

Now we are pressed with the remainders of corruption within, and temptations and persecutions without: wait for his coming. The people tarried without for the high priest, till he came forth to bless them: so must we look for his return when he will come to bless us.

SERMON VI.

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.—MAT. XXV. 7, 8.

THE meaning of this part of the parable is, that the virgins being roused by the cry made, went to trim their lamps and fit themselves for their march; while they were so doing, some of them had oil left; but others had spent all their store, and their lamps were going, or had gone out. Three things are remarkable in these parabolical expressions:—

1. That which is common to them all, ‘All those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps;’ which must be differently interpreted of the wise and the foolish. The arising and trimming their lamps noteth in the wise their actual preparation for the Lord’s coming; in the foolish, it noteth the strength of their confidence and self-conceit. The foolish think they are as prepared and ready for Christ’s coming as the wise; they arise and address themselves to meet the bridegroom.

2. On the part of the foolish, they found their oil spent.

3. That they go to the wise for a supply: ‘Give us of your oil.’

First, The effect of the cry that is common to them all, ‘They arose and trimmed their lamps.’ Which is first to be considered on the wise virgins’ part, and so it will teach us this note:—

Doct. That the faithful, as often as they think of the coming of the Lord, should more rouse up themselves, and prepare themselves to meet him with joy and comfort.

For the trimming of the lamps, on their part it noteth the rousing up of themselves out of their negligence and security, and a serious preparation for his coming. To evidence this to you, we shall consider—

1. How the scripture presseth this upon us.

2. What reasons there are in the thing itself to awaken us to this serious preparation.

First, How the scripture presseth this upon us. In the word of God we have not only the doctrine of Christ’s coming to judgment, but the uses and inferences built thereupon. I shall instance in two places in one chapter, 2 Peter iii. 11 and 14.

Ver. 11, ‘What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’ Where observe—

1. That it is not enough to believe the doctrine of Christ’s coming, but we must improve it to the use of holy living. The improvement is pressed in scripture, as well as the doctrine is revealed. In God’s account no faith will go for faith, but the working faith; all else is

but opinion and cold speculation; whatever truths we believe, we must bring forth to practice. Therefore if we believe steadfastly, we must live accordingly; live as men that look for such things. A bare apprehension or assent to the truth is nothing worth, unless it be accompanied with that care and diligence which belongeth to the truth so apprehended. The Christian religion consisteth not in word, but in deed; and our belief of it is not tried by a speculative assent, especially in the absence of temptations, but by a constant and diligent practice of those duties whereunto this belief bindeth us. So that they do not truly and savingly believe such things who are not seriously and constantly diligent in the spiritual life. I cannot say that an assent separate from practice is no faith, but it is no saving faith; it is such a faith as the devils may have, who know there is a God, and a Christ, and a world to come; they believe it and fear it. So may carnal men believe it so far as to stir up bondage and legal fears in their hearts; but while they improve it not, and prepare not for their everlasting estate, their faith is ineffectual to salvation. True faith is tried rather by living than by talking: 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' There is a difference between an untruth and a lie. Now where the actions do not correspond to the profession, that profession is not only an untruth but a lie. There is a denying in word as well as works,¹ Titus i. 16. Many profess and believe as Christians, but live as atheists. It is not notions, but affections, living rather than talking, that will demonstrate true faith. Now the paucity of serious walkers sheweth the paucity of true believers.

2. In this improvement there is an appeal to conscience; for here is a question put to our own hearts, let reason and conscience speak: After the serious consideration of the glory and terror of Christ's second coming, what holiness and preparation is necessary on our part! Surely the holiest upon earth, if they would put this question to their own hearts, they would not be satisfied with that holiness which they had, but would seek after more; their desires would be strengthened, their endeavours quickened, their diligence doubled. It is for want of self-communing that we are so dull and sluggish. If men did oftener ask of themselves, reason would tell them that no slight thing will serve the turn. But truths are not improved. First, for want of a sound belief; secondly, for want of a serious consideration. Therefore in scripture, when any notable truth is propounded and improved, there are these appeals to conscience: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' and Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we say to these things?'

