

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF ST MATTHEW.

SERMON I.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.—MAT. XXV. 1, 2.

IT was Christ's manner to instruct by parables, partly for the greater evidence and force, while heavenly things are represented to us in such notions as we do best understand; and partly to teach us the art of holy chemistry, or extracting spiritual advantages out of obvious occurrences and occasions. Now parables are of two sorts—argumentative and representative.

First, The argumentative parables are such wherein some notable reason is couched, or ground is laid for some excellent encouragement in our converse with God, by showing what falleth out among men. In these argumentative parables, the parts of the parable are not to be strained, but the scope and parable itself is to be regarded. As in the parable, Luke xviii., of the unjust judge, the scope is to be regarded, but not the parts strained, as if God were to be compared to an unjust judge. And that famous parable, Luke xi. 8, concerning success in prayer, where there is *argumentum a minori ad majus*, an argument from the less to the greater: 'Though he will not rise and give him as he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him.' And those passages of giving good things to our children: 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?'

Secondly, The other sort of parables, which I call representative, yields us a notable delineation of some heavenly matter, by laying the scene of it among earthly affairs; for God is fain to lisp to us in our own dialect, and speak as we can understand. This and the next parable are of this sort. The occasion of it was thus: Our Lord had been discoursing of the dangerous state of the latter times, and therefore presseth to watchfulness and timely preparation. This he doth by three parables: First, By the good man of the house watching against the coming of the thief, Mat. xxiv. 42, 43; by the parable of

the servant misbehaving himself in the absence of his Lord, Mat. xxiv. 45, to the end ; and now, the third time, by this parable of the virgins. Still, in the close of all, he repeateth his charge of watchfulness, not so much because of the difficulty of the matter, as because of our dulness. We cannot often enough be put in mind of vigilancy and diligence in preparing for the coming of the Lord ; so great is our sloth and drowsiness, and non-attention to the great affairs of our souls. Now these three parables, though they come to one effect, yet have their special use. The first of these concerns all ; the second, the officers of the church ; the third, the members. First, The good man of the house watching against the coming of the thief speaketh thus much : If men watch to avoid a temporal inconvenience, much more should we watch to eschew eternal destruction. The diligence of the men of the world in worldly things upbraideth and condemneth our negligence in heavenly things. The parable of the unfaithful servant, that put off the thoughts of his master's coming, and therefore eateth and drinketh with the drunken, and beats his fellow-servants, is a notable warning to the officers of the church, that they do not abuse the power of the keys, and inhabit with the wicked, and discourage the godly, and blast them with censures, and stir up the displeasure of the magistrate against their faithful and painful brethren in the ministry. A drunkard shall find more favour with them than one that is mindful of his Lord's coming, and would keep punctual to the orders and institutions he hath left before he went. Now, lest the members of the church should want their admonition, besides a warning to the officers in the second parable, here is a warning to the members in this third parable, to watch and be ready, that they be not surprised. In the wise virgins is represented the comfortable fruit of watchfulness ; in the foolish, the sad effects of security : ' Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened,' &c.

In the words we have—

First, The thing compared, *the kingdom of heaven.*

Secondly, The comparison itself, *shall be likened to ten virgins.*
Who are—

1. Described by their quality or state, *virgins.*
2. By their number, *ten.*
3. By their rank or distribution, *five wise, and five foolish.*
4. By their work or employment, *they went forth to meet the bridegroom.*
5. Their preparation for that work, *they took their hand-lamps.*

Before I explain these circumstances, I must a little acquaint you with the custom of the Jews to which allusion is here made. The weddings of those times were kept by night, in which the bridegroom and his company were by certain virgins fetched in, and conducted to the bride, with lamps in their hands and songs in their mouths. As for this custom, I shall give you some passages in scripture. That the weddings were in the night-time, we read, Gen. xxix. 23, ' It came to pass in the evening that Laban took Leah his daughter, and brought her to Jacob.' That the bridegroom had his companions, we read, Judges xiii. 11, Sampson had thirty companions brought to him. That both had their companions, we read of ' the children of the bride-

