

SERMON VIII.

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.—MAT. XXV. 10.

THREE things are here remarkable:—

1. The coming of the bridegroom while they went to buy.
2. The entering in, or admission of those that were ready, into the marriage-chamber.
3. The shutting of the door to exclude the rest.

For the first of these, their going to buy must be interpreted according to the scope of the parable; and so it signifieth their unreadiness and unpreparedness for Christ's coming: they were to seek of grace when they had most need to use it. In parables, things are said to be done in the day of judgment which are done in order to or with respect unto that day; not that men do go and buy oil then, &c. I might observe from hence—

1. The certainty of Christ's coming. We heard before of a great expectation, of his tarrying, of the cry raised, now of his coming, he really came at last; but of that point before.

2. Of the suddenness of his coming, by way of surprise on the carnal world. When the careless were little ready for him, he came; when they went to buy; but of that in verse the 13th.

3. I shall choose to speak now of the quality in which he cometh; he cometh as a bridegroom.

Doct. 1. That the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to his people as a bridegroom at his second coming.

Rev. xix. 7, 9, 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready: and he saith unto me, write, Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.'

To evidence this unto you, consider these propositions:—

1. That between Christ and believers there is a mutual tie, consent, and obligation each to other, which may be notably represented by the marriage covenant, Ps. xlv., Isa. xlv. 5, and elsewhere. There is a living relation between Christ and them, beyond what is between him and others; a relation not only notional and imaginary, but is really transacted between them, as between two parties in the marriage covenant. So Cant. ii. 16, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' Both the parties are mutually, explicitly, and formally engaged and contracted to one another; Christ to us as head, we to him as members of his mystical body. As it is real, so it is near; they twain shall be one flesh, we one spirit: 1 Cor. vi. 17, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' Whole Christ is ours, we are or should be altogether his, as full of kindness and love, Eph. v. 25–27; Zeph. iii. 17. And it is indissoluble; the marriage-knot remaineth inviolable for ever: 'I will betroth thee to me for ever,' Hosea ii. 19.

2. This marriage may be considered in four respects:—(1.) With respect to the ground and foundation of it; (2.) With respect to our

first entrance into this relation ; (3.) With respect to the state of it in this world ; (4.) With respect to its perfect consummation.

[1.] With respect to the ground and foundation that was laid for it in Christ's incarnation, or at his first coming. Marriage is between parties of the same kind, as, in the first marriage, Adam called Eve bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, Gen. ii. 20. So Christ came to fit himself for that relation of husband to his church, by taking our nature upon him ; and therefore the apostle, when he speaketh of the marriage between Christ and his church, useth the same name which Adam had used : Eph. v. 30, ' For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bone.' When Christ was in the world, he made a way for the marriage : he parted from us it is true, but there was an interchange of tokens ; he took our flesh, and left with us his Spirit.

[2.] With respect to our first entrance into this relation, when first converted to God, or upon our thankful, broken-hearted, willing acceptance of Christ for Lord and husband. All marriage is entered into by a consent : Christ giveth his consent in the promises, and we by faith, which is a broken-hearted, willing, and thankful acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the ends for which God offereth him. Where note, that faith is an acceptance of Christ : John i. 12, ' To as many as received him.' Next, for the mode and manner of this acceptance, it is broken-hearted, because we are undeserving and ill-deserving creatures, altogether unworthy to be taken into such a near relation to Christ ; as Abigail, when David sent to her to make her his wife, debased herself : 1 Sam. xxv. 40, 41, ' Let thine handmaid wash the feet of thy servants.' Alas ! who are we ? A poor trembling soul is afraid of being too bold, but God's offer encourageth it. And as it is a broken-hearted, so it is a willing acceptance of Christ ; for Christ will not draw us into this relation by force, or bestow the privileges of it without or against our consent : Rev. xxii. 17, ' Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.' If the will be to Christ, the great difficulty is over. Christianity is but a hearty consent to accept of Christ and his benefits ; but the creature's will is not soon gained : Mat. xxiii. 37, ' I would, but ye would not ;' he inviteth and clucketh by the renewed messages of his grace, but we will not be gathered : Isa. lxv. 2, ' I have spread out my hands all the day long to a rebellious people.' The ungodly careless world knoweth not the worth of God's greatest mercies, and therefore despise them, yea, take them for intolerable injuries and troubles, because they are against their fleshly appetites ; but when the will is once thoroughly gained to God, the great work of conversion is drawing to a happy period ; the consent of the will is the closing act, when we yield ourselves to the Lord, resolving to become his, and to be disposed, ordered, and governed by him at his own pleasure : ' I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine,' Ezek. xvi. 8. And as it is a willing acceptance, so it is a thankful acceptance of Christ ; because it is a great favour and honour done to us, considering the infinite distance between the parties to be joined in the marriage-covenant, God over all blessed for ever, and we poor wretched creatures. There may be among us great distance between the persons that enter into the marriage-covenant, but all that distance is but finite, for it is but such