3. In this appeal the qualification of our persons is first regarded and looked after. For pray mark the question: it is not, How holy ought our conversations to be? but, What manner of persons? The state of the person must be first regarded, and then the course of our actions and conversations. There are some persons at whose hands God will not accept a gift. God had respect first to Abel, and then to his offering. The state of the person is to be judged of according to the two great privileges of Christianity—justification and sanctification.

¹ Qu. 'works as well as word'?—Ed.

[1.] That we be justified, and reconciled to God through Christ; that we daily renew friendship by the exercise of a godly sorrow for sin, and a lively faith in Christ: 1 John v. 1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God;' and 1 John ii. 1, 'Little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not: and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Others are not accepted with God.

[2.] That we be sanctified, or renewed by the Spirit, Titus iii. 5, and so fitted and framed by this general holiness for the particular duties we are called to. A bowl must be made round before it can run round; the instrument must be framed, and strung, and put in tune before it can make any melody; the tree must first be made good before we can expect any good fruit from it, Mat. xii. 33. Actions are holy by their rule; a person is holy by his principle. Therefore, till there be a principle of grace wrought in our hearts, we are not such manner of persons as God will accept; nor are we fitted to perform him any service, or to meet him at his coming.

4. When our persons are in frame, we must look to the course of our actions or walking; for the tree is known by its fruit, and a man by the course of his actions. We do but imagine we have holiness within, unless we manifest it in our outward conversation; and will strive to show ourselves mindful and respectful of God's commands at every turn: Ps. cxix. 1, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord;' not only undefiled in the rule, but undefiled in the way. A sincere, constant, uniform obedience to God's law, or a careful endeavour to approve ourselves to God in all our ways, is the mark of true blessedness. A man is judged by the tenor of his life, not by one action.

5. This holiness must be in all the parts of our conversation: 'In all holy conversation.' In our outward carriage and secret practice, common affairs and religious duties; in the duties of God's immediate worship and the duties of relations; towards superiors, inferiors, and equals, 1 Peter i. 5; in every creek and turning of our lives. There is no part of a Christian conversation but should savour of holiness and godliness: his common and civil actions, in adversity, prosperity, at home and abroad. So Titus ii. 12, 13, 'The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying all ungodliness, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' Soberly as to ourselves; righteously as to our neighbour; godly as to God. To rest in a partial practice of holiness will not become the expectation of Christ's coming, who will examine us upon every point of duty.

6. Godliness is added to holiness to increase the sense and signification. There is some formal difference between these two. Holiness signifieth the purity of our actions, and godliness the respect they have to God, that he be eyed and aimed at in all that we do; that all things should be done in and to the Lord, or for his glory. This should be the supreme end of all our ways and actions. If we consider grace as it provideth for the rectitude of our actions, positively it is called holiness; if relatively, with respect to our dedication to God, it is called godliness. Well, then, we should be such manner of persons,

not only in all holy conversation, but godliness. We should stir up ourselves to do more for God in the world, and love him, and fear him, and honour him in all that we do.

7. In both we should endeavour the highest pitch that possibly we can attain unto; for it is in the original, 'All holy conversations and godlinesses;' which doth not only imply the extension (as we render it), 'in all holy conversation and godliness,' but the intension and degree, as well as all the parts and points of godliness. Those that have made most progress in godliness should still aspire after higher degrees: the more will our comfort be now, and the more our glory when Christ cometh. We cannot be over, it is easy to be short. The most serious and the most painful do exceedingly lament their negligence when they come to die; but none ever begrudged their pains, or bewailed their diligencc. There should be holinesses and godlinesses. Therefore we should not only keep what we have, but seek to get more. This is the apostle's use of the resurrection of the dead, and so by consequence of Christ's second coming, 1 Cor. xv. 18, 19. So Phil. iii. 11.

The next place is ver. 14, 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent, that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' In which words observe—

1. The exhortation is generally propounded, 'Be diligent.'

2. Particularly, in what this diligence is to be exercised and laid out.

[1.] With respect to the means, 'That ye may be without spot, and blameless.'

