

SERMON XVII.

CHRIST'S COMING IS AT OUR MIDNIGHT.

PREACHED AT WESTMINSTER, BEFORE THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF
COMMONS, MAY 17, 1648,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR THANKSGIVING FOR THE GREAT
VICTORY IN WALES.

TO THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF COMMONS IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED
AT WESTMINSTER.

ACCORDING to your command I have presented these notes to your view, somewhat concerning the kingdom and coming of Christ; an argument as unwelcome to some as welcome to others. Kings, princes and rulers sometimes startle at it, but they need not, for Christ means them no hurt; if they will throw down their crowns at his feet, he will set their crowns on their heads and his own too. The Jews feared and refused to receive Christ and his kingdom, lest they should lose their own kingdom; and thereby they lost both their God and their kingdom, as Austin observes. But who ever lost his sceptre by submitting unto Christ's sceptre? I may say, truly, *potestus Christi* is rather *cumulativa* than *privativa*. In helping Christ to his throne, you shall help yourselves to your honours and greatness. I will not say that Christ hath need of you, he hath no need of us: but if that of the schools be true, namely, that one is helped by another, either by addition of new strength and virtue, or by the exercise of what was formerly given; then Jesus Christ may in some sense, and that according to scripture phrase, Judges v. 23, be said to be helped by you. Great confederacies will be raised against him when he comes to his kingdom, Psalm ii. 1, 2. But God, who sits in heaven, laughs at those combinations, verse 4, and in spite of them will set his King upon his holy hill of Zion, verse 6. And to him that overcome will I give to sit down with me in my throne, saith our Saviour, even as I have overcome and sit with my Father in his throne, Rev. iii. 21. Wherefore, most honourable, be not overcome with evil, be not overcome with difficulties, with oppositions or combinations of men; but overcome evil with good, and do what in you lies to bring this blessed King Jesus unto his throne and inheritance that as the earth in due time shall, so England in special manner may become the kingdom of our Lord Christ, and we may all say, The Lord God omnipotent reigneth amongst us.

I could not long deliberate in so short a time what part of God's word I should preach to you, but knowing the trouble of these times, and that the more you spend your thoughts on Christ's coming and kingdom, the more your hearts will be upheld in the times of your troubles; I chose rather to preach on this argument, which I here now present, and beseech the Lord to bless it to you, and you to this kingdom; only be strong, and be of good courage; fear not, neither be

dismayed ; and the Lord your God will be with you as he hath been formerly, which shall be the prayer of,

Your humble servant in the gospel of Jesus Christ,

WILLIAM BRIDGE.

“ And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh.”—MATT. XXV. 6.

IN this parable ye have the state and posture of the church a little before and at the coming of Jesus Christ. “ Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,” verse 1. Sometimes the doctrine and grace of the gospel is called the kingdom of heaven ; “ The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed,” &c. This cannot be meant here : because in the gospel there are not ten virgins. Sometimes the state of glory above is called the kingdom of heaven : that is not meant here, because there are no foolish virgins. Sometimes the church of Christ under the new testament is called the kingdom of heaven, for there God appears, manifests himself, and it is heaven on earth ; and this is that which is here called the kingdom of heaven ; which kingdom is described by the Governor, King and Head thereof, and by the subjects of that kingdom. The subjects are described by their agreement and disagreement. First, They agree in this, that they are all virgins ; though some foolish, yet virgins, not defiled with men or the pollutions of the world : it is possible a foolish and unsound heart may go thus far in religion, to be free from the pollutions of the world, yea, through the knowledge of Christ, says the apostle Peter. Secondly, They agree in this, that they have all their lamps, good and bad, wise and foolish, under ordinances, which are the lamps, whereby the golden oil of the sanctuary is emptied into our hearts. Thirdly, They agree in this, that they are all expectants, wise and foolish wait the Bridegroom’s coming ; they all think to receive good, and have a good day by the coming of Jesus Christ : this is far, yet thus far may a foolish virgin go. Fourthly, They all agree in this, that they had oil in their lamps ; indeed it is said, verse 3, that “ the foolish virgins took no oil with them,” but they say, verse 8, “ Our lamps are gone out ;” * so that oil they had once, but

* Ad nihilum valet quod non valet ad finem suum.

they had not enough, and so none; parts and gifts and common graces a man may have, not only his lamp, but some oil in it for a time, yet be a foolish virgin. Fifthly, They agree in this, that they keep company, have communion and fellowship together in the church, yea, so far that the foolish are not known till Christ's coming; so smoothly may a foolish virgin carry it, yet remain foolish. Sixthly, They all agree in this, also, that they hold out their profession with lamps, and waiting until the Bridegroom comes. So that possibly a man may be a professor of the gospel, and bear up his profession among the best, even to the last, yet be unsound at heart, and a foolish virgin. Thus far they agree.

