoyed without hurry and distraction, and weariness shall be all unknown. Thus shall they understand the meaning of the text, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore." Then shall they experience the truth of that beautiful hymn which says:

"Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
My Saviour, My eternal rest;
Then only shall this longing heart
Be fully and forever blest.

"Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Thy unveiled glory to behold;
Then only will this wand'ring heart
Cease to be false to Thee and cold.

"Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Where none can die, where none remove,
Then neither death nor life shall part
Me from Thy presence and Thy love."

Is there a single man or woman here that can laugh at true vital religion? Is there anyone who persecutes and ridicules true godliness, and talks of people being over-particular and righteous overmuch? Beware what you are doing! Again I say beware. You may live to think differently; you may live to alter your opinion,--but perhaps too late. Ah! there is a day coming when there will be no infidels,--no, not one! "Before the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord." Remember that day, and beware.

Is there any dear child of God here who is mocked and despised for the gospel's sake, and feels as if he stood alone? Take comfort; be patient; wait a little--your turn shall come. When the spies returned from searching Canaan, men talked of stoning Caleb and Joshua. A few days passed away, and all the assembly confessed that they alone had been right. Strive to be like them. Follow the Lord fully, and sooner or later all men shall confess that you did well. Men seem to be afraid of going too far, men seem to be afraid of being too holy. Millions will lament in the day of Christ's return that they had not religion enough; not one will be heard to say that he had too much.

And now, brethren, it only remains for me to close this sermon by *three words of application*, which seem to me to arise naturally out of the parable of which I have been speaking. I heartily pray God to bless them to your souls, and to make them words in season at the beginning of a new year.

1. My first word of application shall be a *question*. I take the parable of the ten virgins in my hands, and I address that question to everybody here present. I ask, "Are you ready?" Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "they that were ready went in with the bridegroom to the marriage,"--they that were ready and none else. Now here, in the sight of God, I ask you every one, "Is this your case?" "Are you ready?"

I do not ask whether you are a Churchman and make a profession of religion; I do not ask whether you sit under an evangelical ministry, and like evangelical people, and can talk of evangelical things. All this is the surface of Christianity, and may be easily attained. I want to search your heart more deeply by far. I want to know whether grace is in your heart, and the Holy Ghost. I want to know whether you are ready to meet the Bridegroom, ready for Christ's return. I want to know, if the Lord should come this week, whether you could lift up your head with joy, and say, "This is our God; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Ah! some will be saying, "This is far too high a standard. This is requiring far too much. This is extravagance. This is a hard saying: who can bear it?" I cannot help it. I believe it is the standard of the Bible; I believe it is the standard St. Peter sets before us when he tells us to be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God"; I believe it is the mark at which every believer should be continually aiming, to be found ready to meet Christ.

I want no man to become a hermit and cease to do his duty in the world; I call on no one to leave his lawful calling or neglect his earthly affairs. But I do call on everyone to live like one who expects Christ to return, to live like a pilgrim and stranger, to live ever looking unto Jesus and leaning on Jesus, to live like a good servant with his loins girded and his lamp burning, to live like one whose treasure is in heaven and best things yet to come, with his heart packed up and ready to be gone. Now, is this too much to ask? I say decidedly that it is not.

Now, are you ready in this way? If not, I would like to know what good your religion does you. A religion that does not make a man ready for anything is a religion that may well be looked on with suspicion. If your religion does not make you ready, its source is not derived from the Bible.

2. My second word of application shall be an *invitation*. I address it to every one who feels in his conscience that he has no grace in his heart,--to every one who feels that the character of the foolish virgin is his own. To all such I give an invitation this day: I invite you to "*awake*."

You know, many of you, that your hearts are not right in the sight of God. In the broadest, fullest sense you are asleep--not merely asleep about the doctrine of Christ's second advent, but asleep about everything that concerns your souls. You are wide awake perhaps about temporal things; you read the newspapers, it may be, and have your head stored with earthly wisdom and useful knowledge. But you have no heartfelt sense of sin, no peace and friendship with God, no experimental acquaintance with Christ, no delight in the Bible and prayer; and what is all this but being asleep?

How long is this to go on? When do you mean to arise and live as if you had a soul? When will you cease to hear as those who hear not? When will you give up running after shadows and seek something substantial? When will you throw up the mockery of a religion that cannot satisfy, cannot comfort, cannot sanctify, cannot save, and will not bear a calm examination? When will you give up having a faith which does not influence your practice--having a book which you say is God's word, but do not use--having the name of Christian, but knowing nothing of Christ? Oh! when shall it once be?

Why not this very new year? Why not this very night? Why not awake and call upon your God, and resolve that you will sleep no longer? I set before you an open door. I set before you Jesus the Saviour who died for sinners on the cross, Jesus able to save to the uttermost, Jesus willing to receive. Go to Him first and foremost if you would know what step to take. Go to Him in prayer and cry, "Lord, save me or I perish; I am weary of sleeping--I would fain sleep no longer." Oh! "awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Sun and moon and stars are all witnessing against you; they fill their place in creation, and you do not. Sabbaths and ordinances are witnessing against you; they are all proclaiming there is a God, there is a judgment, and you are living as if there were none. The tears and prayers of godly relations are witnessing against you; others are sorrowfully thinking you have a soul, though you seem to forget it. The very gravestones you walk past this night are witnessing against you; they are silently whispering, "Life is short and death is near." All, all are saying, "Awake! awake! awake!" Oh, brethren, the time past may surely suffice you to have slept. Awake to be wise, awake to be safe, awake to be happy. Awake, and sleep no more.

3. My last word of application shall be an *exhortation* to all who have the oil of grace in their hearts. I draw it from the words of our Lord at the end of the parable. I exhort you to "watch."

I exhort you to watch against everything which might interfere with a readiness for Christ's appearing. Watch against inconsistencies of walk, watch against besetting sins, watch against the harm of false doctrine, watch against formality in the use of spiritual things, watch against slothfulness about the Bible and private prayer. Backsliding begins from within. Watch against bitterness and

uncharitableness; a little love weighs more than many gifts. Watch against pride and self-conceit; Peter said, "Though all men deny Thee, yet will not I"; and presently fell. Watch against the sin of Galatia, Ephesus, and Laodicea; believers may run well for a season, then lose their first love, and then become lukewarm. Watch against the sin of Jehu; a man may have great zeal from false motives. It is a much easier thing to oppose antichrist than to follow Christ.

Brethren, believers, let us all watch, and watch more every year we live.

Let us watch for the *world's sake*. We are the book they chiefly read; they watch our ways. Oh! let us strive to be plain epistles of Christ.

Let us watch for *our own sakes*. As our walk is, so will be our peace; as our conformity to Christ's mind, so will be our sense of Christ's atoning blood. If a man will not walk in the full light of the sun, how can he expect to be warm?

And, not least, let us watch *for our Lord's sake*. Let us live as if His honor was concerned in our behavior; let us live as if every slip and fall was a wound to our Head. Oh! let us exercise a godly jealousy for thought, word, and action--motive, manner, and walk. Never, never let us fear being too strict. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."