

SERMON XIII.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 28, 1879.

"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."—MATTHEW XXV. 1—4.

In the morning we noticed that the kingdom of heaven here spoken of signified the Gospel dispensation, till Christ shall come to judgment. We noticed being likened to ten virgins showed the similarity they all had; they all appeared to be virgin souls. We noticed they showed something of what real virgin souls had, in their faith and purity of worship. They were enlightened in the truth, they "had escaped the pollution of the world through lusts;" thus they all appeared to be alike. We noticed that their object seemed to be the same, to meet the bridegroom; there was some hope about it, there was some desire in their going forth to meet him. That shows that there is a common work of grace, and what a long way that common work of grace will go. There is faith, but not saving faith; there is hope, but not springing from being begotten again by the Good Spirit; there is a desire, but it is the desire of the slothful that killeth him. Though it appears on the outside much the same, yet when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary it kicks the beam. *it is found wanting*

Then we began to notice that five of these virgins were wise and five were foolish. Now the wise looked well to their ways, to prove and make sure that they had something that would stand when He appeared. The others were enlightened, as the Scripture says, "It is impossible for those that were once enlightened, and have tasted the good word of life, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." Like Balaam—he had a sight and taste of this—he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." They rested on this light. Again, they had tasted somewhat of the good word of God like Herod, when he heard John preach about salvation, and Christ coming as the Lamb of God, to "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," and telling men that they must repent and believe the gospel. He heard John gladly. He was like the seed that fell on stony ground; it sprang up quickly. It is just the same, perhaps, with some of you. When you hear the gospel preached it seems to enlighten your judgment, please your taste, and you are pleased to hear it, but it has no root, it withers away after a time, the things of time and sense swallow it up, so it becomes unfruitful. Perhaps some of you have a light while the gospel is being preached; you can see, "O to be a righteous man, to be saved by grace, to get to heaven, what glorious things!" Perhaps while my foot is upon your conscience, while

you are hearing, you say, "O let me be one of these, this lust or that pleasure shall go;" but as soon as my foot is off your conscience, and Monday morning comes, you are the same as you were before. Again, these foolish virgins knew something of compunction, the same as Judas, he had some compunction: "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," he said. "What is that to us? see thou to that," said they. Sometimes you have sorrow for your sins, "If I were to die now, what would become of me?" "O yes," say you, "I have such thoughts sometimes; but it does not end in any thing, it is only the sorrow of the world that worketh death." Then again, like Ahab: he humbled himself when he heard of the threatenings and judgments of God on account of his wicked ways and doings. God said to the prophet, "Have you seen how Ahab humbles himself?" Perhaps God has laid some affliction on your body, perhaps He has sent some loss in your business, or perhaps under the preaching of the Word conscience has done its office, and made you say, "O my wicked ways, what will become of me if I die in this state?" You have made some promises and resolves, but they have all come to nothing.

"Five were wise, five were foolish." The wise did not rest on such a superficial work as the others did. The wisdom of the wise is to understand his way, as it is said, out of the heart proceed all the good or the bad things, therefore God says, "My son, give me thine heart." The wise looked to see what their religion sprang from. Some of you may be ready to say, "These things shake me to the centre, if you are going to put me in the balance, I shall surely kick the beam." God forbid that I should make the heart of those sad that should not be made sad, and God forbid that I should strengthen the hands of any wicked. I believe I should lie if I were to say I do not know anything the wise virgins did. I have trusted, again and again, by the testimony of God, that I shall be found with oil in my vessel at the last. Like me, you may not be able at times to be put into the balance, but yet we can stand the touchstone. "Aye," say you, "Though you may weigh yourself up, and cannot see that you are good weight as far as regards faith, hope, love, or any of the graces of God's Spirit, in the clearness, truth, and power, yet you can stand the touchstone. You can appeal to God that there is sincerity in your heart, that you have a desire in your souls to be right. You can appeal to God in the uprightness of your soul and the honesty of your mind that your aim, end, object, and desire is to serve Him and please Him, and be found right in His sight at last. "O yes," say you, "I can come there." Blessed be God if you can come to the touchstone, you will come out right, there is a reality in your soul, it is gold. Now the foolish virgins were destitute of it, they rested on a superficial work, they had a name to live, and were destitute of the power. They were satisfied with a profession and being found among those that loved and feared God; they rested in self-confidence and