But though these virgins agree in many things, yet they disagree in point of wisdom; for the wise got so much oil as did serve till the last, the foolish not so; there was *defectus olei*, verse 8.

Again, You have here the description of the King, Governor and Head of this kingdom, who is described from and by the manner of his coming. First, He comes as a Bridegroom. Secondly, He comes apparently: not as in the days of his flesh, when he came more hiddenly; "Behold a great cry," &c. Thirdly, He comes suddenly, unexpectedly, in the most dark time, he comes at midnight.

Now Christ's coming is either spiritual and invisible, John xiv. 18, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you;" or visible; and that either at the day of judgment, or else at the calling and conversion of the Jews, when he will appear in the clouds, and come to set up his kingdom in this world in a more glorious manner than ever. So Rev. xvii., "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him (that is the Jews); and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him, even so, Amen;" which relates unto Zech. xii. 10—14, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his own son, &c. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, and the land shall mourn, every family apart: the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the

house of Levi apart, and their wives apart," &c.; which cannot be understood of the day of judgment, because then the families of David, Nathan, Shimei, Levi, shall not mourn apart, and their wives apart. Of this coming of Christ to set up his kingdom, I rather take this parable to be understood, and not of his coming at the day of judgment; for in Matt. xiv. the disciples did propound three questions to our Saviour Christ: verse 3, "Tell us, when shall these things be?" that is, the destruction of the temple; "and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" To the last he doth answer first, as is usual in Scripture, negatively: verse 6, "Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars, but the end is not yet." Affirmatively, verse 14, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come." To the first question he doth answer in the second place, verses 15, 16, and to the second he doth answer in the third and last place, because he intended to speak most of that, and so proceeds to speak of his coming, and the signs thereof, in the after part of the xxivth chapter, verses 37—50, and so he goes on in this beginning of the xxvth: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be like unto ten virgins." In which parable still he speaks of his coming as before, for, verse 13, he concludes this parable thus, "Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

Besides, Christ comes not as a Bridegroom but as a Judge at the day of judgment. And if ye look into Rev. xix., xxi., and xxii., where mention is made of the glory of Christ's kingdom in the latter times, ye find that the converting Jew, who there sings the Hebrew song, Hallelujah! is called the bride, the Lamb's wife, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus." And at chapter xix. 18, 19, mention is made of a great battle: but there is no fighting or battling at the day of judgment. That is no time for feasting, nor suppers neither; but at weddings and marriages there were and are great suppers, which we read shall be at this time, verse 17. And as the wise enter, so the foolish, and those that tell and make lies, are shut out. Finding therefore all these things at that coming of Christ, thus to suit with this parable, I rather incline to think, that it cannot be understood of the day of judgment, but of that time when Christ will appear at the Jews' conversion, to set

up his kingdom on earth, in that glorious and blessed manner which all the prophets bear witness unto.

And because all the victories and deliverances that Christ worketh for the churches in the meantime, are so many steps unto this kingdom and coming of his : therefore, in scripture phrase, sometimes they are called his coming. Matt. xvii. His transfiguration was called his coming in his kingdom, for chap. xvi. 28, Christ saith, " There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." And then, chap. xvii. 1, it is said, " And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them." In three gospels the history of the transfiguration is linked unto that speech : " There are some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom," with those words, " And after six days Jesus took Peter," &c. Our Lord and Saviour Christ was then come when he spake those words, but he was to come in a more glorious way and manner to set up his kingdom ; and his transfiguration being a taste of that glory and coming, it is here called his coming in his kingdom. So all these great deliverances and victories which Christ worketh for his church, being so many tastes and forerunners of his coming in his kingdom, they may be called his coming too : surely they are as so many steps that he takes in the way of his coming to his kingdom.

But, says the text, he comes at midnight ; that is, in a time when he is least expected, suddenly, and when we are most in the dark. And so the observation is this :

Christ comes at midnight : though his coming be most expected, yet he will come in a time when he is least expected : when he comes as a Bridegroom, he comes at midnight, in a time when he is least expected, in the darkest time ; Christ comes at midnight.

" Behold (says Christ) I come as a thief : " thieves come in the darkest time, a time when they are least expected ; so will Christ's coming be.

For the opening and clearing of which truth, I shall labour to shew,

First, That our Lord and Saviour Christ will come again.

Secondly, That he will come at midnight.

Thirdly, Give you some account why he chooses rather thus to come at midnight, than otherwise.

And then draw down this by way of application to our present occasion.

First, Our Lord and Saviour Christ will come again.

Take his coming for his spiritual coming, and though now absent from your souls, yet he will come again. "If any man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him," John xiv. 25.