chamber,' Mat. ix. 15, the special guests invited to the marriage-feast, who were by custom to fetch the bridegroom, and wait upon him : these are called *φίλοι νυμφίου*, 'the friends of the bridegroom,' John iii. 29. That the bride had her companions, it is said in Ps. xlv. 14, the spouse 'shall be brought to the king in a raiment of needlework; the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.' And their fashion was to take hand-lamps, then in use, and fit to carry abroad, for night-lights. The scripture frequently alludes to that : Rev. xviii. 23, 'And the light of the candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride no more at all shall be heard in thee.' And thus the bridegroom was met by virgins with lamps; as he drew near the bride's house, he was met by servants with candles returning to the marriage. Therefore it is said, Luke xii. 35, 36, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding.' This was the custom, which I the rather observe, that you may see how fitly our Lord layeth down things. Now those that accompanied the bridegroom and the bride were children of the bride-chamber, and admitted into the marriage-room and supper; and those that came after that, when once the door was shut, were surely kept out. Now here is a fit representation of the spiritual mystery laid down by Christ; and therefore let us—

1. See the thing compared, 'The kingdom of heaven;' that is, the state of the church wherein God reigneth in the person of the Messiah. Of the kingdom of glory it cannot be meant, for there are no foolish virgins, and in the internal kingdom of grace none; but in the external kingdom of Christ in this world. And this is not considered simply and restrainedly to that point of time when Christ is coming to judgment, but respects and should affect us all; for such as we depart out of the world now, such shall we be found to be at the day of judgment. It concerneth all ages, not only those that shall be found alive at that time, but every one in successive ages.

2. The comparison must be explained; the bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is the church; the whole church is the spouse of Christ, and each particular believer a virgin attending upon this spouse; the marriage is mutually promised; the espousals are in this life: Hosea ii. 19, 20, 'I will betroth thee to me for ever;' and to be solemnised and completed at the coming of our Lord: Rev. xix. 7, '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.' Here is the betrothing in the covenant of grace. *A nobis accepit arrhabonem carnis*, &c., saith Tertullian; he took the token of our flesh and carried it to heaven, to prepare heaven for us, and left with us the token of his Spirit, to prepare us for heaven: he is not gone from us in discontent, but will come again with all the angels of heaven with him, to receive the bride unto himself.

[1.] The companions of the bride are here represented under the name of 'virgins,' for so Christians are called for the purity of their faith and worship, and also for their blameless conversations.

(1.) Virgins for the purity of their faith, that keep themselves free

and untainted from the corrupt and rotten opinions of the world: 2 Cor. xi. 2, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as chaste virgins to Christ.' He meaneth it here in respect of the purity of their faith, that they might not be corrupted by false teachers.

(2.) Virgins for the purity of worship. Idolatry and corruption of worship is often expressed by harlotry; and therefore the prophet, to figure out Israel's apostasy and corruption in worship, is bidden to take a wife of whoredoms, Hosea iii. And those that followed the Lamb are said to be virgins not defiled, Rev. xiv. 4; not polluted with idolatry, which is spiritual fornication.

(3.) Virgins for purity and blamelessness of conversation. The apostle speaketh of some that 'had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who might be again entangled and overcome therein,' 2 Peter ii. 20. Well, then, these were all virgins, even the foolish as well as the wise, not tainted with error, nor defiled with false worship, nor profane, corrupt or scandalous in their conversations; they were such as had escaped the corruptions of the world, and had as glorious a form of godliness as any others.

[2.] They are described by their number, 'ten.' This is mentioned either because ten is a number of perfection, or because usually the number of those companions of the bride never exceeded ten.

[3.] They are set forth by their distribution into two ranks—some wise, some foolish; five of the one sort, and five of the other. The number is not exactly to be stood upon, as if the number of the saved and damned were equal; as in the parable of the marriage-feast *one* had not a wedding-garment; it is not to be understood as if only one were damned of all that are invited to the profession of the gospel; it only signifieth that all the virgins are not alike careful to prepare for the coming of the Lord. By the wise are meant provident and diligent Christians; by the foolish, the improvident and negligent. Among those that bear the name and keep up the reputation of Christians, some will be found not to fill up their profession with answerable duty, not to make serious provision for the coming of Christ.

[4.] They are set forth by their work and employment, 'They went forth to meet the bridegroom;' that is, they expected the coming of Christ, and happiness by him. The foolish and the wise did both agree in this; indeed, this is the whole business of a Christian.