conceit. Now the wise said, "Let us search and try our ways." That is what you will do if you are wise. There was presumption also in the foolish virgins. Therefore my text saith, "The foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them." They had a name to live and were dead; they were just what the Scripture saith, "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; whereas thou knowest not that thou art poor, miserable, blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire;" but they wanted no counsel. They never knew what renewing grace is, what it is to be born again of the Spirit, they never had any word from God whereby they could say, "I found Thy Word and I did eat it, and it was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my soul." They had no contrition of heart, no real confession of their sins, before God, no broken spirit; satisfied they were. You can see what self-conceit they had, you hear them say, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," but, as I said when reading the chapter just now, O! that cutting, piercing, distressing, solemn, and tremendous sentence, "I never knew you!" God grant that never may be said to you nor me. I have felt this (see if you can come in) that He could not say to me, "I never knew you." Many places I could tell Him of where He has met with my soul. Many places I could point out and say, "Lord, you met with me in such a place, and humbled me and crumbled me, and did me such good. You met with me here, Lord, and dropped this word in my soul. You appeared for me in this trouble, and encouraged me to believe you would not leave nor forsake me." Cannot you say so? Are there not any places? Say you, "Not many." Have you *one*? If there be one, "God is of one mind, and none can turn Him;" "Having loved His own, He will love them to the end." If He has ever comforted and persuaded your heart you have found favour in His sight, He is too holy to deceive you, His truth will not let Him change. "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate: whom He did predestinate, them He also called: whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." What a mercy: to be able to put your foot down on any place! Look through your short life, and see if there be no barn, no field, no room, no tree, no place wherein God bowed the heavens and came down, and you felt, "Verily there is a God that heareth and answereth prayer." "Yes," say you, "I trust I know what that is, although I have but little religion." I am not asking you how much you have got, as we noticed in reading this morning, some were only thirty-fold bearers; some had only two talents, and only gained other two, but they were welcomed the same as those that had ten.

"The foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them." Just the same as some of you. You come to chapel or go to any other place, you have no doubt about your religion, no questioning about it, you never go before God, and say,

"Do I love the Lord; or no?"

"No," say you, "I am satisfied about it." I wish I could be as satisfied about it as you are yourself, if you do not want it confirmed, or made over again, and for God to clench it in your soul. God told Gideon that he was a man that His heart was set upon. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." God has not said so much to you, yet this man was a wise man; he would not take it upon hearsay; it was not a notion, an opinion in his head, a mere speculation, it *concerned* him. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." "If the Lord be with us, why then has all this evil befallen us, and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of? If the Lord be with me, I will put a fleece upon the floor, and let the fleece be wet and the floor dry." Have you ever tried your religion? Have you ever gone to God with it, saying, "Now, Lord, if it be a real religion, if it be Thy work in my heart that has set me after Thee, a godly hope and a true love, give me another token, confirm it in some way in my soul; I am going this morning to Thine house, Lord; speak by Thy servant, so that I may know what I have been brought to hope in is of Thee." Sometimes down you have gone: "It is against me, I do not know that, I have never felt those things;" then as the man of God has come forward with another evidence, you have said, "Blessed be God, I have got that, I am not destitute of His grace, I shall at last be found right." Has God ever confirmed it in *your* heart? "No," say you, "I do not listen to it." Then you are a foolish man, folly is bound up in your heart. Now the wise virgins go to God with their religion. So have some of you. Your wicked heart has run out after something wrong, your pride has brought you into some trouble, that has caused you to say, "If the fear of God were in my soul, how could I do such things?" This has made you ready to give up all your religion and say, "Surely my heart has deceived me, I am following *an ignis fatuus*." This has brought you again to God, as it did Gideon, "Now, Lord, let the floor be wet and the fleece dry." It is of eternal moment to have things right. Damnation is no trifling business, the devils feel it in earnest. Therefore, my friends, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" These foolish virgins went on, they took no oil, no word from God, no anointing of the Holy Ghost, no sweet testimony of the Son of God, no faith bringing something in from heaven, no love running out and wooing the Son of God to come in. Just the same as some here before God have got a name, but no oil, no grace. How solemn! If you could only see what I see about your state and condition, if you could only feel what I am now feeling about you, and what I have felt this day about men and women here, who may die and never find out their deception till the flames of hell discover the cheat, it would bring tears from your eyes, as it has from mine this day. The foolish virgins "took no oil with them." I can see the terrible state and condition that men and women die in, when destitute of a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

"But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." This vessel,

of course, is the heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." What is the oil? It is said, "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise." What is this? It is the *pardon of sins*. "I will pardon them whom I reserve." "They shall all know Me, from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, for I will pardon their transgressions, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity." There is oil; this is to be found in the dwelling of the wise, then how they can "lift up their heads with joy, for their redemption draweth nigh," and say with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The Holy Ghost saith by the prophet, "Thy God shall rejoice over thee as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride." What is this oil? It is *justification*. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, it is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and who ever liveth to make intercession for us." "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." There is oil. "We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Hence it is said, "that we may be found of Him in peace." Paul says, "If so be, that being clothed, we may not be found naked." This justified man has peace with God, so he is not found naked, being clothed upon with his house from heaven, that is, Jesus Christ. This is oil, how it softens, how it revives. This is oil that will make a man's face to shine. It will make your bed so soft, your pillow so easy, it will enable you to look God in the face without fear. This is oil indeed. What is this oil also? It is *union to the Son of God*; which made the poet say,

"Make our union with Thee clear,
Perfect love, and cast out fear."

