

1887

SERMON XII.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 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.

"THEN shall the kingdom of heaven." Now the kingdom of heaven here does not mean glory, for there are no foolish virgins there; nor does it mean an internal work of grace, because that brings forth fruit to perfection; but it sets forth the Gospel dispensation—the time here upon earth. "Then," it is said, "the kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins." Ten is either put for a definite or indefinite number. I have understood when virgins went to meet the bridegroom they never exceeded the number of ten. Be that as it may, they are called virgins for the purity of their faith and worship, they are not carried away with the rotten opinions of the world, but "they worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." John tells us that when he saw the company in heaven, the angel said to him, "These are they that were not defiled with women, for they are virgins." The women there spoken of are false churches, as you read by the prophet Isaiah, "In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by Thy name, to take away our reproach." So the Papal Church is called "the beast," and all that worship it are called adulterers. Everything contrary to the truth set forth in the Scriptures is adultery and spiritual fornication. Then it is said, some "have escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust;" but if they become again entangled their last state is worse than the first. Now all these ten virgins appeared alike, they were not carried away with the false worship of the beast, nor with any lie. They were all together, they went forth to meet the bridegroom, so you see they had some faith, some hope and expectation, and some love, or they would not have gone forth. If they had not some faith in the truth that he was coming they would not have gone forth; they had some faith that they should meet him; they had some love in expectation of enjoying him. This will show how far men and women may go. It is said of some "who have tasted the good Word of God," and have been enlightened in the truth, that they fall away, and "turn like the dog to the vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

All of you, as you are here before God, are, so to speak, like the ten virgins; you all have come forth for something. You believe God's Word. I expect there is not one here that doubts the truth of the Scriptures. You

have an historical faith that what the Word says is true, that Christ lived on this earth, that He died for sin, and that next He will "appear without sin unto salvation," to gather His chosen to be with Him in heaven for evermore. That faith is not sufficient; it is just the same as if you were to read in a newspaper respecting any battle fought, or anything that had transpired; you would read of it without taking any part in it, and have no interest in it. Then there is a temporary faith that believes for a while, but in time of temptation falls away. Again, you have a hope. Many of you, perhaps, hope God is merciful, He has not made us to cast us away at the last. You have a hope that when you die you will go to heaven, seeing that you are consistent and circumspect, and that you unite with the people of God; you see no difference between them and yourself. Then, perhaps, you have a love, too; you could say you esteem and respect those that fear God, you prefer them to the ungodly; and you have a love to the truth; you would sooner hear the truth than hear error preached. You like to hear of a finished salvation and of the final perseverance of the saints; you show your love by abiding among the people of God, and by coming to the house of God. These are the things that bring you to meet along with the wise virgins. If I were to ask you you would tell me that was your faith, hope, and love, yet with all this, it is not the right thing, there is something beyond this. While you go forth to meet the Bridegroom in faith, hope, expectation, and love, you have not that grace which will take you to heaven. *MP.* Real faith separates a man from the world. "Come out from among them, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing." It separates him in heart and in affection. It brings him out of himself, to throw himself simply and entirely upon the blood, merit, and righteousness of the Christ of God.

"Other refuge have I none."

He sees more beauty in the Christ of God than in all things else besides. His faith draws virtue from the Christ of God. The faith of a true child of God unites him to Christ; there is a communication between his soul and Christ, there is union and communion with Christ. Is your faith anything like that? Does it separate you from the world, and bring you to feel, "The life I live I live by the faith of the Son of God," and "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth I desire beside Thee?" Then there is a hope that these wise virgins had. "He that hath this hope purifies himself even as He is pure." This hope is wrought in his heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, "Which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast." Now it is called a lively hope. "We are begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." If you have got a right hope it will make you look to the bottom of your religion, and search the groundwork of it. You that are foolish virgins do not do that. "How do you know?" say you. Because "the heart is deceitful above all things; and desperately wicked;" Satan is not divided

against himself, or how would his kingdom stand? He rocks you to sleep with a false hope and false security; it does not spring from a well-grounded assurance, it does not purify you, it leaves you just as you were, it does not beget anything in you. You know no difference, it is all the same thing to you in worship all the year round; now and then there may be a pang, but it does not abide. Then as to love. Where there is real religion there is such a love to God and to Jesus Christ, they can indeed say, "Because of the savour of Thy good ointments, Thy name is as ointment poured forth." This will try you, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." Many of you know that you take no heed to walk after God's commandments; God may command what He pleases, you will do what you like; if God's commands stand in the way of your profits and gains, they may go on one side. "You are right," say you. I know I am right; the Word cannot deceive us, God will not deceive us, however we may deceive ourselves. Where there is real love it will deny self, and take up the cross, and follow Christ. No sooner did they propose to Hamor, Shechem's son, that he should be circumcised to have Dinah, than he did it directly, he had such love to her. When God said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon the mountain that I shall tell thee of," he did it. Love is something more than talking, thinking, or wishing; it is an active, living principle, whereby the man can appeal to God at times, and say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

