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A Sermon preached by Mr J Delves at Galee4d Chapel, Brighton
on Lord's Day evening 22nd July 1056
on the occasion of the death of Mr James Payne

And they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.
(Matthew 25:10)

Many Scriptures, those we have been reading this evening (*Revelation 19 & 20*), and many others, show the blessed and happy state of those who, when they come to die, and in the great judgement day, will be found **ready**. O beloved friends, how can there be a more important or far-reaching consideration than this! Have we solemnly and prayerfully asked ourselves this question: Are we ready to meet God? Has there been that inward searching as to whether we have a right and good standing for eternity? Truly it is a solemn consideration: *Pause, my soul, and ask the question.* Have **you** ever asked the question? Have you, I suggest, **have** you asked the question:

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?*

In the case of our beloved departed friend and brother, we can unhesitatingly affirm that he was ready, that it was well with him. Blessed, happy, ransomed soul, now before the throne of God, casting, as it were, his crown before the throne, crowning Him Lord of all.

But how unspeakable solemn is and must be the case of those who are not ready, because it must be concluded that many die who are not ready. What an awful consideration! How solemn the declaration: *Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* Solemn words indeed were those spoken by the Lord Himself concerning the wicked who are cast into hell, *where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* None can say there are no warnings in the Word of God in relation to this important consideration: none in this chapel can say there are no warnings in relation to the tremendous issues of eternity. If we blind our eyes to the solemn revelation of divine truth, we blind our eyes to our own destruction. What a solemn thought it is!

Yet what a wonderful, merciful, blessed revelation God has given concerning His people; what provision He has made for them! Happy are they, happy indeed are they who are brought, as our departed friend was brought, to know the Lord, to love Him, and to serve Him, to walk in His ways, to honour Him in his life and death. How happy are they: *Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.* Our beloved brother Payne is walking in the light of His countenance as he never walked here in the same measure. He had very many gracious, sweet in-shinings of the Lord's mercy and love in his soul; he had many sweet touches. The streams of that river, we believe, often gladdened his soul. Now he is where there is no trouble, where there is nothing to mar the sweet, sacred pleasure and joy that the ransomed saints enjoy at the Father's right hand. *At Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

O, we might well think and tremble, for death is not upon the road. None can tell who in this congregation will receive the summons next. We see an empty seat that has for many years been occupied by one from whose lips living prayers have gone up to the God of all grace. Now we shall hear that voice no more; the seat is vacant. Our brother has exchanged earth for heaven; and who would wish him back? We can but rejoice that the Lord has taken him home from a weary, afflicted body. As many of you know, he was deprived of sight, deprived of

hearing, and deprived of bodily strength; and yet given remarkable patience and grace in all his sufferings. It softened the heart to be with him.

Speaking for myself, many times years ago when I used to see him, oftener in our early days, has he spoken kindly and affectionately to me, spoken fitting words, seasonable words, some of which still remain, in relation to how the Lord dealt with him. The Lord did deal with him in a clear and distinct way, opened his blind eyes, brought him to a knowledge of the truth, convinced him of his guilty sins before a holy and heart-searching God. I believe our late brother Payne knew what it was to tremble before God under the terrors of a broken law, and I believe he knew what it was to rejoice in pardoned sin, to walk in the light of God's countenance, to enjoy the gospel in his own soul. What a wonderful mercy!

And the Lord brought him through many trials and afflictions in his earthly pilgrimage. Many hard things he had to endure, and it was a hard struggle with him for many years; but the dealings of God with him in providence in some things were very striking.

So it is, more or less, with the Lord's people. What a wonderful mercy it is, beloved friends, to have a real religion, a religion with God in it, a religion where a poor sinner has dealings with God in a gracious, merciful way! Do you have dealings with God? Have you the kind of religion in which there are living communications from God to your soul?

They that were ready. O that word! *They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*

I would like, in the first place, to speak, as I may be helped, of the great danger of coming short in these things, as is shown in this parable of the ten virgins; of the importance of being found ready; and then what is involved in being found ready.

1. Is there not, beloved hearers, a very great danger in religion of assuming that all is well without real foundations for such a conclusion? To refer to the parable, was it not apparent that the foolish virgins assumed that all was in order, and that they would have no difficulty, and would meet with no disappointment? Is it not an amazing consideration that many people can be slack in relation to their standing for eternity? Is there not a danger of walking in sparks of our own kindling, of having a mere form of godliness, and yet be destitute of its saving power? Is there not a danger of having a name to live merely, of having light in our judgement without any life in our soul?