[2.] With respect to the end, 'That ye may be found of him in peace.' In the original the posture of the words is thus: 'That ye, being without spot and blameless, may be found of him in peace.' All these circumstances deserve to be considered by us.

1. The general exhortation, 'Be diligent.' Rouse up yourselves, set speedily and earnestly about it. We are apt to delay, therefore make haste: we are too slight and sluggish; therefore be earnest, and zealous, and hard at work: every slight endeavour will not serve the turn. The wife that looketh for her husband's coming home will put all things in readiness: the servant that expects his master's coming will ply his work. Therefore let us not be remiss and negligent, but make serious preparation. A loitering profession will fail us in our greatest need; and when the bridegroom cometh, our lamps will be gone out. The devil's bondslaves spare no cost to serve their lusts; their faulty self-denial may put Christians to shame: Isa. v. 17, 'They draw on iniquity with cart-ropes.' The men of the world use all possible diligence to obtain the good things of this life, Ps. cxxvii. 2, 'Rise early, and go to bed late;' and shall we put our hand in our bosom, and think all will do well, though we mind our business only by the by? No; if your scope be to meet Christ with joy, religion must be your work and main employment.

2. Particularly, wherein you are to show your diligence; for we flatter ourselves with general notions.

[1.] With respect to the means, 'That ye be without spot and blameless.' The one word relateth to the heart, 'That we may be without spot,' and the other to our conversation, 'blameless.'

(1.) The first thing wherein diligence is to be improved is the washing away of our sinful spots, or the washing away of sin in the guilt and filth of it, or in a way of justification and sanctification, 1 Cor. vi. 11, suing out our pardon in the name of Christ, and by his Spirit using all holy means for the cleansing of our polluted natures. This is a work to be done not once, but often; for we are all washed but in part: Prov. xx. 7, 'Who can say his heart is clean?' And when we have once washed, we are inclined to defile ourselves again: John xi. 13, 'He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet.' Every day we contract defilement by living in the world. Our final consummation is in Christ's day, when we shall be presented to God, 'not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,' Eph. v. 27. For the present, still we are cleansing, and making use of the blood and Spirit of Christ for that end and purpose.

(2.) Blameless; that relateth to our carriage and conversation, as it is said, Luke i. 6, that Zachariah and Elizabeth 'walked in all the commandments of God blameless.' So should we take care that we incur no just blame for all those things Christ hath left in trust with us, as to the improvement of our talents, keeping his laws, observing his ordinances, or carriage to his servants and all men.

[2.] As to the end, 'that we may be found of him in peace.' The word *found* is often used with respect to Christ's second coming: 2 Cor. v. 3, 'If so be we shall not be found naked;' Phil. iii. 9, 'That I may be found in him.' It is used, because the last day is a day of exact search and trial, and because that day cometh upon the greatest part of the world by way of surprisal. We do not look for it, nor prepare for it, but it cometh, unthought of, unexpected by the most. But the word *found* noteth either a state of reconciliation with God, Rom. v. 1, or it noteth comfort and joy, 1 John iv. 17. The wicked are then at their wits' end, Rev. xix. 18, call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them. But when you have made diligent preparation, you may have boldness in that day, and 'lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth near.' A peace that will hold out when Christ cometh, is a peace indeed; otherwise what a terror will unpardoned guilt, and an unrenewed nature, a fruitless life, and a blemished conversation breed in us? Thus you see how the scripture presses this.

Secondly, What reasons there are in the thing itself to awaken us to this serious preparation—

1. Because of the person coming, our Redeemer, the bridegroom, the Lord himself, who is so great and holy. If we mean to do him honour, we must prepare to meet him in the best manner we can, as the bride would provide her ornaments against the nuptial day. Oh! what cleansing of soul, what fruitfulness and exercise of grace should there be, that we may not put our Redeemer to shame when he cometh to be glorified in his saints, and to show forth the fruits of his death in us! I say, this preparation should be not only for our own honour, that the bridegroom may not refuse us his company and approbation, 1 Peter i. 7; but for the honour of Christ, that he may be glorified in the faithfulness and obedience of his servants, when it shall be produced to the view of all the world, as the fruits of his purchase and

Spirit : Eph. v. 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, nor having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.' It is begun here, and consummated there, Col. i. 22, and Jude 25.