Take his coming, for his personal, visible coming at the day of judgment, so he will come again, 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

Take his coming for his appearing in the clouds, when he will come to set up his kingdom, so he will come again before that great day: for if ye look into the Scripture, ye shall find that his coming and his kingdom are knit together, do synchroonize. Dan. vii. 13, 14.

So in many scriptures ye shall find that his coming and his kingdom do go together. Now if ye look into Rev. xi., we shall find it spoken of times yet to come: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever," ver. 15. "And we give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned," ver. 17: which cannot be understood of the day of judgment, for then the nations are not angry, then the temple door is not opened, as is here said, ver. 18, 19.

I would not be mistaken here; for I do not think that Christ shall come and reign, continue reigning upon earth a thousand years: I do not see how the saints can spare him out of heaven so long. Neither do I think that this his coming is only to be understood of a spiritual coming into the souls of his, so filling their souls with his Spirit, that they shall have need of ordinances no more; for in those glorious times, though there shall be no temple, that is, a Jewish temple, yet the temple door, that is, the gospel temple, shall be opened. And in Zech. xiv. which is plainly spoken of the glory of the latter times yet to come, it is said expressly three times in that chapter, that men shall go up to keep the feasts of tabernacles, an allusion to the Jewish ordinance. But why not the feast of pasaeover and pentecost, only the feasts of tabernacles? Many reasons may be given, but I

think one is, because the feast of tabernacles had been more neglected than other feasts; for upon the coming out of Babylon, in Neh. viii. it is said, they had not kept that feast from the time of Joshua the son of Nun to that day, which was almost a thousand years. Now the Holy Ghost seeing what degenerations there would be in our latter times, and losings and neglectings of ordinances, he saith here, that then they shall keep the feast of tabernacles: that is, in the expression of the Jews, observe those ordinances especially, which had been most defaced and forgotten. But I keep to the words of Scripture.

Christ shall come in the clouds again, when the poor Jews shall see him, and those which are called, Forsaken, shall be called, Beloved, the King's bride; when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be come in, when Christ himself shall set up his kingdom in the world, his *regnum potentiae*, not *patientiae*, when he shall rule from sea to sea, when he shall come, not riding upon an ass' colt, but in the clouds, with thousands of angels ministering unto him. When foolish virgins shall be shut out from his glory, and the wise professor taken in. And in the meanwhile, though our Lord and Saviour Christ seem to forsake the churches for the present, yet he will come again unto them with delivering and conquering mercy: "Behold, I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast," Rev. iii.*

But how may it appear that Christ will come at midnight?

I shall give you a taste of it in all his comings, because there is the same Spirit in one as in another.

For his spiritual coming. When Christ comes first with his converting grace, and causes his converting mercy to pass upon any soul, then he doth come at midnight. "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceives it not; in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon man, in slumberings upon the bed: then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction," Job xxxiii. 14, 15, 16. When a man is fast asleep in his sins, little thinks of any good, unless it be to oppose it, then Christ comes and seals

* Read 2 Esdras xiii. which though it be apocryphal, and the lowest of the Apocrypha, being written in Latin, yet of great antiquity, cited by Cyprian, Jerome, Austin, Clemens Alexandrinus, and divers others.

on some instruction upon his soul. Thus he doth come at midnight.

Again, When Christ comes with his comforting mercy, and causes his comforting grace to pass upon a man's heart, then he doth come at midnight, in an hour and time when he doth least expect him. "I sought him (says the spouse) but I found him not. I sought him on my bed (in private), and found him not. I sought him in the streets (in the public ordinances), but I found him not. It was but a little that I passed from the watchmen, but I found him whom my soul loveth." Then and there she finds him, where she looked not for him, and did not expect him. Ps. xlii. 6, 7, 8, says David, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." Here is trouble, sorrow and heaviness. "All thy waves have gone over me," ver. 7. Here is more. Yet, saith he, ver. 8, "The Lord will command his loving kindness in the day time, and in the night his songs shall be with me." It is God's ordinary title, "The Lord our Maker, who giveth songs in the night," Job xxxv. We read of Master Robert Glover, mentioned by Master Fox in the Book of Martyrs, that though he were a man very gracious and holy, faithfully bearing witness to the truth; yet it pleased God to withdraw himself and presence from him, insomuch that he was greatly distressed while he was in prison: and opening himself to his friend, told him how God had left him and deserted him. His friend exhorted him still for to wait on God, which he laboured to do; and the night before his execution, spent much of that time in prayer. Yet no comfort came, no manifestations of the presence of Christ. The next day he was drawn out to the stake for to die for the truth, and as he went, he mourned much for the presence of Christ; but when he came in the sight of the stake, it pleased God so to fill his heart and soul with comfort and the incomes of his love, that he cried out unto his friend, Oh, Austin, he is come, he is come, he is come! This good man was in the dark a great while, but when in the darkest time, then Christ came. Christ comes at midnight, when he doth come with comfort.