"Do not I love Thee, dearest Lord?
O search my heart and see,
And turn out every idol, Lord,
That dares to rival Thee."

MP. None but the wise virgins can come there. Some of you can see yours is only a semblance of things. There is a difference between a "potsherd covered with silver dross," and a silver or golden vessel. So you read, in a great house there are vessels to honour as well as to dishonour; "if a man therefore purify himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use." You talk of faith, but it is not an active principle, it is not believing, it brings nothing in, it is an assent. Your faith cost you nothing, it is like the faith of the Plymouth Brethren, you can pick it up when you like. Not so if you are one of these wise ones; it has been wrought in your heart by God; He has persuaded you; it is a religion you cannot put down nor take up. You cannot believe what you like if you have got a faith that will save your soul, it stands in the power of God. At times you cannot believe God has wrought anything savingly in your heart, you cannot believe that there is a reality in your soul, and that your faith is the faith of God's elect, though it is as plain at times as this lamp before my eyes. Now the foolish can believe at any time. You cannot give up your religion, it is something that has got hold of you that makes you hold

on. So with the hope God has wrought in your heart, you cannot say there is no expectation in your soul. What does it do? It brings you to seek the face of God, makes you turn over His Word, brings you at times to hear it, and, amidst all your fears and trials, it keeps your head above water. You have had many things to damp your love; how many frowns you have had instead of smiles. Instead of finding "Wisdom's ways to be ways of pleasantness and all her paths peace," what misgivings, what jealousies, what miserable days you have had, yet your love has kept on. Now with you that are foolish, your faith has never been tried like that, your hope has never been dashed, nor your love tried; if it were to come to that, most likely you would give it up. In the chapter I read of some who received the word, they gave up soon, others endured for a while, some held out till the last, but they brought forth no fruit to perfection; it does not say they gave up or let go like the others, but that they brought forth no fruit. Now Christ says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Have you anything like what I have just been hinting about? Has God persuaded your soul, and by a Divine influence and power in your heart, said, "Seek ye My face," and under that influence and power have you answered, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Do you know what it is, while seeking His face, for God to come in with some reviving, encouraging, comforting word, and bring you to feel, "Who can tell but what God will save my never-dying soul; hope thou in God, it may be I shall find favour in His sight?" It has made you turn over things again and again. I will tell you what this faith and hope has done. It has given you to see more reality in the things of God than in all the things of a passing, dying world. I know what this faith and hope has done. It has raised your thoughts God-ward. I know the things of the world come like a dead weight at times on our minds, and seem to swallow up everything, but where there is real faith and hope they will force their way through, and you can no more keep the man from thinking of heaven and hell and the things that make for his peace than you could create a world. "Oh," say you, "there are a good many foolish virgins here, but if these things you have spoken of are marks of grace, and things that will bring a man to heaven at last, blessed be God they are in my heart in a little measure." The thirty-fold hearers were approved by God. If you have got this religion you have got a love that will bear you up and carry you amidst all the opposition from the world, your own base heart, and the devil, too. This is your feeling, "Give me Christ, or else I die; nought but death shall part Him and me." I will tell you what His love will do. It will bring you to desire and love holiness as much as you desire and pant for happiness. The foolish virgins do not think much about holiness. "Let us get to heaven." But, my friends, get to heaven and not love holiness here!

"Heaven is that holy, happy place,
Where sin no more defiles."

The Son of God said, "I go to prepare a place for you," "I have betrothed you to Myself." He took our flesh with Him into heaven as a token of it. As He has done so, he gives us His Spirit here to prepare us for that heaven. That Spirit is a Spirit of holiness. As He has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us, and has taken the token with Him, so He gives us a token of it here.

"Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame;
None shall obtain admittance there
But followers of the Lamb."