That is what it will do. This love is "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us," whereby we love Him with His own love. "If any man love God, he is born of God, and knoweth God." This oil is according to what the Son of God saith, "Unless a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "The Spirit witnesseth with our spirits that we are the children of God." "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." "He which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit." If you are wise you have got this oil in your vessel, these things are to be found in you, you have not a mere name to live. Say you, "You are a little too high yet." I will come a

little lower then. If you have got oil in your vessel—say you, "I cannot say I have got so much as this." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Unless he is born again, he will never have the Spirit's witness with his spirit that he is born of God. He will never be really able to say,

"I love the Lord with mind and heart,
His people, and His ways,
Envy, and pride, and lust depart,
And all His works I praise,"

till he has got oil in his vessel. "Well," say you, "I have felt that, and could say it before a heart-searching God." Then you have got oil in your vessel, that you have. I know what you would say;

"More frequent let Thy visits be,
Or let them longer last."

I will come a little lower to see if you have got oil in your vessel. If you have, you know what a contrite and broken spirit is; your heart has been broken at times by reason of your sin; there has been real sorrow for sin before God. "I believe I know what that is," say you. Then hearken:—

"This sacrifice He'll not despise,
For 'tis His Spirit's doing."

"A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Then say you, "I have felt at times just a moving in my heart, bringing a tear or two out of my eyes, and making my knees to bow before God, and hope there is something real in my heart." Have you felt this? Then you will not be shut out, all go in that possess this oil.

"The work that Wisdom undertakes
Eternal Mercy ne'er forsakes."

He giveth grace and He giveth glory. He will perfect that which is begun, notwithstanding there may be a great deal that is bad in you, and that makes you ashamed of yourself, and often brings you to fear, and causes suspicions and anxieties how the matter is, but with all this there are some good things found in thee towards the Lord God of Israel. What a great thing it is to have the heart right. Jehoshaphat did many crooked things, but it is said, "he walked in the first ways of David his father." How gentle and simple was David in his first ways. Notwithstanding he did many things afterwards that displeased God, and God reproveth him on account of those things, yet it was the correction of a child. If you know what a broken spirit is, there is oil in your vessel. What a great thing that is! Let the Blessed Son of God put in his hand, and your heart will rise up directly. Sometimes you can hardly tell if you have grace or not. Sometimes you say—

"Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;"

yet there it is; it being the oil of grace it will never dry up, it will keep

your soul alive. You will often find it comes out most lively under afflictions or cross providences; how they will make the lamp burn, so to speak. Let God go before you in a way of mercy, see how it will come up. Sometimes affliction makes the man look well to his ways, to see what he has got, and brings him at times, though everything may go wrong with him in the world, to look to the end of his race, and feel there are better things to come. If you have got oil in your vessel you know what it is to be born again, you are not the man you formerly was. The foolish ones are just the same as they always were; they took up their religion and walked along with it, then at death it went out with a stink. It is not an empty profession, it is possession I want you to have. You may be ready to say, "I wish you would not push us so close, and be so pointed, and so make us miserable." When I am laid in the dust, and you come upon a sick and dying bed you may think of some of the things I have said. You will not think then, "He was too close, too hard, or too severe upon us, and, so to speak, narrow-minded and particular." This thought may flash across thy mind, "O that I had of his oil! O that I had listened to his truth! What object did he have but the salvation of my soul, that made him so anxious as to how things would go with me at last?" Now to have oil in the vessel, then, if the thought should flash across thy mind as thou art giving up the ghost, to feel, "I shall be with him, and we shall praise God together in heaven; we shall sing, 'To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood;' how glad I am that he warned and cautioned me, and bade me look to see whether I had oil in my vessel ere I came to this day." What is this oil in the vessel? It is *repentance towards God*. Christ is "exalted to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins." Therefore the apostles said, when many Gentiles had been brought to repent of their sins, "Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life; these Gentiles have got a religion that will take them to heaven, they have got oil in their vessels." How it gladdened the hearts of the apostles. Has God blessed you with repentance unto life? Paul tells us what repentance is, what vehemency, what desire, what revenge it works. Mr. Hart says—

"Nor is it such a dismal thing,
As 'tis by some men named,
A sinner may repent and sing—"

I have done that many times; there are many acts of repentance, as well as many acts of faith. So—

"A sinner may repent and sing,
Rejoice and be ashamed."

You can see what this repentance is by this Scripture, "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evils that ye have committed." It is the goodness of God felt in the heart that breaks it into a thousand pieces, while the soul loathes himself before God, and wonders at the compassion of God towards such a wretch as he feels himself to be.

"The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Oil is such a spreading thing. The grace of the Spirit runs up and down into so many things. There is another oil, that is, *humility before God*. None have such low eyes as the wise, they can see so much in themselves that is wrong. The more grace a man has the more humble he will be; the more comforts God blesses his soul with, the less man he will be. None are so poor in spirit as those that are rich in grace. "I do not understand that," say you. Then you have got to learn some of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. It is easier to be poor in pocket than poor in spirit. You may easily empty your pocket, but poverty of spirit springs from God's grace in the soul. You can see what this poverty of spirit is. God says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." Therefore my text says, "The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." If you are among the wise, you know something of this oil, that is a "treasure to be desired," and is found only in the "dwellings of the wise." If you are destitute of this oil, whatever name you may have among men, whatever you may think of yourself, and however high your self-confidence may rise, you will at last be shut out from the kingdom of heaven, and sent among the devil and the damned. If it be God's will, may that never be the unhappy state of any now before me.