Balaam said: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.* Many people have said that who, like Balaam, had no desire to live the life of the righteous, or bear for Christ's sake. Balaam said some very beautiful things, but he had no part or lot in them. What a solemn consideration that, after all those things he said – and he could hardly have said better things of the children of Israel – yet after all, he loved the wages of unrighteousness! Peter speaks of him as being like a *well without water, a cloud carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.* How profoundly solemn! Do the things of eternity ever cause you to tremble? Have they sometimes shaken your very frame, as it were? Many, alas, think and conclude that all is well with them. But the Lord in His sermon on the mount says: *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.* A solemn consideration indeed for any professed minister of the gospel.

How do matters stand with us? Can you be satisfied with externals, with coming to the house of God, good as it is in its place? Can you be satisfied with just what you have in yourself?

O how sad it is to think that people are so satisfied, can wrap themselves, so to speak, in a form of godliness, and may be thought to be real Christians, where perhaps the rest of the matter has never been. It is a solemn consideration. I do not wish to put this question to others without some searching of heart myself. The point is: have we ever been rightly brought down before God? Have we had any real discovery of our guilty, ruined condition? Do you have to say from the very bottom of your heart, "Give me Christ, or else I die."? Has there been an emptying from vessel to vessel in your case?

They that were ready went in. They that were **ready**. They did not **all** go in, for they were not all ready. That is a very solemn thought. There was an outward similarity; these ten virgins were all together, they all took their lamps. It was not a case of five going without any lamps, and five going with lamps. There is a very solemn, searching, separating line of truth here. It seems to show that some may go a long way in a dead profession, may be looked upon as shining Christians, and yet never have any searching of heart as to their prospects for eternity. Is that the case with you?

They all took their lamps – all ten of them – and all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They had all been asleep. *While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.* It does not say that five of them were wide awake and kept watch all the time: *They all slumbered and slept.* Everything seemed all right until the last; then came the midnight cry, and there was a rude awakening with some. They all arose and trimmed their lamps; they all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They all seemed together, shall I say, to the last breath. And then some of them discovered the omission; there was no oil in their lamps; there was something lacking. How solemn to come to the borders of eternity, and then find something lacking! *They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage; and the door was shut.*

Surely it is an all-important question, whether or no we shall be found ready. It is important, beloved friends, because of the brevity of life as compared with eternity. Our life is like a vapour. We spend our years as a tale that is told. It is but for a moment, as it were, like a flash. Life is short at the very longest: *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.* So we have continually to witness. Some of us begin to feel the truth of it ourselves; some have felt it for a long time. O life is short; hence the importance of being found ready!

But not only is it important because of the shortness of life, but because of the uncertainty of life. I know here the Lord is referring to His second coming, but the truth applies also to our decease. Life is very uncertain, is it not? We cannot tell what a day or hour may bring forth, can we? *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.* Who can tell when that awesome day will come? It may come very suddenly, and O, those who would put things off, as they say, to their dying day, are under an awful delusion! What a mercy to be brought to realise the importance of being prepared to meet God, in view of the uncertainty of life here! Who can tell? Someone here may be taken before the day is gone; sometimes it is, as it were, almost momentary; hence the importance of being found ready.

It is important, too, because of the solemnity of death. Death is a very solemn consideration. It is the fruit of sin. It is a divine appointment consequent upon sin; and O, there is a sting there! *The sting of death is sin* – though mercifully the Lord's people have the sting removed. *Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* To the dear family of God, the sting of death is, as it were, drowned in the atonement. Why, is it not an amazing consideration to think that the sins of which we have been guilty, if washed away in the precious blood of Jesus, will never rise against us in the judgement day! O wonderful

consideration! What an amazing mercy to be prepared to die! I have sometimes heard one, years ago in the prayer meetings here, pray: "Lord, when we come to die, may we have nothing to do but to die!" Our beloved brother was just there – he had nothing to do but die, and the Lord took him home. Happy soul, now with the Lord: *For ever with the Lord*. Said the apostle John: *We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*.

But the importance consists in the fact that there is a judgement day approaching. O there is to be a judgement day! We were reading of that day, when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the books will be opened; and another book will be opened, the book of life, and those whose names are not found written there will be cast into the lake of fire. A solemn consideration! This is the second death. Blessed indeed are they who have part in the first resurrection. We cannot question this in the purposes of God in the future, can we? The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, confirmed this: *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Cor.5:10)* We must **all** appear there; I must; you must. I shall have to be there; you will have to be there. What then? *They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage*. They that were **ready**. What a solemn point this is: they were not **all** ready! Shall we be found ready?

Then again, the matter is important because of the happiness, the peace and joy of all who are found ready, when that time shall be. It may be that there is much searching of heart with some in relation to this.

*When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?*

Can it be possible that a poor worm like me, a poor nothing, a worthless wretch:

*Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Thy right hand?*

Can it be possible that we shall be found ready? O to be found ready! Happy are they who are found ready – happy indeed are they! Our dear friend and brother is there joining in that everlasting song: *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood*. He alone is worthy. Every ransomed soul will know where to put the honour. *Thou art worthy...for Thou wast slain, and hast ransomed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*.