[5.] They are set forth by their preparation for this work, 'They took their lamps;' that is, made open profession of their hope: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine among men;' for external shining profession they were both alike. All are called Christians, all are baptized, and all profess faith in Christ, and an expectation of his second coming, with eternal life to ensue upon it; all are virgins, all have lamps, all are devoted to the bridegroom, go forth to meet him, and yet some were wise, and some foolish; some made preparation that whenever the bridegroom should come they might be ready to go in with him, others contented themselves with an outward profession, or loose waiting for his coming, but did not with that serious diligence prepare themselves for it, and so came short of the blessedness expected by them; there wanted a deep radication, and a constant perseverance, without which

the blaze of profession, which lasted for a while, will soon be extinguished.

Doct. That in the visible church, among those that give up their names to Christ, some will be found foolish when others are wise, and come short of the blessedness expected by them. Or, in the visible church all are not wise Christians, but some are wise, and really such as they profess themselves to be; others negligent, foolish, and imprudent.

The state of the visible church is here represented; and observe—

1. This parable is not spoken of the corrupted members of degenerate churches, but speaketh what shall fall out in the churches not defiled with whoredoms of the world. There are some churches that have turned the government of Christ into a temporal domination, and their worship into a mass of paganish or heathenish rites and superstitions, and place all their glory, not in excellency of gifts and graces, but pomp of living and external splendour, and make Christianity look like a temporal worldly thing, calculated only for this life. Of those Christ speaketh not here; something may be intimated of them in the former parable, but here he speaks of a reformed church; not the church in her pollution and defection, but a church in her right constitution. Papists will be counted Christians, who may be rejected by Christ at his coming; they have so corrupted his worship, discipline, and doctrine. Nay, but Christ speaketh here of those that live under the dispensations of purer Christianity; some will be found true believers, others common professors; even among the members of a reformed church, that make profession of the purity of the gospel, all will not be found such as may abide the day of Christ's appearing in judgment. In Abraham's family there was an Ishmael as well as an Isaac; in Christ's, a Judas; and in the apostles' time, some were enemies to the cross of Christ that yet took the profession of Christ upon them, Phil. iii. 18.

2. Mark again, it is not meant the scandalous and faulty members of a pure church. There are many Christians in name only, but indeed deny it, Titus i. 16. But it is not meant of the scandalous, that live as if their hopes were altogether in this world, that engulph themselves in all manner of sensuality, as if there were no heaven or hell, nor no future account to be given of our actions; but it is meant of such as profess themselves to be devoted unto Jesus Christ the bridegroom, such as are desirous to be admitted into the nuptial-feast, to have communion with him in heaven, and possibly may attain to a blameless conversation, and appear virgin-like, all waiting for the coming of the Lord, in their own and others' estimation. Some that prophesied in Christ's name, and ate and drank in his presence, are yet rejected by Christ as workers of iniquity.

3. It is not meant only of those that have a show or a false and counterfeit profession, that are taught to act over their part in religion as a play, as in the best and purest churches there will be hypocrites. No; these had some real work, though not a saving but a common work, as a man may have a light tincture of religion whose heart is not yet sound with God, Ps. cxix. 80, therefore David prayeth, 'Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.' There was not a universal

renouncing of all corruptions, not that thorough care to please God, nor a rooted affection to Christ, though they have some good motions, hopeful inclinations that way, as these virgins seemed to be well affected to Christ; for the present they had their lamps, made some slender preparation, they went forth to meet the bridegroom as others did. Therefore it will be necessary to show that a common work may go far, and yet come short of blessedness: I shall prove it by three reasons.

[1.] Because a common work may go far.

[2.] Though a common work may go far, yet it is not likely to hold out.

[3.] If it should hold out a constant profession, yet it will not be enough to qualify us for the kingdom of glory, or heavenly bliss and happiness.