as can be between creature and creature, which are equal in their being, notwithstanding the inequality of many extrinſical reſpects ; but in this diſtance between Chriſt and his people, the diſtance is between the Creator and the creature, the potter and the clay, the thing formed, and him that formed it ; betwixt the moſt lovely perſon, and the moſt loathſome ; between the heir of all things, and the children of wrath ; the king immortal, and a poor vaſſal to ſin and Satan. And conſider alſo the many benefits we enjoy by it ; we have the communion of his righteousneſs, Spirit, and graces : 2 Cor. v. 21, ‘ He was made ſin for us, that we might be made the righteousneſs of God in him.’ There are two maxims in the civil law, *Uxor fulget radiis mariti*—the wife participateth in the honour of the huſband ; ſo we have the communion of Chriſt’s righteousneſs ; and *Uxori lis non intenditur*—the huſband is answerable for the wife ; the pleas muſt be brought againſt him. So Jeſus Chriſt hath paid our debts, and repreſenteth the merit of his ſacrifice ; he is reſponsible for the debts we owe to divine juſtice. Participation is another benefit : Eph. v. 26, ‘ Huſbands love your wives, as Chriſt loved the church, and gave himſelf for it, that he might ſanctify and cleanſe it by the waſhing of water.’ Chriſt upon the croſs had merit enough to purchaſe, and love enough to intend, and wiſdom enough to chooſe, the greateſt benefit for us ; and what did he purchaſe, intend, and chooſe, but to ſanctify and cleanſe us by the waſhing of water through the word ? And laſtly, we muſt receive him to the ends for which God offereth him ; that is, to be Lord and huſband ; which importeth a forſaking all others, and a devoting and giving up ourſelves to Chriſt, to live in his love and obedience.

(1.) Before there can be a receiving, there muſt be a renouncing of all other loves. Chriſt will be entertained alone. The huſband cannot endure a co-rival and competitor. And the marriage conſent implieth an election and choice, which is a renouncing all others, and a preferring him alone. So the marriage covenant runneth : Hoſea iii. 3, ‘ Thou ſhalt not be for another, but ſhalt be for me.’ So Ps. xlv. 10, 11, ‘ Hearken, O daughter, and conſider ; incline thine ear : forget alſo thine own people, and thy father’s houſe. So ſhall the king greatly deſire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord, and worſhip thou him.’ All that do conſider what is offered in Chriſt’s name, and conſent to the motion, they muſt forſake all their old ways, the old corruptions, and old paſſions, and old affections ; and ſeriously think of leaving all their worldly pleaſures and vanities ; they muſt not ſtick at their choicest intereſts, moſt pleaſing luſts, and deareſt ſins, though it be a right hand, and a right eye, Mat. v. 29. If we conſent to take Chriſt, and retain our old loves ſtill, we ſhall be little the better for being Chriſtians.

(2.) You muſt give yourſelves up to him, to live in his love and obedience. There are two grand duties we muſt reſolve upon, if we enter into this relation—conjugal love and conjugal obedience.

(1ſt.) Conjugal love. There is no want of love on Chriſt’s part : Iſa. lxii. 5, ‘ As a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, ſo ſhall thy God rejoice over thee.’ Now this love muſt be mutual ; as he in us, ſo we in him. Now conjugal love is ſuch a love as is greater to the yoke-

fellow than to any other. So our love to Christ is a superlative love. We must not only love him not less than other things, nor equal with other things, but above them, cleaving to him alone. Some love Christ less than other things; they love him a little, but love the world better. Honour and greatness better: John xii. 42, 'How can you believe that seek honour one of another?' Pleasure: 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.' Profit: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world.' Some love Christ, but love other things equal with him. They are divided; it is a nice case; hard to say which hath the mastery: they make a pother with religion, but never feel the true force of it. But the true conjugal affection is superlative: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee;' Phil. iii. 8-10, 'I count all things but dung and dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.' They prefer Jesus Christ before all things in the world. Besides, as an husband, he must have this love.