The importance also consists of considering the awful misery of the lost. There is a heaven for the redeemed, and there is a hell of punishment for the lost. The Lord Himself declared of His own people who will be found at His right hand at the great day, that the King shall say unto them: *Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*. To those on the left hand He will say: *Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*. Religious people try to varnish all that over; they say, "All that kind of theory is exploded long since!" It will all be found true one day. Whatever tenets people may hold, it will be solemnly true of each one of us one day, that – *They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut*. We shall be shut in, or shut out.

The importance of this also consists in the duration of that future state. It is not for a few years, but for ever and ever – for ever and ever, beloved friends. O what an expression! If we

die in the Lord, by the Lord's divine mercy, then we shall be blessed for ever and ever, world without end. But if we are not found ready, then we shall be under the curse for ever and ever – for ever and ever! *Their smoke rose up for ever and ever.*

2. But now, what is it to be found ready? Just a moment or two on this last point. What is it to be found ready? We may say it consists, first of all, in what the Lord has done for us in the great work of redemption, that amazing revelation of divine mercy, grace and love in a covenant-performing God, who gave His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who assumed human flesh, and fulfilled the divine law, suffered the penalty of that law as though He Himself had broken it. He laid down His life as a Substitute, shed His precious blood, magnified the law, and made it honourable on behalf of all whom the Father gave to Him. What a wonderful consideration! What a wonderful gospel it is! What good news for poor, needy sinners! It is all done for us, you see, in this sense.

Moreover, the Redeemer not only laid down His life, shed His blood, and paid the ransom price, but He rose again and took our nature into heaven; and there He is *clothed in a body like our own*. What a sweet thought this is! There is a man in heaven who loves His people, and who love Him; and His presence there is the earnest of the ultimate presence of all His redeemed family. *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.*

But there is something else in order to be found ready. There must be something wrought within us which nature can never effect. There must be vital change. *Ye must be born again*, otherwise we shall never be found ready. *Ye must be born again*. Not only so, but we believe this: that where the Lord begins a work of grace He will complete it, and that the work of grace here must issue in eternal glory hereafter. It will be so in every case. *He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.*

There has been a preparation; the preparation was made at Calvary, where the curse was removed, where the dear Redeemer Himself was made a curse that the blessing of Abraham might come upon His dear people. But the preparation must be **in the heart** too. *You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins*. To be found ready, there must be living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth in him*. There must be faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; there must be a knowledge of Him too; and in this we are not setting up necessarily a definite standard of experience, but showing what is truly necessary in order to be found ready.

I have often thought of dear old Mr. Curry, who used to be here many years ago. When he was walking along the Patcham road he had such a view by faith of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven that he said: "When I shall see Him He will not be a stranger to me." What a wonderful thing to be able to say! I believe there are some here who can say that; and sometimes I venture to hope I might have been able to say it myself.

There was a very old minister years ago at Maidstone, who, when he came to die, said – and said it, I believe, to our late pastor here – "My conscience is as though it never had a sin on it." What a blessed state to be in, in the prospect of eternity! *They that were ready.*

If we look at those worthies in the 11th of Hebrews, we can say of them that they were all ready. They had plenty of trouble, persecutions, many bitter ingredients in their cup, but they were all ready. *These all died in faith*, we read, *not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off*. They were assured of them. What a wonderful mercy!

The Lord alone can fit a sinner for heaven; it is with Him to wash our guilt away and to clothe us in that spotless robe of righteousness wrought by the Saviour's obedience to the divine law.

We have this happiness as we think of our dear departed brother, though we shall miss him. Many here will miss him, as we think of the unction of his prayers in this place; a few broken sentences at times used to go up from his heart on Sabbath mornings as long as he was able to be brought here by the kindness of his friends – a few sweet, unctuous sentences, which seemed to show how near he lived to the Lord. The savour of his conversation was another feature: he was blessed with a meek spirit, and would often speak a timely fitting word with something in it – not a lot of talk about religion, but a reasonable word that was sometimes like apples of gold in pictures of silver. He was enabled to endure unto the end, to walk worthy; he was held up and supported in and through many trials and much conflict, but he was found ready; he had nothing to do but to die.

I believe that will be the case with some here this evening. O what a wonderful mercy to feel that our peace is made with God, and that all barriers are removed, so that when we come to die it will be *absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*

May the Lord graciously sanctify the loss to the devoted family. It was a great comfort of our dear departed friend to be tenderly and affectionately cared for by his daughters until he was taken home. The Lord bless them, the Lord regard each one, and grant that they may know their father's God. May this be our mercy. May the Lord give us to hear the voice, grant us needful grace, and prepare us for His divine will. Amen.