2. Because of the manner of his coming, in power and great glory. Every coming of Christ should be entertained with great reverence. When our first parents heard but the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from his presence among the trees of the garden. When he came to give the law, Heb. xii., it was terrible, and made them quake and tremble; much more, now he cometh to judge according to the law, when articles of faith are to be made objects of sense, and God is no longer in a way of trial with the world. Christ, in the days of his flesh, when he came not to judge but to save, yet sometimes beamed out his majesty, as in the miracle of the great draught of fishes. Luke v. 3, but especially when his enemies fell backward with a look or word from his mouth, John xviii. 6; his whipping the buyers and sellers out of the temple, Mat. xxi. 12; and at his transfiguration his disciples were afraid, Mat. xvii. 6. If his voice was so terrible in the days of his flesh, what will it be then? He came at first in the form of a servant, Phil. ii. 6, 7; now he cometh as Lord and heir of all things, Heb. i. 2. Then he came in the similitude of sinful flesh, Rom. viii. 3; now without sin, Heb. ix. 28. Then he had a forerunner, John the Baptist, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,' Mat. iii. 3; now the archangel, 1 Thes. iv. 16. Then he had twelve companions, poor fishermen; now with saints and angels, his holy ten thousands, Jude 7. Then he raised some few to life; now 'all shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live,' John v. 28. Then he came riding upon an ass; now he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and the Judge shall sit in the throne of majesty, summoning the world to appear before him. As this will be comfortable to the godly, so terrible to the unprepared.

3. Because of his work when he cometh, which is to judge the world, and to make a strict inquiry into the ways of men : Rev. xx. 12, 'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in the books, according to their works.' All actions are set in order, Ps. 1. 21, with such impartiality and strictness, that we should all tremble at the thought of it. Surely if we did believe these things we would prepare ourselves accordingly : Acts xvii. 31, 'He hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness.' God governeth the world now in righteousness, but the justice of God hath not its full scope and measure. God useth patience to the wicked, and doth not give the godly their full reward. God is arbitrary in his gifts, but not in his judgments : all are under a rule, either the law of works or the gospel law : James ii. 12, 13, 'So speak and so do, as those that are to be judged by the law of liberty.'

4. After judgment sentence is passed, never to be reversed again. Here there is a possibility of retrieving it by repentance, for here it is *sententia legis*, but there it is *sententia judicis*, there is no appeal from this sentence. Here sentence may be repealed, Ezek. xviii. 12, 'If

the wicked shall turn from his sins that he hath committed, and keep my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.' Therefore we have need to provide for this day.

5. Prepared or unprepared, we must all go forth to meet the bridegroom. Therefore we had need to consider with ourselves whether we are in case to meet him or no. Others think we make too much ado about it; but this is the great thing that should take up our care and thoughts, whether we are upon a sure bottom for eternity: Luke x. 42, 'This is the one thing necessary.' Alas! that we should make no greater matter of it, and set ourselves about it with no more care and seriousness, Ps. xxvii. 4. It is necessity, and our own necessity, and a necessity for so great an end; not to live honourably and comfortably in the world, but for ever with God. In reason necessary things should be preferred before superfluous; that which cannot be spared should be first regarded.

Use 1. Is to quicken you to rouse up yourselves, and to trim your lamps. God's messengers in all ages have raised the cry: Enoch long ago: Jude 14, 15, 'Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.' He speaks of it as a thing in being, and actually in view; so do we call upon men. If we had a deeper sense and more lively apprehensions of that day, surely we would more bestir ourselves.