And, when Christ comes with outward delivering mercy to a person or people, then he doth come at midnight also. It is said of Israel, that they went out of Egypt at midnight.

God had promised deliverance a long time before, and they did all expect it; but who would have expected it at such a time as that was? And if ye look into that last chapter of Zechariah, we shall find that the great deliverance of the churches, promised, is to be "in one day, which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night, but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light," ver. 7. Who would expect light at evening? All expect darkness at evening time. But at evening, when we look most for darkness, God hath promised this great light.

And for Christ coming at the last, ye know what he says, "I will come in an hour when ye look not for me." And for this great deliverance and victory which the Lord hath now given unto you, was it not at midnight? Consider with yourselves a little, remember the days of your former troubles, and were you ever in a more dark condition; were ye not all benighted; when were your enemies more high and lofty; when were your friends more down and dejected? A night, a night, the Lord knows, a dark night was come upon us. Well, but now Christ comes with a seasonable, almost miraculous victory and deliverance. And this is Christ's way and manner; he never comes to his people as a Bridegroom, but still he doth come at midnight; in all his comings, still he doth come at midnight.

Christ loves that his people should sit up for him, watch and wait for him. He waiteth to shew mercy on them that wait on his mercy. The more a man is respected and beloved in a house, the more, if he be abroad, those in the house will sit up and watch for him: he that loves him not, says, I will go to bed, I will stay no longer, let him come when he pleases; but he that loves him saith, I will watch, I will stay, I will sit up for him, yea, though he do not come until midnight.

And does it argue love, for one man to sit up and wait for another; and not love in our souls, to sit up and watch, and wait for Christ? Christ loves to see our love exercised; and therefore, says he, Though I intend to save and help such a person, yet I will stay, and stay long, I will not help him presently, I will suffer a night, a dark night to come upon him; so shall I see his love in waiting for me.

Christ loves to shew mercy to his people in such a way,

as he may hide pride from men; he would not have his people to be proud of mercies. And upon this account, says the text, in Job xxxiii. "He seals on instruction in the night, that he may hide pride from man." When a man is awake, he tries things by reason, and if reason like them, then they do pass for current; if reason do not approve them, then they will be rejected: but in a dream, in a deep sleep, the mind receives things, not examining them by reason. Now in the great things of God, the less hand reason hath, and the more faith, the better. Reason's going before faith doth diminish it; but reason's following faith, strengthens it: say the schools.* Faith ennobles a work. The more a man ushers in a business with his own reason, the more apt to be proud thereon; but in a dream, in a deep sleep, there is little of reason to be used; and therefore in a deep sleep he comes upon us, that he may hide pride from us.

Christ loves to come so as he may be most welcome to his people; and the less expected, the more welcome many times: and when is he less expected than at midnight? If a man be in extremity of misery, and a friend comes to visit him, then he doth not only bid him welcome, but admires his love: Oh, sir, could you find in your heart to come to me now; what, now at midnight? this is love indeed. Christ comes to be admired of all that believe, says the Scripture; and therefore, when his people are in the dark, in a dark night, then he chooses to come, and then especially, and then a man's heart doth melt with love to Christ: Oh, what a gracious Saviour have I, that could find in his heart to find me out with his mercy in this dark condition, in this unexpected time. His time is not as our time, as his thoughts are not as ours. Christ is the good Samaritan, he will pour wine and oil into the bleeding wounds of his servants; but he will first let the priest pass by, and the levite pass by, and such means and helps pass by which we ordinarily expect comfort from; and when we have none from them, then says he, Now is a time for me: but by that time all other helps are passed by, it will be midnight. But though it be midnight, says Christ, it is all one to me, for I create light, and my thoughts and my times are not as man's are. And though man come with help and succour in the day time, yet

* *Rationes precedentes minuunt fidem, subsequentes augent.*

I will come at midnight. Oh, what glorious dispensations of love and mercy is here!

What is the issue of this doctrine; what if Christ do come at midnight?

This doctrine looks wishly upon two sorts of people, such as he doth come against, and such as he doth come for.

