

The Parable of 10 Virgins

The New Testament Portion of our readings for the day (Matthew 25) contains a parable concerning a particular group of people, and how they will stand when Messiah comes again. The parable describes 10 virgins, who are each deemed to be “wise” or “foolish” according to their attitude towards maintaining a supply of oil to produce light. Those who took a reservoir of oil were able to keep their lamps burning brightly in preparation for their Master’s arrival, and constituted the “wise”. Those who did not were deemed “foolish,” unable to receive their Master in a state of readiness, and who did not have the means to keep their light shining. These were absent when their Master came, and were in a state of darkness, their lights having gone out. In each group there are examples and lessons for Christ’s brethren and sisters in all ages to take heed to, and we shall consider these as the basis of our exhortation today.

The first point to note, is that all of the women are *virgins*. This term denotes a moral purity of character: the bride has not defiled herself, but has rather kept herself pure out of love for her prospective husband. So Paul spake: “... I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you *as a chaste virgin* to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Again, John was shown a vision of the same class, and told: “these were they that were not defiled with women; *for they are virgins*” (Rev. 4:4). This latter passage is significant in that the ones spoken of were men – “not defiled with women” – hence the virgins are men as well as women. But the use of this term indicates that it is a particular group of believers that are being referred to in the parable, not all. Those who turned aside and committed fornication with the harlot-system of Rome are not counted among the ten: these are rather those who had kept themselves “chaste,” or pure. But even though they had not embraced that monstrous apostate body described to John, the “virgins” still had problems of their own. And here we have the point that whilst we may be separate from the ways of the world, there may still be ways in which we can become deficient in our preparation for Christ. Historically (although not so much in our day) Protestants were fierce in their separation from, and denunciation of the traditions of Rome, yet that separation itself did not make them “wise,” as they did not believe the system of things described in the Bible as being able to make one “wise unto salvation”. They hold “another gospel” than that which is the power of God through faith unto Salvation - and so whilst they repudiate one system falsehood, they embrace another.

Both groups had lamps to use, but only one group had the means of using theirs. The wise were characterized by their oil that they had taken thought to provide, and the foolish in neglecting to take oil with them. But what does the Spirit signify when describing these things?

Under the Old Testament system of things, there was a Lampstand in the Tabernacle, and Lampstands (plural) in the Temple. Revelation chapter 2 tells us what Lampstands represent, although the number is different: “the seven lampstands which thou sawest are the seven ecclesias” (Rev. 2:20), the symbolic number of 7, referring to the *complete* ecclesia of Christ. Again, Philippians chapter 2 liken the ecclesia to the Lampstand of the Tabernacle/Temple arrangement, “... shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life” (Phil. 2:15). This reference demonstrates that an ecclesia is only a stand for displaying light to the extent that it displays the Word of Life, for the Light is that Word: “thy word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 110:105). The point has also been made that the lampstand in the Tabernacle was constituted of 66 parts, numbering the same as the books which make up our Bible.

This reference to the Lights in the Tabernacle/Temple generates many thoughts as to the significant of Light as used in Scripture. It is part of God’s grace that we do not walk in darkness, as those in the world at large, and this is demonstrated in the lampstands of the Temple. 2 Corinthians 4 describes those lamps: “he made ten (*compare the number of lamps held by the virgins - CAM*) lampstands of gold according to their form, and set them in the temple, five on the right hand and

five on the left” (2 Chron. 4:7). Notice this point: as the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year, he would pass through the lampstands, five on each side, in the hope of entering into the place of the manifestation of God’s Glory. This seems to be alluded to in Romans, speaking of the believers, whose faith goes beyond the veil into the Holiest with Christ:

“therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the Glory of God ...” (Rom. 5:1-2).

Here, just as the High Priest hoped to enter into the place of God’s Glory *in type*, so Christ did in reality, and so we will be in the age to come. We have peace with God, and this was something foreshadowed in the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest went into the place of glory on behalf of the people. But just as the High Priest had to pass through the Lampstands, five on each side, so we have access “by faith into *this grace wherein we stand.*” (the number 5, representing Grace in Scripture). We see then, an allusion for believers to follow. We walk in the midst of the golden Lampstands, standing in grace (i.e. 5 on each side) as we hope to become part of the Glory of God yet to be revealed.