1. To rouse up ourselves. Shake off sloth and security: 2 Tim. i. 6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee;' Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' There is need of awakening ourselves yet more and more. Conscience is too sleepy, the will too remiss, the affections are dead and earthly, and are not so active and powerful upon our hearts as they were wont to be. Oh! do not rest in a lukewarm drowsy profession, but seriously bestir yourselves.

2. Trim up your lamps; that is, let your practice and profession of godliness be more lively and powerful, and grace kept in constant exercise: 'Having your loins girt, and your lamps burning,' Luke xii. 35. Oh! it is a blessed thing to be found so doing. You will never do so—

[1.] While you content yourselves with a little religiousness by the by, and do not make godliness your main work and business: 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'

[2.] While you content yourselves with doubtful questionable grace, and do not put it out of all doubt: 1 Peter i. 10, 11, 'Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, that so an abundant entrance may be ministered unto you.'

[3.] You will never do so while you content yourselves with a little general religion, without looking into every part and point of duty: 1 Peter i. 15, 'Be ye holy in all manner of conversation.' Wherein you are to exercise your obedience to God: Acts xxvi. 7, 8, 'Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God night and day, hope to come.'

[4.] You will never do so till your minds be taken off from the present world, and more deeply fixed upon the world to come, Mat. vi. 21. 'Till that be your treasure, Col. iii. 1, 'Set your affections upon things above.' Our affections often cool, being scattered too much upon pre-

sent things; we have little or no thoughts of our spiritual journey: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' It is meant of the affections. It is the lively expectation of blessedness to come that keepeth us in life and exercise.

Secondly, We now come to the consideration of it as to the foolish virgins, 'They all arose and trimmed their lamps.' The foolish virgins made a fair flourish; on their part it noteth their vain confidence, as if they were as ready to meet the bridegroom as the wise, though the event showeth the contrary; so that on their part it doth not note so much their serious preparation as their foolish presumption.

Doct. 2. Many think they have grace enough to meet Christ at his coming, when the event showeth no such matter; or, many have great confidence of the goodness of their condition, that will be found foolish virgins at last. As in the text, the foolish virgins; and in the 7th of Matthew, the foolish builder.

There are four reasons of this:—

1. Self-love, which blindeth a man in judging of his state and actions: Prov. xvi. 2, 'All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes.' It is natural to a man to have a good conceit of his own ways; so Prov. xxx. 12, 'There is a generation of men pure in their own eyes, yet not washed from their filthiness.' A man will favour himself, be a parasite to himself. A self-suspecting heart is very rare, John xiii. 23, 24, and 2 Sam. xii. 7.

2. An overly sense of their duty, and belief of the world to come. Temporaries have but a taste of heavenly doctrine, Heb. vi. 4, a light tincture. The act of their faith is not so intense and serious as to set them a-work with all life and diligence, or to enable them to judge impartially, whether they are able to bear the coming of Christ, yea or no. Presumption is the child of ignorance and incogitancy; they do not consider of the strictness of the gospel law, or the impartiality of the last day's account; there is but a notional, slight, superficial, ineffectual apprehension of these things. An ignorant person is fool-hardy, he doth not weigh the danger. It is not the greatness of our confidence, but the acuteness of our sense.

3. Want of searching or taking the course whereby we may be undeceived: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' Yea, when searched, and their natural face showed them, James i. 23, 24; they will not search and try their ways. A temporary is seldom discovered to himself till it be too late; but you may find him by these notes. Usually he is slothful; he is not a laborious Christian—sound exercise maketh us feel our condition; he is not self-searching, he doth not look into himself, he smothereth those misgivings of heart which he hath, and will not consider the case, or return upon himself. If they do not search, they cannot know themselves; if they should search, they do not like themselves; they choose the latter.