Some foolish virgins there are whom Christ comes against, and these he will come upon at midnight, take them in their beds, when they are fast asleep in their sin, and are most secure. Ye have heard of the lamentation of Norwich: there was a generation of men that rose up and threatened to destroy the godly party there; but the Lord so ordered things in his providence, that those whom they threatened to destroy, were preserved, and the destroyers perished; nigh two or three hundred, if relations be right, blown up with powder, or spoiled, and three godly families, consisting of about twenty persons, in several rooms of the house that was blown up, were all preserved, and not a bone of them broken, whilst the others flew up into the air, as spectacles of divine anger, as if God should speak from heaven, These are the people whom I would have preserved, and those are the people that I would have punished. But oh, poor destroyed souls who perished in the thunder of God's anger, did they ever think that Christ would have come upon them at such a midnight? Here is a great deliverance and victory that is now before ye: if relations speak true, two thousand and five hundred, putting to flight eight thousand of the enemy, fifteen hundred slain, three thousand taken prisoners, and the rest scattered: but, oh, poor deceived people who made this insurrection, did they ever think that Christ would have come so suddenly, in such a time, at midnight upon them? Consider all your wars, and hath not Christ come at midnight all along? Christ is in the way to his kingdom, and every step he takes shall be midnight; both unto those he comes for, and those that he comes against; but woe to them whom he doth come against, it is a dreadful thing to be cut off suddenly, and surprised in our sins. This is a judgment threatened on the latter day, Christ will come quickly, be quick with men in a way of judgment: as a thief in the night will come, when poor foolish virgins shall be fast asleep.

I would here therefore exhort and beseech ye in the Lord, to consider the ground ye stand upon, the principles ye work by, the cause ye manage; and I appeal to you, whether do ye not think that God is in all these wars, that the event of battles is only in the hand of God? Some of you, no friends to parliament, nor the cause of God in their hands, have tried many ways, as once Balaam, to curse Israel; sometimes ye have got upon one hill, and there ye have built an altar, thinking from thence to curse God's people; when that would not do, then you got upon a second; when ye could not do it from thence, then ye got to a third mountain: one while ye thought to have done it by the strength of your old skilful soldiery; when that would not do, then ye came home, and sought to make divisions among us, and to raise jealousies between brethren; seeing that would not do it sufficiently, you have now gotten to a third mountain, labouring to stir up the countries to make insurrection, and yet ye cannot curse them from these. Wherefore now after all, do ye not think that God is against you; can ye believe that God is with you, after all these successive victories that have fallen against you? Have ye not read that scripture, "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth, the wicked are snared in the works of their own hands?" and have ye not been snared in the works of your own hands; have ye not risen to fall; have not your own doings been your undoing; and will ye yet go on to plot, consult, design; what, will ye never have done? Well then, go on, consult, plot, devise, associate, confederate together, try the conclusion, work to the utmost; yet know that when ye have done all, and as ye think have the better, and all is your own, then will Christ come upon you at midnight, in an hour and time when ye do least expect him, and it will be a darker night than ever yet you saw; for our Lord and Saviour Christ, he doth come as at the last, so now in these his precedaneous comings, still at midnight, he doth come at midnight. Be wise now therefore, oh, ye princes, nobles, rulers, judges, gentlemen, and others: kiss the Son, lest ye perish in the way, for Christ is upon his way unto his kingdom.

Again, this doctrine looks wishly upon such as Christ comes for. Why should any of God's people despair or be discouraged, saying, Christ is now gone, and will never come

come again ; he hath hid himself, and I shall never see his face again. Nay, but he does come at midnight, that is his time, a time wherein he is least expected, a dark time, the darkest time, the sleepest time, the coldest time, a time when all your candles are out, and your comforts out, when you cannot see your hand, your working hand, your praying hand, when you say all is gone and lost, and I shall never see the light again, comfort again ; then doth Christ say, This is my time, it is now dark, and night, and midnight with my servant, now will I go and comfort and deliver him : why should any godly man be discouraged, whatever his condition be ; shall Christ come at midnight, and shall I be discouraged because I am in the dark ? Oh, my soul, remember this, Christ comes at midnight, in all his comings, still he doth come at midnight. And that this is Christ's constant course with all his people, see what is said in Hosea vi. 3, "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord, his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Oh, but I am a poor ignorant creature, do not know or understand the mind and will of God in these actions, and transactions of things abroad. Be it so, yet, says the Lord, you shall know him, if ye follow on to know him. Oh, but I am in a sad and a dark condition, benighted with some affliction. Be it so, Christ will come, and he will come as the morning ; as sure and certain as the morning comes, so will Christ come ; and though it be a dark night, yet ye say, certainly morning will come again ; so confident may you be of Christ's coming ; for, saith the text, he will come as the morning : that is, certainly. Oh, but I shall faint in the meanwhile, he will stay long ere he comes. Nay, but he will come in season, as the former, and as the latter rain ; the former and the latter rain come in their seasons ; so will Christ do, and therewithal your comforts shall be all revived and refreshed ; why should then any of God's people be discouraged ?

But suppose that the Lord Jesus do comfortably appear to us in a dark condition, when we look not for him, as now he hath done to this kingdom : what is our duty that doth flow from hence ?