First Reason. A common work will go far. I take it for granted that there is a real common work of grace, as well as also a real special work. If you doubt it I will inform you from scripture: Heb. vi. 4, compared with the 9th verse. We read there of some that were 'enlightened,' some that 'tasted of the good word, and of the heavenly gift;' and elsewhere of some 'that had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ,' 2 Peter ii. 20. All this is real, the tasting the good word real, the enlightening real, the partaking of the heavenly gift real, the escaping the pollutions of the world real; but the apostle saith in the 9th verse, 'We expect better things of you, and things that do accompany salvation;' or things that have necessarily salvation in them, things that whosoever hath them shall certainly be saved. The graces of temporaries are for substance true, but slightly rooted; there are the purlieus of grace, or the borders of the kingdom of heaven, some flashes of light or dawnings of grace, but the daystar doth not arise in their hearts; many are enlightened, taste the good word, have some delight in the promises, taste of the heavenly gift, apprehend it sweet to have communion with God in Christ, and taste the powers of the world to come, feel some transports of soul when they hear of the hopes of eternal life, and may be brought to some partial reformation; but that which is wanting is a deep radication or a more firm inherency of these graces in the soul, and a habitual predominancy of these motions and affections over all other inclinations; for till it be so, we cannot do any great service for God, or endure any trial for his sake. Sometimes true grace is described by its deep radication; James i. 21, it is called an 'ingrafted word;' it is not something tied on, but ingrafted; the root of the matter is within; and sometimes it is described by its efficacy: Rom. vi. 17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to you.'

But more especially I shall show you that a common work may go far with respect to the three theological graces, faith, hope, and charity, mentioned by the apostle 1 Cor. xiii. 13, 'Now abideth faith, hope, and love;' and again, 1 Thes. v. 8, 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.' Now a common work may go very far in all these graces of faith, hope, and love, as here the virgins seemed to believe the coming of Christ, and went forth to meet him.

First, Therefore I shall show you what they may do as to faith. I shall show what the grace is, and how far they may go along with it. The scripture speaketh so much of faith, that we need to know what it is. Faith in its peculiar respect works towards Christ and heaven; but take it in its general latitude, it is a firm and cordial assent to all such things that are revealed by God, as revealed by him. Let us explain this. Here is the object, things revealed by God as revealed by him; then the act, it is an assent; the adjuncts, it is a firm and cordial assent. For the object in this description, I consider it materially and formally, all things revealed by God whatsoever. All things necessary to salvation, faith apprehends them distinctly, other things implicitly, that is, knows them in their general principle. Few Christians know all the doctrines contained in the Christian religion, but they believe them in the general. But now things necessary to salvation, I must distinctly know them, as those that are called articles of the Creed, the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments. Faith is an assent to, and built upon a divine testimony, without any other reason, whether as to things past, present, or to come. Things past, as the creation of the world: Heb. xi. 3, 'By faith we understand the worlds were created by the word of God.' If a man should hold the creation of the world upon some other reason that seemeth cogent unto him, and not upon the discovery of it in the word, certainly it is not faith, whatever it be, for faith assents to whatsoever is revealed by God. So for things present, that God sitteth in heaven, and Christ at his right hand. Stephen saw it by vision and ecstasy, but every believer seeth it by faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, as if with bodily eyes. So for things to come, as Christ's coming to judgment, John saw it in the light of prophecy: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God;' and they see it in the light of scripture and the promise. So that you see the objects of faith are things revealed by God, because revealed by him. If a man should believe the Christian religion upon tradition, or the current opinion where he liveth, it is not faith, but human credulity. Now the act of faith it is an assent, not knowledge but acknowledgment: the understanding hath a double act, apprehension or judgment; it judgeth of the truth of things apprehended, or apprehendeth the tenor of things, and then judgeth of the truth of them. They are not enlightened in a way of faith that are only able to talk of heavenly things, but such as are persuaded of the truth of them. And then mark the adjuncts, it is a firm and cordial assent.

1. It is a firm assent, and that excludeth many things from faith, as light credulity: Prov. xiv. 15, 'The simple believeth every word.' He that believeth everything without search and serious advertency, believeth nothing. And it excludeth bare non-contradiction. Many are thought to believe the religion they live under, because they do not question it. These can no more be said to believe than children are said to believe the questions and answers of the Catechism they have learned by rote. True faith knoweth the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed, Luke i. 4. And then it excludeth conjecture to be faith, which is a lighter inclination of the mind to a thing as probable; it may be so, yet there is a suspicion to

the contrary. Nay, it excludeth opinion, which goeth higher than conjecture, but cometh short of faith.

Well, now, thus far many go ; there may be an owning of the true orthodox religion, only out of custom, chance of birth, education, tradition of ancestors : they may talk much, as parrots repeat men's words by rote only. There may be convictions and opinions about them, they may be persuaded those things are true that are in the word of God, and yet no firm assent.