4. Building upon false evidences, or upon sandy foundations. A formal professor may go very far towards salvation. Temporaries may have awakening grace, much trouble about their condition; as Ahab and Judas. So many are full of doubts and stinging fears, and

make their case known, would fain be eased of their smart. They may have enlightening grace, Heb. vi. 7, more than many true Christians have; Rom. ii. 18, have an 'approbation of the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law;' 2 Tim. ii. 5, 'having a form of godliness.' Grammatically and logically have a clearer understanding of the sense of words, the contexture and dependence of truths, be able to defend any sacred verity, and express their minds about it; yea, some sense of Christ and heaven and glory; yea, they may have affecting grace, be wonderfully taken with the glad tidings of the gospel; may have some taste of the grapes of the good land, may desire to die the 'death of the righteous,' Num. xxiii. 10; desire the 'bread of life,' John vi. 34; they may delight in holy things, Isa. lviii. 2, as Herod heard the word which John preached gladly, Mark vi. 20; the stony ground heard the word with joy. But they have not renewing grace, heart-transforming grace, sin-mortifying grace, nor world-conquering grace. Yet something like these they may have, something like transforming grace; a change wrought in them, though not such as puts grace in sovereignty and dominion. As to sin-mortifying grace, there are some conflicts with sin, and they may sacrifice some of their weaker lusts, yet the flesh is not crucified. As to world-conquering grace, they may profess long, hold out against a persecution: 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 'If I should give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth not.' Compare Acts xix. 33 with 2 Tim. ii. 10, and 2 Tim. iv. 14. Yea, they may keep some profession till death, have a good esteem among the people of God, and yet the heart never be thoroughly subdued to God.

Use 1. Oh! then, 'let us not be high-minded, but fear;' Rom. xi. 20; and let all this that hath been spoken tend to weaken the security of the flesh, but not the joy of faith. Let it batter down all your false confidence and carnal security, by which you are apt to deceive your own souls, and make you build more surely for heaven. Consider—

1. God may see that which yourselves or men do not; for he seeth not as man seeth. Others look upon appearance, you yourselves may be blinded with your own self-love, but God knoweth all things, seeth all things; therefore, though thou hast a name, yet perhaps art dead, Rev. iii. 1; and though we 'know nothing by ourselves, yet we are not thereby justified,' 2 Cor. iv. 4.

2. How dreadful it is to know our error by the event rather than by a search! The foolish virgins said to the wise, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.' They began to see their defect when it was too late. The foolish builder, that built his house upon the sand, his building made as fair a show as any; but it fell, 'and great was the fall of it.' So is the hope of the hypocrite when God cometh to take away his soul: then they will see and bewail their deceits of heart, but have no time to remedy them. Many think they have godliness enough while they live, but when they come to die they will find it little enough, and all their false hopes will leave them ashamed.

3. We have need again and again to bring the grounds of our confidence into the sight and view of conscience, that we may be sure they will hold weight: Ps. xlv. 18, 'Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined thy way;' 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing,

the testimony of our conscience.' At least, when you suspect yourselves, how do you make a shift to quiet your consciences? Is it upon solid grounds, and such as will bear weight in the day of Christ? Many are strongly conceited of themselves, when there is little ground for it: Luke xiii. 24, 'Many shall seek to enter, but shall not be able;' Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest that thou wert rich, and increased with goods, when thou art poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked.' In a poor case to meet the bridegroom, but they thought themselves in a happy condition.

Use 2. To excite you to this duty, take these considerations:—

1. Your cure is not fully wrought, you are not yet brought home to God: 1 Peter iii. 18, 'Christ also suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.'

2. To keep to your first beginnings, after a long time of growth, is to be babes still: Heb. v. 12–14, 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat: for every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but strong meat belongeth unto them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern good and evil.' A child, if he should continue a child and an infant still, is a monster.

3. The same reasons that invited you to begin with Christ should invite you to go on with his service. If a little grace is desirable, surely more is desirable, because it is the adorning of the soul. Excellency in grace is a great means to convince and convert the world: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven;' and John xv. 6, 'Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit.' Deprive not God of the honour you owe him, nor the world of such a powerful help; we put forth our utmost endeavours to get excellent things here on earth, and shall eternal glory be only coldly thought of, and carelessly sought after?