(2d.) This is a Lord that must have conjugal obedience: Eph. iii. 23, 24, 'The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, and the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything.' I urge it, as wives are subject to their husbands in everything, so let the church and each believing soul be to Christ. Surely, if you consent to marry to Christ, you must reckon upon it, that you are no longer your own to dispose of, and therefore henceforth you must no more live to yourselves. Christ is accepted and received for Lord, Col. ii. 6, and as such you must consent to serve and obey him: Ps. xlv. 12, 'He is thy Lord, worship thou him.' You must take him so as never to be ashamed to own him; take him for better, for worse; take him and his cross, Mat. xvi. 24; take him and his yoke, Mat. xi. 29; take him and his spiritual laws, John xiv. 21. You are to be obedient to Christ in all things. You are no more to do what you will, but what will please the Lord, 1 Cor. vii. 30. In short, you must obey him, if you will have benefit by him, Heb. v. 9.

[3.] It is spoken of with respect to its present state in this world. The relation is begun, but it is not publicly solemnised: 2 Cor. xi. 2, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' The church is *sponsa*, not *uxor*. Here by the offers of the gospel we are espoused, and by faith engaged to him: it is called a betrothing to him, Hosea ii. 19, 20, 'I will betroth thee to me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee to me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and mercy: I will betroth thee to me in faithfulness.' The word is not taken generally for marriage, but strictly, and hath a special emphasis in that place; and so noteth either the goodness of God; he would not receive Israel as an unchaste prostitute, that had broken covenant with him, but as a virgin, as if never any breach of contract before; or rather noteth the present state of the church: she is betrothed to Christ, but the marriage is not consummate. The day of espousals and public solemnities are deferred till the resurrection, when Christ will come as a bridegroom to conduct his spouse into his Father's house, for ever to remain with him.

[4.] With respect to its consummation ; it is perfected at his second coming ; and it is properly called a marriage. It was but a wooing or betrothing before then, when the queen is brought to the king, and abides with him for ever : Ps. xlv. 15, ' With joy and gladness shall she be brought ; they shall enter into the king's palace.'

Now there are many reasons why this second coming of Christ is called a consummation of the marriage, and Christ may then be said to come as a bridegroom.

1. Because there is a personal meeting and interview between his spouse and himself. Now he employeth spokesmen : 2 Cor. v. 20, ' Now we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.' As Eliezer, Abraham's servant, went to get a match for his master's son, so the ministers of the gospel : 2 Cor. xi. 2, ' I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.' He sends tokens and spiritual refreshings : John xiv. 21, ' He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.' Then he cometh himself, we meet him in person. Here we meet him in ordinances, Isa. lxiv. 5 : ' Present in spirit,' 2 Cor. v. At death our souls meet him, Eccles. xii. 7, but then our whole man shall meet him, Job xix. 26, with these arms embrace him. We are indeed brought near to him by faith, and have some fellowship and communion with him ; but we do not see him as he is, nor see him face to face, as afterwards.

2. For the public solemnisation of the marriage, the bridegroom and the bride do both deck and adorn themselves. The bridegroom cometh in the glory of his Father, with great abundance of the holy angels : Rev. xix. 7, ' Let us be glad, and give honour to him ; for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.' Common garments are not for that wedding : we must be active in the purifying ourselves, but the grace is given by God : ver. 8, ' And to her was granted that she might be clothed in white linen ; the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.' As Esther was supplied out of the king's wardrobe, these ornaments and garments of salvation are purchased and bestowed freely upon us ; by Jesus Christ all is given. We are here but renewed in part, and cleansed in part ; all our filthy garments are not yet put off ; but then we shall not have the least remainder of sin and misery. If we should meet Christ with our deformities, we should meet him with shame and discomfort ; it would be a dishonour to our bridegroom to come into his presence with our filthy rags ; therefore we come to present his bride with glory.