2. But to come nearer yet, the next adjunct it is a cordial and hearty assent, such as engageth the heart to Christ. We read in scripture of 'believing with the heart,' Rom. x. 9, and 'believing with all the heart,' Acts viii. 37. Truths are propounded to us in the scripture not only as true, but good things, of great weight and moment ; as well as certain. Believing is a hearty business ; now this cordial and hearty assent excludeth historical faith, and temporary faith.

[1.] Historical faith, which rests on a naked speculation, or a simple and naked assent to such things as are propounded in the word of God. This consisteth in a mere speculation of the mind, without any change of the bent of the will and affections. True faith ever overcomes all contrary inclinations and motions, so that God's interest may prevail above them : Heb. xi. 13, 'Being persuaded of them, they embraced them.' Those who have a mere historical faith are not excited to holy living ; are rendered more knowing, not better : this is a real faith in its kind. Simon Magus did really believe by the preaching of Philip, Acts viii. 13. It was not counterfeit, for it is said he wondered. And those in John ii. 24, that believed in the name of Christ, but Christ 'would not commit himself to them, for he knew all men.' And no question the devils do really believe, James ii., not only natural truths, but gospel truths : 'I know thou art the holy one of God.' What a confession is this out of the devil's mouth ! Therefore it is wrong to say that unregenerate men do not believe. Because this being the main business in hand, I will tell you why it is called historical faith. Not from the object of it, as if they only believed the histories of the scripture. No ; they believe promises, threatenings, doctrines, precepts, mysteries. But it is called historical faith from the manner wherewith it is conversant about its object. As we read histories in which we are no way concerned, only for contemplation and knowledge' sake, not to make a party in their broils, or interpose in their quarrels ; so they rest in idle speculations, which betters not the practice. Well, now, this speculative assent they may have ; this faith doth not only believe those things that are true, but doth heartily and truly believe them.

[2.] There is besides this, temporary faith ; that is, such an assent as is accompanied with a slight and insufficient touch upon the heart, called a taste, Heb. vi. 4, so that they do not only believe the truths of the gospel, but are tickled with some delight, and do in some measure find their hearts drawn off from worldly lusts and practices ; but the impression is not deep enough, nor the joy rooted enough to counterbalance all temptations to the contrary. They seem to have

their hearts loosened from the world, and to prefer Christ before the creature, as long as no temptations do assault, or sensual objects stand up in any considerable strength to entice them ; but then they bewray their weakness. But that faith that is serious and hearty doth so believe the promises of the gospel as to seek happiness in them, to make it his business so to believe the mysteries of our redemption as to build all his comfort and peace upon them, so believe the commands of God as to frame his heart to observe them ; in short, to improve everything to the use of holy living.

Secondly, The next theological grace is hope. Here was an expectation of the bridegroom's coming, as well as a belief of it. All Christians profess that they expect Christ to come to judgment, and many desire and hope to be entertained at the nuptial feast as well as others, and hope to go in with him into celestial joys. Now there may be much of this in temporaries, not only a bare profession, but some real motions this way. Oh, how often are they pressed to keep on this joy and comfort ! Heb. iii. 6, ' Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end ;' and Heb. iii. 14, ' For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end ;' and to maintain it with all serious diligence, Heb. vi. 11, that it may grow into more certainty. But to evidence this to you, let us see what Christian hope is. It seems to be described by the apostle, Rom. ii. 7, those that ' seek for life and immortality by patient continuing in well-doing ;' or a ' looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life,' Jude 21. Or more formally, a certain earnest or desirous expectation of blessedness promised, in that way wherein it is promised. We believe there is such a blessedness, therefore wait with earnestness and patience till it come to pass, and exercise ourselves with all diligence for the obtaining it. True hope ever quickeneth our diligence : Acts xxiv. 10, ' And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men.' Most interpreters say, ' Hereupon do I exercise myself.' He had spoken of the hope of Israel, so that it was upon the account of his hope he did use that diligence. But more plainly, Acts xxvi. 6, 7, ' Unto which hope our twelve tribes, serving God diligently, hope to come.' A man that hopeth for anything will earnestly pursue it in the way wherein it is to be obtained, and follow his work close day and night. There is a hope that is but a devout sloth, but the true Christian is lively and active : 1 John iii. 3, ' He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as Christ is pure.' Ignorant people say they hope well, that he that made them shall save them, but live as if they fled from heaven and salvation ; but the true hope encourageth us to hold on our course with diligence and cheerfulness, notwithstanding the troubles and difficulties and temptations we meet with in the way to it ; they make it their constant work and business. Now they that are unrenewed may go far in hope, especially when they are under the initial work of the Spirit ; they may have not only the careless man's hope, which is a slight and superficial hope, which groweth upon them they know not how, without any warrant or ground ; nor a dead and cold hope, which is the fruit of opinion, a loose and fond conjecture rather than a certain expectation ; but a hope that hath some life in it ; nor the presumer's hope, which is a lazy loitering

