

"AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT"

"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." Matthew 25:10.

After concluding His ministry in the Temple, Christ and His disciples withdrew to the Mount of Olives, and there He delivered to them a marvelous discourse on "Last Things." As He continued His teaching He spoke the parable of the ten virgins, which has made an indelible impression upon the imagination of multitudes of Christians. The parable has many sides and aspects. It is both prophetic and practical. It is searching and sifting. It applies to all ages, but especially to the last days. It was spoken for the purpose of alerting the disciples, as well as all future Christians, to the return of Christ to the earth.

In connection with His second coming Christ sought to impress His hearers with at least five facts:--the certainty of it, the uncertainty as to the time of it, the necessity of preparation for it, the blessedness of those who are prepared for it, and the wretchedness of those who are not prepared for it. While the parable clearly recognizes the fact of Christ's return, it also accentuates and emphasizes the uncertainty as to the time of this great event. Since the time of His coming again cannot be known it is perfectly ridiculous for anyone to attempt to set a date for it. With reference to this greatest future event our blessed Lord enjoined watchfulness.

In this parable Christ drew a picture of an oriental marriage festival in the light of prevailing customs at that time. He portrayed ten lovely, joyous, and charming girls who were expecting to participate in the festivities. The major event in the celebration was the arrival of the bridegroom at the house of the bride's father to receive his bride, and to take her with him to his own home for the wedding feast. The virgins were expected to go out with lamps to meet the bridal party, and to pass in with them to the wedding supper.

One is led to believe that to all of the virgins the bridegroom was known; by all of them he was highly regarded; and on the part of all of them there was a sincere desire to do him honor. During the interval of waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom, all of the ten virgins became drowsy, began to nod, and fell into a deep sleep. The fact that they went to sleep is not indicative of any special fault. It was only natural that they should go to sleep, and, as no injunction had been given to the contrary, there was no sin attached to their sleeping.

A great and fundamental contrast is clearly indicated between the two classes of virgins. Christ said that "five of them were wise, and five were foolish." The term "wise" indicates that they were thoughtful, sensible and prudent. The "foolish" were easy-going, trifling and lacking in forethought. The essential difference between the virgins consisted in the fact that five of them took extra oil along with their lamps and the other five failed to do so. The wise virgins took additional oil in vessels because they anticipated the possibility that the bridegroom might tarry long enough for their lamps to consume all of the oil which they contained. With extra oil in reserve, they were prepared to replenish the supply in the event of an emergency.

Lacking in forethought, the foolish virgins did not make any preparation by having an adequate supply of oil. They failed to secure oil for their lamps, which indicated their lack of good judgment.

This parable is a gripping story, related only as Christ could tell it. It is full of lights and shadows, triumph and tragedy, laughter and tears. Christ portrayed ten lovely girls, who were expecting to take part in a marriage ceremony. What a fascinating picture they present! All of them seemed to be equally joyous and charming. All of them were virgins. All of them were invited to the wedding. All of them were dressed appropriately for the occasion. All of them had some knowledge of and regard for the bridegroom. They had a desire in their hearts to honor him by going forth to meet him. Each one of them

had a lamp, and all of them knew that they had to have oil in their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, all of them slumbered and slept. They were alike in their intentions; that is, they were in the group for the same purpose. But just here their likeness ends.

Five of them were prepared to meet the bridegroom, but five of them were unprepared. So, they were in two groups, the ready and the unready. Each group had the same objective, namely, to meet the bridegroom. Moreover, each group had the same opportunity to prepare to meet him.

At midnight, when the bridegroom came, all of the virgins were awakened by a startling cry: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Upon their awaking to the emergency, it was revealed that five of the virgins had wisely made careful preparation by bringing along an adequate supply of oil. They trimmed the wicks of their lamps, filled the lamps with oil, lighted them, and went forth to meet the bridegroom with joy. They were received by him with a hearty welcome. It was also revealed that the five foolish virgins had not brought oil with them.