3. Then there is an open manifestation of his dearest love. Before the last day the match is concluded between the parties ; there is love expressed, but it is secret and hidden : ' Our life is hid with Christ in God.' But then he will own believers man by man, Luke xii. 8, invite them into his bosom in the sight of the world, Mat. xxv. 34, pronounce their pardon on the throne, Acts iii. 19, set them at his right hand, as judging the world together with himself, 2 Cor. vi. 2. Alas ! now all is under a veil ; the world sees us not, 1 John iii. 1 ; now we ourselves question whether he loves us or no, question it often :

‘If the Lord be with us, why are these things befallen us?’ But then all is open and clear; when the clouds vanish about Christ’s person, so about us also. It is called ‘the day of the manifestation of the sons of God,’ Rom. viii. 19.

4. Then we are brought home to his house, conducted in state to heaven, John xiv. 3. Then the day is come when you shall have all that you have hoped, desired, looked for. Oh! what a happy day will that be, when the great shepherd of the sheep shall lead his flock into their everlasting fold, and the husband of the church carry her with him into his father’s house: John xvii. 24, ‘Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me may be where I am, and behold my glory.’ And his will and testament is made good. Now we are in the outer court. If one day in the house of God be better than a thousand elsewhere, oh! what is it to be brought home to God! In these blessed mansions there we shall abide for ever, and never to part more.

5. Everlasting cohabitation and living with him: ‘We shall be ever with the Lord,’ 1 Thes. iv. 17; not get a glimpse and away, but for ever to enjoy his presence. Christ’s presence for a time upon earth was very sweet to his disciples; it was bitter to them to think of his going from them, though it were expedient for them; but now remain in an everlasting state of intimacy and familiarity with him. Now we have a taste of Christ, but then our communion shall be without intermission or interruption; we shall be out of the crowd and press of troubles and temptations and sins, and study divinity in the Lamb’s face, and he will communicate himself to us according to the vastest extent of our capacity.

Use, Oh! then, be espoused to Christ; otherwise he will not come as a bridegroom, but as a judge. For motives—

1. Consider your necessity. There is a deep necessity lieth upon you; you are undone for ever if you are not married to Christ. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. vii., if a woman can live without a husband, she doth well if she marieth not; but now you are undone for ever if you have him not; you are liable to the wrath of the eternal God. The apostle saith, Rom. vii. 4, that all those are dead to the law who are married to Christ: that must be done necessarily. First, now, what is it to be dead to the law, but to see ourselves miserable and undone for ever, and impotent, and no way able to help ourselves? The law which is written upon every man’s conscience is there represented as a hard and cruel husband, that requireth a hard task to do, but affordeth no strength at all to do it; therefore it bindeth us over to death and the curse. The sense of the law, being inbred in the conscience and natural to us, cannot be extinguished, but will return with the more violence. Well, then, the law suggesteth what we should do, threateneth us if we do it not; and conscience telling us we have not done it, this is a continual grief and vexation to us, and a man is kept under fear of death and hell all his days.

2. Consider the excellency of Christ, who is altogether lovely as to his person and offices, and every way suited to your necessities. As to his person, he is God-man, able and willing to do you good; for what cannot God do? and surely he will not be strange to his own flesh. You are condemned by the law; he is a priest to make atone-

ment for you. You are ignorant of the way to true happiness; he is a prophet to teach and guide you. You have many enemies and difficulties to overcome in that way; he points it out to you; and your own flesh is weak, but he is a king to vanquish your enemies, and to assist you with the powerful succours of his Spirit; he will help you to perform your duty in the midst of all temptations to the contrary; for we are to serve him in newness of spirit, Rom. vii. 5, 6.

3. Consider the utility and profit of it: 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23, 'All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' If you could as heartily devote yourselves to the service of Christ, as Christ as mediator did to the work of redemption, nothing would be wanting to you to promote your present holiness and future happiness.

4. It is no presumption to aspire to this marriage, for God maketh the first motion. God hath made love to you, and wooed you by all manner of engaging expressions, that he may win your hearts, and engage your consent. Oh! do not refuse the Lord's kindness, or neglect to bestow your hearts upon him, or to give up yourselves to him. Christ hath employed spokesmen, sends his tokens as presents of love: Mat. xxiii. 37, 'I would, but you would not.' All marriages are brought about by earnest suit on the one side, and consent on the other: so it is here. Oh! therefore consider, and say, as Rebecca, 'I can say no more nor no less; the thing is the Lord's.'

5. Consider how ill Christ will take it to be refused: Prov. i. 29, 30, 'They would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproofs;' and Ps. lxxxii. 11, 'But my people would not hearken to my voice; Israel would none of me.' Despising of kindness is very provoking. Oh! then, give Christ a free and a full and firm consent, and all is ended.