If Jesus Christ hath appeared to you in the dark, and

come to you even at midnight; then trust in the Lord for ever; and again I say, trust in the Lord, trust in the Lord at all times. Here is one night over, but another night will come, I fear, and it may prove a darker night; night and day have their courses. But does Christ come at midnight; why then should we not trust in God at midnight, in the darkest time? * “At what time I am afraid,” says the Psalmist, “I will trust in the Lord.” Faith moves Christ for to come the sooner: and therefore, says the apostle, “Looking for, and hastening the coming of the Lord.” You read it in the English, hastening unto; but according to the Greek, † the words may be read better thus, looking for, and hastening the coming of the Lord. Our very looking for his coming doth hasten his coming. Faith mitigates our calamities, and holds the hands of our enemies. I have read in the life of Tyndale, that he being in the Low Countries, heard of a certain juggling conjuror, that could by his conjuring, command a dish of meat from any prince’s table in the world, which he did use to do, and would ordinarily invite his friends unto dinner: whereupon Master Tyndale resolved, that he would go see this act, but would set himself to believe the contrary; which he did; and the company being come together, and the conjuror endeavouring the same, was so hindered by the faith of Master Tyndale, that he cried out, and said, I cannot do it, there sits the man that hinders me, and holds my hands. ‡ I say, faith will hold the hands of wicked and devilish men; such too many we have to deal with in these times: oh, that you would use your faith more and more. And have ye not ground enough for it: Christ comes at midnight; why should you not believe whatever your condition be, although it be never so dark?

Again, If Christ come at midnight, then why should those who are employed for Christ, be shaken, or unsettled in his work and service?

We many times leave God’s work, and are not constant in it because of opposition, which doth make us fear: but will Christ come and own us, and come in a time when we look not for him, in the darkest time; then why should not men

* *Nec super biendum rebus florentibus nec desperandum adversis.*

† *Προδοκωντας και σπενδοντας την παρουσιαν*, 2 Peter iii. 12.

‡ *Fide armatus, difficilia queque potest.*

go on with all constancy, even in their darkest fears? Luther relates a story of Austin's mother, which also Austin doth mention, who was much troubled for her son Austin, because for the space of seven or nine years, he had been a Manichee, she prayed and continued praying for him; at the last, in a night, she had as a word from God in answer to her prayer these words, *Qualis tu, talis ille*; As thou so he. Whereupon she was much refreshed, and told him, she had received a promise from the Lord that he should be converted from his error; but he told her the meaning of the words was contrary, that she should be as he was, that is, converted to his opinion; but she did so constantly abide in her sense, that, *Facile transivit in sententiam matris*, he easily turned to his mother's opinion. And indeed, what more convincing to an adversary than to see one constantly abiding by what is good. A christian, especially a christian magistrate, should be like to Christ, who, when he is in a way of mercy, will not be put out of his way by men. Isaiah xxvii. 4., "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together." At verses 2, 3, he speaks of his great love and care to and of his church: "A vineyard of red vine, I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Aye, but in this vineyard, there may be many briars and thorns, that may arise up to afflict God's people. True, but says the Lord, Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them. As if he should say, Indeed these wicked men are as briars and thorns, rending and tearing my poor people, and as briars and thorns they do conjoin and twist together; but though they do rise up against me in the way of my mercy towards my people, yet they shall not put me out of my way; I will even pass through them: yea and though they do rise, it shall be to their own ruin; they shall burn together; I would burn them together, I the Lord would pass through them. Now our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I hope, is in the way of mercy to this poor kingdom; but certainly, he is upon the way to his own kingdom; and though wicked men may obstruct and hinder us, they shall never hinder him, but he will pass through them. Oh, therefore, labour more and more to be like to Christ, keep on your way; for

though it be late ere he come, yet he will certainly come, he comes at midnight.

Again, If Jesus Christ have come unto us, even at midnight: why should not all of us go forth to meet him with some present of thankfulness? The more abundant, full, free, and continued any mercy is, the more it doth call for thankfulness, Christ hath been in the field for you and fought your battles for these many years; and I must needs say, that of late our divisions and sins have been so great, that I feared they would even drive Christ out of the field: but now I see still he doth own your cause, and own your forces, still he doth keep the field; yea, and goes on marching, as if he were resolved not to leave the field, till he hath conquered all this kingdom with his love; and he hath now given you a taste of his intentions and love in this victory, a seasonable victory, a wonderful victory, an unexpected victory, a midnight victory; oh, thou wonder-working God, shall we not now praise thy name? We read of a great strait and dark condition that Jehoshaphat was in by reason of his enemies; but he crying unto the Lord, the Lord heard and delivered him and his people: insomuch as they kept a day of thanksgiving in the open fields, and they called the name of the place Berachah, the valley of blessing. 2 Chron. xx. 26.