There is an important point to learn from this allusion. The point that Paul, under Spirit guidance, is making is that we have access “*by faith* into *this grace* wherein we stand”. We stand in the light of Divine Revelation in a position of faith and grace. We cannot plead our own righteousness before the throne of Glory, for all aspects of our reconciliation are of Him. Our faith is imputed as righteousness. We cannot claim a ‘right of access’ to the “hope of the Glory of God” for it is of His Mercy that the Hope is given to us. We cannot plead our own labours in much Bible study, to generate the light of the Word— the light is given by grace (cp the number 5). It is altogether of God’s Grace that we are not alone in darkness: He enlightens our way, He gives us direction, and though faith in his Grace alone, He shall allow us to have access into the Glory that lies ahead for each one of Christ’s little ones. In that day when the poor shall be lifted out of the dunghill, and the haughtiness of man shall be cut down low, mercy shall rejoice ‘against judgment (Jas. 2:13), and righteousness shall prevail. Our standing is all of faith and grace: “for *grace* are ye saved through *faith*; and that not of yourselves: it is the Gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

GO FORTH

Returning to the parable under consideration, we find that the virgins are each invited to *go forth* to meet the bridegroom. We find the underlying principle of this several times in Scripture. Abraham was called upon to leave his family, and go to the Land of Promise. Genesis chapter 24 speaks of how Rebekah, the virgin bride of Isaac went forth to meet him. This is significant, as Isaac was a child of life out of death in two senses: having emerged from parents who were as good as dead in their natural ability to reproduce, and having been offered up as described in Genesis 22. Being life out of death, Isaac stands as a representative man, preeminently as a *type* of our Lord Jesus Christ. The approach of the virgin towards him therefore ought to be of great interest to those who desire to know how to approach their coming bridegroom, as depicted in the parable of Matthew 25. We pick up the narrative in Genesis 24:58: “and they called Rebekah and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go”. The example her is most remarkable; Rebekah needed not prompting or further encouragement: “I will go” was her spirit. So it must be ours, for the day is coming when the Angel shall come to take us to meet our Bridegroom. “I will go” is the best that any man can give. An eagerness to leave the world and all that it stands for behind, and to enter into the joy of our Lord is what our Messiah requires of us. Hence the exhortation to the Queen of Psalm 145:

“hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; *forget also thine own people,* and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him ...” (Psa. 145:10-11).

The day is quickly approaching when whatever state we are in, there will be no longer any time for remedial action. There will be nothing more that we can do. But we can receive much encouragement with this Psalm: of the Bride it is said that the king shall greatly *desire her beauty*. This is an aspect that maybe we ought to give more consideration to. We desire to appear in the presence of our Lord, but he also desires us! He desires our beauty! That beauty is a product of the world believed and obeyed, and developed in the period of making ourselves ready; but we must not be discouraged at our own self-perception as somehow not being good enough for our Lord. The Bride in the Song of Solomon thought this: “look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me” (Song. 1:6). But the Bridegroom that we greatly desire also greatly desires us, and will overlook our imperfections, and redeem us by his Grace (cp Ruth).

WISE AND FOOLISH

The virgins are deemed to be “wise” or “foolish”, based on their approach to having a reservoir of oil to keep their lamps burning. There seems to be an allusion here to the wisdom of the book of Proverbs:

“There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up” (Prov. 21:20)

The wise have oil in their dwellings: that is, they have foresight, and the recognition that the oil would soon be used up, and need to be replaced. We have seen that the combustion of the oil, thus giving light, is compared to the way in which the Word of a lamp to our path. The oil is the essence of the teaching derived from the olive-tree of the Word, and it’s combustion is seen in the teaching and practice of those who desire to walk in it’s light. So it is written of the disciples:

“Ye are the *light of the world*. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,* and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:14-16).

In these words, the dispelling of light is likened to the doing of *good works*. It logically follows that in order to do works that the Father considers to be “good”, we must know His Will. We can only do the will of God if we know what it is, and the only way that we can know what it is, is to give attendance to the Word where it is expressed. We are, as it were, leaking vessels and are in constant need to maintain a supply of the Word to know what to do in the various circumstances that life brings to bear upon us. We need to have a reservoir of the spirit-word to sustain us through the days of difficulty and tribulation that our Loving Father will chastise us with. Sometimes Bible Study is thought of as being something for the more academically minded amongst us, and a “simple faith” for the rest of us. But this is not so: wise men will recognize their need for regular reading and application of the Word, whereas the foolish see no need to do so.

But by the same token, we must not fret that our feeble glow is not good enough for the furtherance of the grand purpose of the Deity. We must remember that as it has been truly said, there is not enough darkness in the entire world to put out the light of one small candle. Though at times, we might feel as feeble as one small candle, we must look forward in hope to the day when a great multitude of small candles shall make up the glory of the Redeemed. That is the day of coming glory which Christ’s true brethren look towards, and long for, despite their present imperfections.

THEY ALL SLUMBERED AND SLEPT

Being that the wise as well as the foolish “slumbered and slept” the sleeping here, cannot be a spiritual sleeping, or insensibility to divine things. Rather, we suppose that the sleeping in the dust of the ground is that which is spoken of, with the resurrection from that ‘sleep’ being the great awakening that will take place when Christ comes. Both classes are raised, both wise and foolish, even as Paul spake elsewhere: “there shall be a resurrection from the dead, *both of the just and the unjust*” (Acts 24:15).

A similar exhortation comes from Ephesians chapter 5:

“...wherefore he saith, *Awake thou that sleepest*, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give the light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, *not as fools, but as wise*, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:14-16).