[1.] A free consent, not extorted. When men are a little frightened into a good conscience, Christ seemeth to be welcome to them; but as their trouble weareth off, so doth their resolution to take Christ for their Lord and Saviour: Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High their redeemer.' In such cases men put a force upon themselves, and their heart is not inclined, but compelled, as those that marry against their wills. It is only in a pang and fit of conscience that they like Christ, when some great distress forceth them to resolve for him, and their fears drive them to Christ, rather than his excellences draw them to him. That which is forced is not sincere. Many own Christ in their sickness and distress, that never care for him when they are well at ease; then they forget all, live as they did before, when their turn is served. There is a difference between a woman's coming to a physician for cure, and her coming to a husband to dwell with him. True conversion doth begin in fear, but it doth not end there; it endeth in a change of heart, and a settled love to God and holiness, and a hatred of sin. This is not only seen in men when the fear of death affrights them, but in their whole lives. Others, under some conviction, they would have Christ for their consciences, and the world for their hearts.

[2.] It must be a full and unbounded consent to all the terms and demands of the gospel, to be what he would have you to be, and to do

what he would have you to do : Mat. xiii. 44, the man ‘ sold all to buy the pearl of great price.’ You must not stick at anything. Though you are unwilling to let the match go, yet it is no full consent. Christ will be taken for better for worse ; you must renounce your dearest lusts, devote and resign your choicest interests, or else you are unworthy of him. The bargain is not made till all your interests be laid at his feet, Luke xiv. 26–33. So for lusts, Mat. v. 29, 30. Here men usually stick, and had rather undergo any cost and pains, than undergo the mortification of sin, as you may see in Micah vi. 6, 7, ‘ Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God ? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, and calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ? ’ Now, before it comes to this, man hath many debates of soul. They are convinced that sin is evil, contrary to God, and hurtful to themselves ; and have some mind to let it go ; but, in fine, their hearts are more for it than against it, and so do not come up to a saving consent to take Christ for their Lord and husband. The pleasures of sin are so bewitching, that they cannot come up roundly to Christ’s terms, or to the whole business of Christianity.

[3.] It must be a firm and habitual consent, and such as is not retracted in our after conversation. Weak and wavering purposes soon come to nothing ; but when this is your ordinary frame, and the new nature, and the inclination of your souls is this way, when there is a new bent put upon your spirits, then it will hold out : Ps. cxix. 112, ‘ I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.’

The second thing remarkable in the text is the entrance of those that were ready in to the nuptial feast ; and—

1. Who are the persons ? They that are inwardly renewed, and endowed with the saving graces of the Spirit.

2. What is their privilege ? They went into the marriage, to the festivities of the marriage-chamber, or place of nuptial entertainment. Marriage-feasts are often spoken of in scripture : Judges xiv. 10, ‘ And Sampson made a feast, for so used the young men to do ; ’ and Gen. xxix. 22, ‘ And Laban gathered all the young men of the place, and made a feast.’ This figureth the joys of eternal life, and that full and sweet communion we shall have with Christ in heaven.

Doct. Those only who are ready and prepared for Christ shall enter into eternal joys, when others are excluded.

Luke xii. 37, ‘ Blessed are those servants whom, when the Lord cometh, he shall find watching.’ So Mat. xxiv. 44, ‘ Therefore be ye also ready.’

1. I shall inquire what it is to be ready.

2. Show you why they only shall have eternal and immediate communion with Christ.

First, What it is to be ready ? There is a twofold readiness—

1. A habitual and constant readiness.

2. An actual readiness, when you specially compose yourselves to meet with Christ.

1. Of the habitual and constant readiness, that concerneth the

state of the person, the frame of the heart, and the course of our conversations, as represented by oil in the vessel, and the lamps kept burning.

[1.] The state of the person. He must be one reconciled, and one at peace with God. There are two expressions in scripture that speak of the state that we must be found in when Christ cometh; 2 Peter iii. 14, 'That we may be found of him in peace.' The other is, 2 Cor. v. 3, 'That we may not be found naked.' And both do principally relate to justification. Our peace depends upon our reconciliation with God, Rom. v. 1; and till your pardon be sued out in a humble and broken-hearted manner, how will you be able to stand before the Lord? till you be *rectus in curia*, and have a discharge of sin and the curse, and be not found in a natural and unconverted estate? The other expression is, 'That we may not be found naked.' It is sad to appear before God with no other covering but our own skins. No; there is no getting the blessing but in the garment of our elder brother. Therefore we are so often bidden to 'put on the Lord Jesus,' Rom. xiii. 14, and Gal. iii. 27, and that you buy of Him 'white raiment to cover your nakedness,' Rev. iii. 17, 18. These places are principally to be interpreted of justification, though it will not exclude sanctification; for that is a garment of salvation to cover our loathsome nakedness from the sight of the Lord.