Therefore, if you are going forth to meet the Bridegroom in truth, in uprightness, in faith, hope, and love, there is holiness of heart. This brings you to cry out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." It is said, "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the King shall be his friend." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and be with Him. "Why," say some before God, "sin is my plague, my grief, it makes me sigh and mourn." What does God say? "Set a mark upon them that sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the land." They are the true virgins. I am as satisfied as I am that the Scriptures are true, nothing troubles and perplexes you like sin. "That is just right," say you. I know it is right. What do you want to get to heaven for?

"There I shall see His face,
And never, never sin,
But from the rivers of His grace
Drink endless pleasures in."

That is why you go forth to meet Him. Are these the things that are to be found in your heart, and you are blessed with?

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto ten virgins, which took their lamps." All made a profession, but profession is not possession.

"To see sin smarts but slightly,
To own with lip confession
Is easier still, but O! to feel,
Cuts deep beyond expression."

They went forth to meet the Bridegroom. There were no questionings in their minds, no fears, no casting downs. No one is more conceited than the man that is destitute of grace. "What you believe I believe, what you are looking for I am looking for." There is no self-examination, no turning things over. If you are a wise virgin, and you are going forth with a lamp of profession, God and you often come together in secret. "Am I right, Lord? Have I begun it of myself? How shall I end, Lord?" I will read your heart by my own. You have been many times on your knees, or walking the fields, or in secret places, saying, "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." God knows that has been the desire and cry of my

heart hundreds of times before Him. You will get to heaven, you will be found right at last. "Eh," say you. Hearken: "The meek I will guide in judgment, the meek I will teach My way." "He that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise."

They "went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." I do not understand by this there will be as many saved as lost; but it is a parable; it does not run upon all-fours; God has an aim in it to show forth one principal thing. As in a picture; it is to show a house or a horse; there are trees and other things in the picture, but they are merely to set it forth; the principal object is the house or horse. So this parable is to show how far men may go, yet afterwards all only have the semblance of the things.

"Opinions in the head;
True faith as far excels
As bodies differ from a shade,
Or kernels from the shells."

So "five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Wherein did the wisdom of these consist? They looked well to their ways, they felt one thing was needful, to be born again of the Spirit; they wanted to prove that their religion was of God. They could not take things upon trust. "What saith God to His servant?" "The simple believeth every word." This is what grace did in their hearts. If it has done this for you you are a wise man. They looked to see that they had got the right thing. They knew that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teacheth a man to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world." Where this grace is it is a world-conquering grace, it is a soul-transforming grace, it is a sin-subduing grace. See what it is! "Five were wise;" they had got that grace that enabled them to overcome the world. Grace brings a man to see and feel, "This is not my rest, it is polluted." I find to my cost and trouble that grace does not root out sin. I can say I have felt in the last week the very sins in my heart that I felt forty years ago, struggling, kicking, and plunging, but I believe I know it is a sin-subduing grace, "so it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." "Five were wise." They were not led captive by the devil at his will; it was not just a flash and away. "Oh," say you, "I think I know what this soul-transforming grace is." Let us try. Perhaps many of you have seen, or you know it to be true, men on the stage fight one another so fiercely, and so savagely in appearance, as if they meant to destroy one another, while the spectators are looking on, but when they get behind the scenes they are drinking and talking together. I have seen it many times in my younger days. This is only done while the people are looking on. It is not done behind the scenes. Now, my friends, perhaps your mortifying your sins is only to get a good name in the world, because people are looking at you. Every now and

then, perhaps, conscience and your sins come together, and there is such a battle. Perhaps there is some trickery in your business, and you think, "I will not do that again," but the next day you do it again. There is no reality in it, it is only a make-believe, it is a play. If it is sin-subduing grace, you are on your knees before God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God," that is where you fight. It is not what the world may think about you, sin is an evil and bitter thing to you, it is not a friend, it is an enemy; you treat him as a foe, you will give him no rest. "Aye," say some before God, "I trust I know what that is." You have got the right thing, you will be in heaven with Jesus Christ. I believe I know what it is. He has given me a sweet persuasion that I shall be with Him, therefore I can encourage you. "Five were wise," they had got this; the others never thought about that being the one thing needful, or what it was to have a name to live and yet be dead. The wise man looks well to his standing, weighs things up before God, comes to the light to be made manifest that his works are done in sincerity and truth. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." If you have got a right religion, you are not afraid of the closest and most searching ministry that can be found. If you have got a right religion, you will not mind weighing it up by the blessed Word of God; but if you have only a name to live and are dead you will not like a faithful reprover, you and God will not come together face to face, in secret, that you may be persuaded and confirmed that your religion is of God. "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."