In Joshua's time the people of Israel were in a great strait by reason of the Amalekites, who came upon them when they were weak; but the Lord fought for his people, smote their enemies, and they were quite destroyed; whereupon Israel made an altar, and called it, Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my shield. In Samuel's time, again, they were in a great distress by reason of their enemies; but they cried to the Lord, and he delivered them, and destroyed all their enemies: then they set up a stone, and called it, Ebenezer, the stone of help, saying, "Hitherunto the Lord hath holpen us." Afterwards, again, they were brought very low, into a very dark estate, sold into the hands of their enemies; but the Lord raised them up saviours, Deborah and Barak, and delivered them from all their enemies: and then they penned a psalm of praise, the vth of Judges, wherein they do ascribe and give the glory of all unto God himself; wherein they make an honourable mention of the instruments which God used; they did not revile the instruments but honoured them;

wherein they condemned and cursed those that would not go forth to help the Lord, "Curse ye Meroz;" wherein they commended the tribes and countries who came forth and willingly offered themselves unto the service of the Lord; wherein they prayed against the enemies of the church: and then mark the issue, at the last verse, "And the land had rest forty years." And such an issue, not only forty years, but many times forty years rest may you have, as an issue of the praises of this day.

But yet, observe, still some monument of praise was erected; sometimes a stone, sometimes an altar, always one monument or other of praise. And have we no altar; no stone now; no name of God to celebrate now; no present of thankfulness to bring to our God this day? Is there no act of mercy to be shewn; none of Christ's friends to be relieved? Shall we make no progress; shall we stand still; do nothing, as men in amaze? Shall we make no improvement of this deliverance and victory? Why should we not all sit down under our relations, and say, How shall I make improvement of this mercy; what shall I do now for God and Christ that I did not before; is there nothing in your hand; what, no present to be given to Christ; have we nothing at all? then let us bring the sense of our own nothing; for the more humble ye are after victories, the more thankful for victories. And if ye have no present in your hand this day to bring unto God for this victory, yet bring the victory itself and give it to God. Ye give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's: why? because his image is upon them; and hath not this victory much of the image of God upon it? When David was delivered from his enemies, we read, in Psalm cxvi., that he checks himself for his former unbelief, "I said in my haste," &c., and gathers up himself into God again; "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." When delivered from his enemies, as we read in Psa. cxviii., he found a retreat from man. O my soul, trust not in princes, not in man, nor in the sons of men; trust not in princes. The word in the Hebrew is, ingenuous men, for princes should be ingenuous; and if any men are to be trusted to, they are ingenuous men; but being delivered from men, he retreats from men, and says, O my soul, trust not in men, nor in the sons of men, not in princes, not in ingenuous men.

Yes, and in that Psalm he call upon others also for to praise the Lord, and so let us do in his words: "Oh, give thanks

unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures for ever : he stilleth the rage of the sea and the tumults of the people, for his mercy endures for ever." Who hath owned your cause again, and your forces again, for his mercy endures for ever ; who hath remembered you in your low condition, for his mercy endures for ever ; and hath visited us with his love at midnight, for his mercy endures for ever. " Oh, give thanks unto the God of gods, for his mercy endures for ever. Praise the Lord."

If Christ come at midnight, then methinks his personal coming is not far off. I cannot say it is midnight in that respect, but surely it is very late ; it is very dark, and it hath been dark a great while.

We read of two sorts of signs which go before the coming of Jesus Christ ; some that are more remote and transient, some that are more immediate and just at his coming. Those that are more immediate and just at his coming, ye read of in Matt. xxiv. 29, 30 : " Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn ; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." These are yet to come. But those that are more remote, all seem to be past already. Before the coming of Christ, says the apostle, the man of sin shall be revealed : that is past. Before the coming of Christ there shall false prophets arise, and say, I am Christ ; and another, I am Christ : that is past. Before the personal coming of Christ there shall be wars and rumours of wars : this is past. And before that day there shall be great divisions, even in the matter of religion ; one saying, Lo, here is Christ ; and another, Lo, there is Christ : this is already. And immediately before, and at his coming, men shall be smiting their fellow servants, eating and drinking with the drunken : this is already. The wise and the foolish virgins shall be all asleep : and was there ever a time when both wise and foolish were more asleep than now ? When men set themselves to sleep, they draw their curtains, put out their lights, and will have no more light come in ; so now, when men are asleep, their senses are bound up that

were open before; they see not, hear not, taste not, smell not; their senses are locked up. Sleep is, *legatio sensuum*. And was there ever a time when men's senses were more bound up, that were formerly exercised, than now? Are there not some that would pray and hear and read, that will not now; who have now thrown off all duties, ordinances and means? Oh, what sleeping is here; was there ever such sleeping among professors as now there is? If ever wise and foolish virgins were asleep, they seem to be in our days; and shall we sleep also; will ye not rather watch and pray? Watch and pray, pray and watch; and what I say to one I say to all, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

Take but two or three wakening observations from this parable.