[2.] As to the frame of the heart, that it may be renewed and sanctified. Habitual grace is oil in the vessel, that there may be a spring or fountain of grace in the heart, John vii. 38; but that I spake of before. The graces of the Spirit are the bride's jewels, and ornaments are the things which the bridegroom delights in: Isa. lxi. 10, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robes of his righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels,' &c. The more these things are in us, and abound in us, the more lovely in Christ's eyes.

[3.] Something as to the course of our conversation. It is not enough to have oil in the vessel, but the lamp must be kept burning, our graces in actual and continual exercise; and we must always make it our study to please the Lord. This is part of our preparation; for men are judged according to their works: 'Therefore what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?' 2 Peter iii. 10. The life of grace is seen in the fruits of it; for that end was it given us; not to lie idle in the heart, but to discover its influence and efficacy in every part of our conversation: 2 Peter i. 8, 'If these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' That will make a Christian busy and active in God's service. Well, then, by this you know who are prepared and who unprepared.

2. There is an actual preparation, which is like the trimming the lamps when they heard the cry, and that noteth our actual fitting ourselves for death and judgment. Besides our general habitual preparation, there needeth actual preparation. When Pharaoh sent for Joseph,

he washed himself. It is no slight thing to appear before Christ. Our general work should often be reviewed, that we may get promises ready, evidences ready, experiences ready; that we may have nothing to do but to wait the good hour, and give welcome to the Lord Jesus Christ, as old Simeon, Luke ii. 29, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' You should be so settled in conscience, weaned in heart, purified in spirit, that you do with comfort wait for the salvation of God; and not only wait for it, but long for it, love his appearing; especially after a long profession of the name of Christ, so it should be.

Now this actual preparation should be made, either—

[1.] Daily, and when you are in the greatest health and strength: we should think of our great change, Job xiv. 14, for death doth not always give warning; and to be provided doth no hurt. It enliveneth our general preparation, and maketh us the more serious: it is like poisoning our confidence, and weighing the strength and temper of it, to see if it can encounter the thoughts of death and judgment to come. A runaway cowardly faith, that cannot endure the serious thoughts and supposition of these things, will do us no good: presumption is a coward. Besides, it riddeth off the present work with more success when we live every day as if it were our last, and do all things as if presently to give an account to Christ of the doing of them. Once more, to familiarise the thoughts of Christ's coming to us, it allayeth so much of the dread and terror of it as belongeth to bondage, and keepeth up so much as belongs to reverence, and serious and awful walking with God.

[2.] When God summons us by his providence to make up our account: Luke xvi. 2, 'Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.' Many are about to go into the other world, but they do not think of making ready for it. The wrath of God is even at the door, and they are stupid and careless. Surely such a frame of heart should be far from the children of God. They have a tender conscience, and a deep sense of the world to come; therefore in probability, when they have but a short time wherein to prepare, their preparation should be the more serious. So when we are to partake of the Lord's supper, a man would go aside and renew his evidences for heaven, and awaken his spiritual desire; so for hearing the word, a man would compose his heart to receive the word with meekness; and should we not set our hearts in frame when we are to meet with Christ, not only in the ordinances, but in person?

Secondly, Why those only that are ready and prepared are to enter into the nuptial chamber.

1. Those are only meet for heavenly happiness. It is most suitable to them, as having that life begun in their hearts which shall be perfected there, Col. i. 12. What should poor sensual, sinful creatures do with heaven? Heaven is prepared for us, and we for heaven, Rom. vi. 23. When we are put into a heavenly frame and temper, heaven's gates stand open for us. It is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper place; heavy and light bodies in their proper places. So here the apostle saith, 2 Cor. v. 5, 'He that wrought us for this very thing is God.' Excellent vessels are not thrown about the house, but

put into a place suitable. The purging and purifying of our souls is a kind of spiritualising of our bodies, and so we are fitted both in body and soul.