The day is soon coming when we shall be given the light of Christ to shine forth brightly as the sun in the age to come. But how we will fare in that day depends on what we do today; walking circumspectly as the wise, allowing our light to shine before men in a day of darkness and evil. We must allow the Word to make us “wise unto salvation”, seeking to live the principles of the Kingdom - however imperfectly - in the days of evil, that we might be rewarded with the days of good, when God’s will shall be done on earth, even as it is in heaven.

RESPONSE TO THE CALLING

When the midnight calling was made, “all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps”. However, the foolish quickly realized that their lamps were about to go out, and said to the wise: “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out: (Mat. 25:8). The response of the wise is given: “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” (Mat. 25:9).

There is a very real and practical example in these things. The same principle is displayed in Galatians and chapter 6. “*Bear ye one another’s burdens*, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). But the passage goes on to say: “For every man *shall bear his own burden*: (verse 5). How is this so? The burden we must bear is the cross of Christ, as Messiah said himself: “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and *take up his cross daily, and follow me*” (Luk. 8:23). And like Simon of Cyrene who helped bare Jesus’ own cross, we must help each other bear the burdens of life as occasion presents itself. Now is the time when we can help each other. Now is the time when we can comfort one another from the Word, and share the oil we have derived therefrom with each other. Now is the day of bearing one another’s burden, as we exhort one another daily. But that day is reaching an end. At the last, we shall have to bear our own burdens. When the Bridegroom comes, we shall each stand in our own right before him. It is written that “no one can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him” (Psa. 49:7). When Jesus comes again, we will not be able to make up any deficiency in our brother: we shall all stand as we are, naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Brother Robert Roberts speaks of this situation.

“They all “rise and trim their lamps”. Never so earnestly was this done by them before; furbishing up memory, reviewing the ways of their probation, fixing their minds on the truth, casting themselves in prayer upon the Father’s mercy. The foolish who went to sleep with empty vessels find them still in that state (for everyone will rise at the resurrection in the spiritual state in which death overtakes them). Dismayed now at their poverty-stricken state, they throw themselves upon the sympathy and support of their more spiritually-minded brethren and sisters. “Give us of your oil.” Nay; too late. The

most spiritually-minded will have enough to do to sustain themselves at such a crisis. The time has passed for looking to others or helping others. All will have to look to themselves till the dread judgment-seat is past. All will be so real and natural at the resurrection, and there may even be such time and deliberation in the proceedings, that it may even appear practicable to still do something to remedy spiritual poverty. But all the response the wise can make to the frantic appeals of the foolish is to do the best they can for themselves while as yet they are not in the Lord's presence" (The Parables of Christ, page 56-57)

This quotation from brother Roberts paints an awful picture of the judgment of those who will be in the class of the rejected. However, we must not be discouraged by a sense of unworthiness and a fear that we are not good enough to be amongst the wise - rather we must look forward in hope. We hope for the coming glory of God, and we look forward with anticipation for the coming of the One who will make it all possible. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 speaks of the believers who: "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to *wait* for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". Again, in Hebrews 9:28, we read: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that *look* for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 10:28).

Notice the characteristics of those described in these verses. They "*wait* for his Son from heaven". They "*look* for him". Though all ten virgins slept the sleep of death, when they awoke, they did so in the same spiritual condition as when they died. The wise are those who wait and watch. They do so not in a sense of perceived self-righteousness, but instead they earnestly desire the One who "was once offered to bear the sins of many". To those who wait and watch, he will come for the purpose of bringing salvation, and not condemnation.

Whilst the foolish went away to procure oil for their lamps, the Bridegroom came, and "the door was shut". The day of opportunity was ended. The foolish did not watch and wait; rather they went away into darkness, with their lamps flickering out. The situation reminds us of Noah's Ark: the day of opportunity for escaping the wrath to come ended with the closing of the Ark by God Himself: "... and Yahweh shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). The multitude round about did not prepare, they did not wait and watch. The door was closed.

To those who were not watching and waiting during their mortal lives, Messiah said: "I know you not." So the exhortation concludes this parable: "Watch ye therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the son of man cometh" (Mat. 25:12). Again, what a terrible picture of the judgment to come. The words "I know you not" that will proceed from the Master's mouth will secure the condemnation of the foolish. We might be fearful that such terrible words might be spoken to us. But again, we must not allow ourselves to be discouraged in the way: what the Master requires of the Wise is simply this: to wait, and to watch. The unwise spend their time being entangled in the cares of this life to the extent that they have neither time nor energy to spend on the more important things of the Truth. Remember the Parable which follows in Matthew 25 which we have read together, concerning the righteous: "his Lord said unto him, Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful *over a few things*, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mat. 25:21). Notice this point: "thou hast been faithful *over a few things*". If we can but hold fast in a day of evil, even if our light is like a candle flickering in the wind, we can look forward with joy. It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, and so it will be that we will be present at the time when "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat. 13:43).

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