1. If ye look into this parable, ye may observe a most desperate sleep is come upon all professors, immediately before the coming, the great coming of Christ. I call that desperate sleep which is universal; this parable falls upon the churches; "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (not the kingdom of the world) be like to ten virgins;" and those ten shall be all asleep, good and bad. And says our Saviour in another place, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on earth?" Again, I call that a desperate sleep which shall be in the face of light. It is a hard thing to sleep whilst a candle is held unto one's eyes; and in the time before Christ comes, much light and truth shall break out, as antichristian error goes off; and yet, even then, good and bad shall fall asleep.

I call that desperate, again, which shall be in the midst of trouble. It is a hard thing for a man to sleep when he is pinched and stricken: in the times before Christ, and when he comes, men shall be smiting their fellow servants, and yet even the smitten shall be asleep. Oh, what desperate sleeping times shall the latter times be; have we not all cause, then, for to watch and pray?

2. If ye look into this scripture or parable, ye find that those who fall asleep immediately before the coming of Christ, shall never wake again till Christ come. "And they all slept (says the text of the ten virgins) and waked not till the Bridegroom came."

Now if a man be very sleepy, and you come to him, and

say, Sir, take heed of sleeping, for if you do fall asleep, you will never wake again, will he not take heed of sleeping? thus it shall be with the sleepers of this latter time. At other times, men shall sleep and wake, and wake and sleep; but if men fall asleep, into a spiritual sleep, immediately before the coming of Jesus Christ, they shall sleep till he comes, and shall be waked no more but by his coming. O Lord, who would not watch and pray lest he enter into temptation!

3. If ye observe this parable, ye shall find that there are two sorts of sleepers, and accordingly two events of their sleeping.

Some slept, as the wise virgins, but did keep their oil, their oil not spent; these when the Bridegroom came, entered with him into his joy.

Others there are that sleep, and have spent their oil, had oil but spent it; and these when the Bridegroom cometh are shut out; and though they call, Lord, open; he answers, "I know ye not." So now in the latter days, there shall be two sorts of professors, one that shall sleep and slumber, but they shall keep their graces, their oil, their principles; and these, though they be found asleep when Christ comes, Christ will pardon, and their sleeping, because they have still their oil.

Others there shall be, who shall not only fall asleep, but they shall lose their principles. True, I thought, indeed, that a man was bound for to keep the Sabbath, to live strictly, and to make a conscience of every word and thought, but now I see there is more liberty: thus they shall lose their principles, their oil, their judgments. These poor souls shall never wake again; and when Christ comes, though they cry to him for mercy, they will not obtain it. No, ye have lost your principles, your oil, your judgment; ye are foolish virgins, ye shall never enter into my joy, he will then say. Who would not, then, watch and pray? What I say to you, I speak unto my own soul, and to every person here present, Oh, let us all watch, for the Son of Man comes, and he comes at midnight; and if it be not midnight now, yet it is late already.

And seeing all these things are so, give me leave, honourable and beloved, to leave an exhortation with you, which is no other than that which the psalmist presents unto ye in the xxivth Psalm: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come

in." Gates, ye know, are the place where the magistrate sat. The temple door was called the everlasting door, in opposition to the door of the tabernacle, which was to continue but a little time. The psalmist speaks here of Christ's kingdom and lordship on earth: verse 1, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Then he will have a church and precious people: "Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord; who shall stand on his holy place?" verse 3; which he answers in the general: "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart:" and more particularly at verse 6: "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, even Jacob."

The children of Israel had two names: sometimes they were called Israel, when they were in a more flourishing and strong condition; sometimes they were in a low and weak condition, and then they were called Jacob: "Fear not, O worm Jacob." Now says the psalmist here, The earth is the Lord's, and Christ shall reign, and the poor despised Israel shall be converted, and ascend unto the hill of God. Now, therefore, my advice and counsel unto you is, that as the Lord Jesus shall make any approach unto your towns, cities, kingdoms, churches, you would receive him, and not shut your gates and doors against him; but, oh, all ye cities, towns and magistrates, lift up your heads; lift up your heads, O ye gates, and all you temple-men and churches, lift up your everlasting doors, that this King of glory may come in. And if ye ask who it is? "It is the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle;" wherefore lift up your heads. And because this exhortation is of great consequence, and men are slow to receive, I exhort you to it again, at verse 9: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." Now the Lord grant that we may also lift up our heads and gates, that this King of glory may come in among us, not as a judge to condemn us, but as our bridegroom to love us.