2. These only have a lively sense of the coming of the Lord. Temporaries are a sort of hypocrites; their work is real, though but a common work; not because they purposely and intendedly dissemble, but because they have not answerable impressions to the things which they profess to believe, and their affections and preparations are not answerable to what they know; and so it is a kind of mocking of God. They profess and believe God omniscient, yet fear not to sin in his presence; to believe eternity, yet temporal things have the greatest power and influence upon them: they look for the coming of Christ in great majesty and glory, but do not make suitable provision. If we had high thoughts of Christ, and a great respect to him, we would prepare accordingly; but surely we have lessening thoughts of Christ, and his glorious coming, if we do not make ready for him, how high soever our notions be about it.

Use. Are we ready? I must direct the edge of this use to four sorts of people:—

1. Some care not whether they be ready or no; they do but dally with eternity and things of religion; their hearts are not moved with joy, or grief, or hope, or fear at the remembrance of this day. Surely they have no faith, at least not a lively, but dead faith; and therefore are so dead-hearted; and besides they care for none of these things, 'They mind earthly things.' If they can live comfortably here, be well at ease here, they never take care to live eternally. Now to these I shall only say, Live in no state or frame of heart but what you would die in. Alas! in your serious moods you cannot but say, I would not die for all the world. But what if God should arrest thee before thou thinkest of it? What would become of thee? On the other side consider, when our work is done, and our ornaments put on, then it will be pleasant to us to think of the coming of Christ: 'Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,' Luke ii. 29.

2. Some think themselves ready when they are not: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest thou wast rich, and increased with goods; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' I trust in God's mercy, and hope I shall go to Christ: it is easy to say this; but do you know what it is to meet with Christ, what honour he expecteth from you at the last day, and how little a naked trust and a dead and empty faith will do to your acceptance with him? I confess we have all from Christ, and all the honour we can do him results from his own grace; but yet it is said, Rev. xix. 5, 'The bride hath made herself ready.' There is work required of us, and such as may be answerable to the dignity of so great a Lord and husband.

3. Others think a habitual readiness will serve the turn. They mind present duties, but do not enliven them by the remembrance of the coming of the Lord; or they have not done their main work, and therefore take more liberty about the world than others, and a greater liberty in the delights of sense; and therefore we have that caution,

Luke xxi. 24, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares.' That will make you wither and contract; deadness and drowsiness hinder your comfort and peace, and that cheerful testimony you may give for God to others; as Peter's question, 'Lord, speakest thou to us, or to all?' Luke xii. 41.

4. Many are ready, but think themselves unready. It concerneth them to study gospel grounds of comfort and peace, if they can endure the touchstone, though not the balance. Where there is a sincere bent of heart to please him, there is a law of liberty, James ii. 12; a law of liberty, not for the carnal, but the sincere; not a law of trial, but of gospel liberty.

We now come to the third thing in the text, 'And the door was shut.' The shutting the door noteth the impossibility of getting our condition altered when the day of grace and trial is once over. There is a twofold door:—

1. *Janua misericordie ad ignoscendum*—the door of Christ's pity and mercy to returning sinners: Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' And John vi. 37, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast off.' But then this door is shut.

2. *Janua gratie ad convertendum*—there is the door of repentance and conversion; but there is no repentance when we are *in termino*. They may have a sense of their misery, but their habitual hatred to God remaineth: they that have wittingly and wilfully rejected his counsel, remain so still. The fire of hell doth not soften, but harden them; their self-love may make them sensible of their pain.

Reason 1. His love to his people. Though Christ waiteth long for the preparation of the wicked, yet he will not always delay the desire of the godly.

Reason 2. His justice. It is fit that they that live so long in their unbelief, and disobedience of the counsels and precepts of the gospel, should at length find this dispensation continued, who grow unteachable and hardened in their negligences: Ps. xcvi. 7, 8, 'To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.'

Use. Is to press us to begin with God betimes. You that are young, take warning this day; do not think there is time enough hereafter. You that are old, do not think it is too late, nor be ashamed to begin now. (1.) The present time is the only opportunity of salvation, or embracing the offer of God's grace, Heb. iii. 7; Ps. xcvi. 7. Oh! do not reject his counsel. (2.) Love is impatient of delay; if we could hope to prevail with you that way. (3.) When the angels sinned, the Lord immediately shut the door against them; to us he hath given leave, Acts xi. 13, 14, and 'space to repent,' Rev. ii. 21; let us not 'receive the grace of God in vain,' 2 Cor. vi. 1.