4. The more serviceable you are for Christ here, the more glory you shall receive in heaven. We believe there are degrees of glory; we read of being ruler of many cities, and sitting at Christ's right hand and left, Mat. xx. 13. The mother of Zebedee's children, when she asked Christ that her sons might sit one at his right hand and the other at his left, Christ doth not deny the thing, that there were degrees of glory, but it was to be given them for whom it was prepared of his Father.

The next thing observable in the parable is the going out of their lamps: Our lamps are going, or gone out. What is the meaning of that? Sometimes the phrase is used in scripture for the failing and ceasing of the wicked's happiness, or the splendour and glory wherein they lived in the world; as Job xix. 6, 'The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his lamp shall be put out with him;' and Job xxi. 17, 'How often is the candle of the wicked put out!' But here it must be interpreted with respect to the scope of this parable, and so by the lamps two things are intended:—

1. The glorious profession that they make of religion.

2. The hope and comfort that is built thereupon.

Doct. 3. Their lamps will go out who have not a stock of grace to feed and maintain them.

First, Let us explain this.

1. What is this going out of their lamps?

2. When is this verified?

First, What is this going out of their lamps?

1. It may note an extinction of their profession, and so profession, where it hath not a bottom of grace, will fail: Prov. xxvi. 26, 'His wickedness shall be showed before all the congregation.' God loveth to uncase hypocrites. In the course of his providence one occasion or other falleth out to make them stumble and break the neck of all their respects to the ways of God: John xv. 6, 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch that is withered.' Christ drieth up their gifts and seeming graces, their duties; they are given up headlong to their own apostate courses.

2. It may be meant of the extinction of their vain hopes and foolish confidence and false peace, which is grounded upon their outward profession and formal practice of external duties; thus we read that 'the hope of the wicked shall be as the spider's web,' Job viii. 14, curiously woven, but gone with the turn of the besom. So Job xi. 20, 'The hope of the wicked shall be as the giving up of the ghost.' No more hope of them than of a man's life that is giving up the ghost; or with pains and gripes; which is not only to be meant of the hope, or the continuance of their prosperous condition in the world, but of heavenly happiness; there is a groundless expectation of that, the apostle's expression intimateth it: Rom. v. 5, 'And hope that maketh not ashamed.' The hope of temporaries will at length deceive them in their greatest need, and leave them ashamed. As Absalom's mule left his master hanging on an oak, so will their hopes fail them, and their preferences vanish.

Secondly, When is this verified, and upon what occasions?

1. Sometimes in life. They took offence at Christ, his doctrine, or something that did accompany it: John vi. 66, 'At that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him;' some one prejudice or other took them off.

2. Sometimes at death, if their profession and hope thereupon tarry so long: Job xxvii. 8, 'What hope hath the hypocrite, when God cometh to take away his soul?' A man may live by a form, but he cannot die by a form with comfort. Men are more serious in the confines of eternity, when present enjoyments cease, and we have nothing left to comfort us but the expectation of the world to come: then we shall repent that we have been no more provident for eternity; if God would spare them a little longer, they would get oil then. When they come to die, oh! that they could live over their life again. Men that have neglected their time of present profiting then see their folly; then how serious, anxious, and solicitous are they!

3. It is possible men may go down with a careless profession, and a blind confidence to the grave, but in God's judgment it will not hold out; for the day of revelation and manifestation is hereafter, and every one is not in a safe condition that dieth in peace, or without actual

horror and trouble. Usually, indeed, 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin;' but it is possible hypocrites may die with stupid and benumbed consciences, and therefore Christ maketh their vain conceits to be blown away in the day of accounts: Mat. vii. 22, 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord!' that is, till the day of doom, may think their plea sufficient.

Reasons why this profession is apt to fail, for there is a distinct consideration of these things:—

1. Because they have a principle of apostasy in their hearts still. The love of some created thing is predominant, as it is in all temporaries; either honour, riches, or pleasure, which when it cometh to be touched or intrenched upon, religion must give way. Christ's first lesson is self-denial. Till there be a universal sovereignty of grace over all our desires and inclinations, so as they shall all give way to the love of God, something is left that will tempt us to leave our profession of godliness, though unwillingly; as the young man went away sad, Mark x. 22; and that which is lame is soon turned out of the way, Heb. xii.; and therefore we can have no satisfaction and security while any one lust remaineth unmortified; if you are not fallen, you are falling.