Embarrassed by the lack of oil for their lamps, the five foolish virgins went to the five wise ones and begged them for a supply of oil. They said, "Give us of your oil." This anxious request was denied because the others were afraid that they did not have sufficient oil for both groups. While their request was earnest, it was also heart-rending and fruitless. Unable to borrow or beg oil from the wise virgins, the foolish ones went forth to attempt to buy some for themselves, but the stores were closed and they could not get any.

During their absence the bridegroom made his appearance. The bridal party entered and the door was closed. Upon their return, after they had attempted to borrow, beg and buy oil, they begged for admittance, but the bridegroom was compelled to say to them, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." For the wise virgins the shut door meant safety, enjoyment and intimate fellowship, but for the foolish ones it meant neglected privileges and forfeited opportunities. Naturally they were fearfully disappointed, but they had no one to blame except themselves for their predicament. They had simply failed to make the necessary preparation.

From this parable I want to draw some simple and valuable lessons. Among them are the following:

I. Preparedness is a necessity.

In the light of this parable, it is evident that we cannot prepare for the emergencies and the great testing times of life after they have come upon us. The hurried and fruitless attempts, when the moment arrives, to make the necessary preparation which should have been made in advance, are indeed deeply pathetic. This parable touches the common fault of failing to be ready to meet Christ at His coming. Secondly, it also has to do with the tragedy of not being ready for death. Each of us has a life to live, a death to die and a Judge to meet, so it is high time that we made the necessary preparation for them. What a pity and a tragedy that so many neglect to make this preparation while they have the opportunity! Lost opportunities will never return.

II. Not all are saved who may think they are.

The foolish virgins thought they were ready to enter the house with the bridal party when it arrived, but they were badly mistaken. There is much deception in our world, but none of it is so dangerous as that which concerns salvation. Satan so often gets people to follow some man-made plan in order to lure them away from God's plan of salvation. Oh, the tragedy of being deceived by Satan! "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." Many who now think they are saved will find that they are not. How terrible to trust in some false hope and come at last to find yourself irreparably lost!

III. Not all will be saved who may want to be.

There was every indication that the foolish virgins wanted to enter with the rest of the bridal party, but they were not able to do so. It was too late when they awoke to the fact that they were not ready. One wonders why they were so foolish.

In like manner one is made to wonder why people trifle and take more chances with their immortal souls than they do with anything else in the world. Desiring to be saved and being saved are poles apart in their meaning. Being saved is far more than having a desire to be saved. Every sensible person wants to be saved and go to heaven, but only those are saved or will be saved who accept Christ as their personal Saviour.

IV. People are never saved by good intentions.

Those foolish virgins had no thought or intention of being left out. They knew that preparation was necessary and they fully intended to make it. It was purely a matter of carelessness, thoughtless neglect and postponed duty. The same thing applies to those who intend to be saved, but are thoughtlessly drifting into hell.

V. Lost opportunities can never be recalled.

"And the door was shut." That statement means exactly what it says. There is an end to innumerable opportunities. When the door was shut the foolish virgins were unable to find an entrance to the feast, even though they sought it with the most agonizing earnestness. Even so, every day is bringing opportunities to you which, if you miss them, can never be recalled. You have an opportunity today, but, if you let it slip, the door that opens to it will be shut and it will never be opened again. Other doors may open, but that one never will.

VI. The prepared and the unprepared will be separated.

According to God's classification, there are two classes of people in this world, namely, those who are saved and those who are unsaved. There are just two masters, namely, Christ and Satan. There are only two foundations, namely, the Solid Rock or Christ and the sinking sand of man's own so-called righteousness. There are just two eternal homes, namely, heaven and hell.

The ten virgins were the best of friends. Five entered the door and the others were shut out. Five rejoiced, but the others were filled with disappointment. All had the same opportunity. Half of them made the necessary preparation, but the rest of them neglected to do so. Five of them seized their opportunity, whereas the other five thought they had time enough yet.

Many of the unsaved are waiting to make preparation on their death beds. They seem to forget that they may die in a car accident or from a heart attack. They forget that multitudes die in hospitals under the influence of drugs. For these and many other good reasons do not wait until the eleventh hour. Don't wait until the door is shut. It is a mark of wisdom to get ready for life, for death and for eternity. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."