2. Because they do not improve what they have received. The great want of temporaries is the want of a constant, serious, lively diligence; now when men have made a good progress in religion, and stop there, they lose what they have: Luke viii. 18, 'From him that hath not shall be taken what he seemeth to have;' to him that employeth his stock, more shall be given; but the other is on the losing hand.

Secondly, As to the hope and comfort that followeth this profession. An inclination to that which is good: I suppose without that there can be no true comfort, until we should submit to the conditions of the gospel law, Mat. v. 28–30. There temporaries are defective, all therefore see it and know it when they are serious and considerative. and their mistakes and misconceits are blown away by death and judgment. Now the conditions are believing, repenting, and gospel walking. Now their faith will not yield comfort: Gal. v. 6, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything, but faith that worketh by love.' Not their repenting, not a little sorrow for sin past, until carnal distempers are mortified, 2 Cor. vii. 10. So for gospel-walking; not a loose owning of Christ, Mat. vii. 21; until there be a full obedience to his law, putting it in practice with an upright heart, which is not consistent with allowed failings. A man may profess himself a Christian, yet if he do not his Father's will, he may come short.

Use. Oh! then, let us take heed we be not of the number of those whose lamps are gone out. The lamps of the sanctuary were never to go out, but to burn always, Exod. xvii. 20. To this end—

1. Apply yourselves to Christ in the use of his appointed means, for the renewing your natures, that his Spirit may give you a new understanding and a new heart: God hath made the offer, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, and it is only made good to those that diligently attend upon the appointed means.

2. Improve what you receive in that way: 1 Thes. v. 14, 'Quench not the Spirit.' Fire may be quenched by pouring on water, or withdrawing the fuel: quench not the Spirit by fleshly delights, nor by a careless conversation.

3. They ask the wise, 'Give us of your oil.' First, 'This demand was unseasonable; to be getting oil when they should use it, to have their oil to buy when their lamps should have been burning.' There is a time of getting, if we lose that, our opportunity is gone, Luke xiv. 32; Isa. lv. 2; John ix. 4. While 'you have the day work, for the night cometh in which no man can work.' Secondly, it was extorted by mere necessity. In a time of straits and distresses men will call upon the people of God to help them, as Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, when God's judgments were upon him.

SERMON VII.

But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.—MAT. XXV. 9.

IN the words we have—(1.) A denial; (2.) The reason of the denial; (3.) Their advice and counsel to the foolish.

First, The denial, *not so.* It is not a churlish and envious denial, but such an answer as the nature of the thing would bear. If they should be so kind, they would deprive themselves, and not leave sufficient for them both; therefore they were better take the usual way of supply. Three points are in this verse:—

Doct. 1. Every one must get oil into his own lamp, or get grace of his own, or else in the day of his accounts the grace of others will do him no good.

Secondly, From the reason, 'Lest there be not enough for us and you.'

Doct. 2. They that have most grace have none to spare.

Doct. 3. If we would get grace, we must have recourse to the ordinances.

For the first point, that every man must get grace of his own.

1. I do not hereby exclude the righteousness of Christ, or his communicating his Spirit to us. There is a great deal of difference between Christ and the saints in point of sufficiency, power, and authority.

[1.] They have not a sufficiency for themselves and us too. Christ hath a fulness out of which you may receive enough: John i. 16, 'Of his fulness we receive grace for grace.' There is *plenitudo fontis et plenitudo vasis*—the fulness of a fountain and the fulness of a vessel. The fulness of a vessel is lessened and abated the more you take out of it; the creature is wasted by giving, but a fountain is ever flowing and overflowing; it keepeth its fulness still, though it affordeth to others. God saith to Moses, Num. xi. 12, 'I will take of the spirit that is upon thee, and put it upon them.' The words seem principally to