hope, that severeth the end from the means, but may have some lively tastes, which for a while sets them a-work in the spiritual life ; but the fault is, it is not so fixed as it should be, neither doth it beget in us that constant assiduous labour, seriousness and self-denial, but enough to keep up a blazing profession, but doth not make them so earnest for the possession of what they hope for.

Thirdly, The third theological grace is love or charity ; love to God, and love to our neighbour. There is somewhat of both here. They were well affected to the bridegroom ; they went forth to meet and carry lamps before him, for his honour as well as light ; and they went in consort and company with their fellow-virgins. So some are so well affected to the ways of God as to make profession of them to the people of God, so as to walk with them. But let me speak of love to God. Love to God is not a fellow-like familiarity, but ready subjection to his laws : ‘ If ye love me, keep my commandments,’ John xiv. 15, and 1 John v. 3, ‘ For this is love, that we keep his commandments.’ Now they may so far do this as to make profession of the ways of God, and walk blameless in them as to men, yet strangers to heart-mortification and a true preference of God in the soul. The knowledge of Christ may make men cleanse their external conversations, but live in secret love with some lusts, which they serve in a more cleanly manner. They love happiness more than holiness ; they love God, but do little for him. Labour and love are often spoken of ; they have not that active and serious diligence that is commanded in doing the things that please God. Then, for love to the brethren, they may magnify the people of God, Acts v. 13, join with them, and do many offices of love for them ; but the heart needs to be purified before there can be that ‘ unfeigned love to the brethren,’ 1 Peter i. 22. And it is not easy to hold on in the ways of God in all conditions. There are many sins contrary to the grace of love ; pride, envy, self-seeking, self-love, wrath. It must be such a love as floweth from holy principles, and breaketh out in real performances ; and this, to be carried out in a Christian manner, will be found very hard to do.

Second Reason. Though a common work may go far, it is not likely to hold out. Their lamps went out, and they had no vessels to supply them. Notwithstanding the sudden pangs and fervours, and forward profession of temporaries, yet usually they fail in the issue. They believe for a while, Luke viii. 13, and hope for a while : Col. i. 23, ‘ If ye continue steadfast, and be not moved from the hope of the gospel.’ Love for a while : Mat. xxiv. 12, ‘ The love of many shall wax cold ;’ and good reason ; partly because they have not the grace to which the promise of perseverance is made. There is *donum perseverantiae*, there is such a thing as the gift of perseverance, and it is assured by promise to special saving grace. Now they that have not this radicated state of grace, have not this promise ; for Christ saith, John iv. 14, ‘ The water that I shall give him, shall be a well of water springing up to eternal life.’ A cruse may fail, a bucket emptied, a pond dried up, but a fountain is ever flowing, and never dried up. Therefore David prayeth, ‘ Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.’ When the heart is not sound before God, disorders break out before men, and many that make a fair show for a while, afterwards shipwreck themselves, and all their credit

for godliness. And partly because where the heart is not thoroughly converted to God, evermore some temporal good thing lieth too close to the heart, and hath a deeper rooting there than grace can have. And these base and carnal delights will in time prevail over the interest God hath in the heart, Heb. xii. 13. That which is lame is soon turned out of the way: 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world.' Men of an unsound heart have some temptation or other that carrieth them quite off from God: as old Eli fell and broke his neck, so they break the neck of their profession.

Third Reason why many that are virgins come short of the nuptial feast. Because if they should hold out a constant profession, it will not be enough to qualify them for heaven and everlasting happiness. It is possible an unrenewed man may never fall from his profession, yet he can bring nothing to perfection. Luke viii. 13, the stony ground fell from their profession, but the thorny ground brought nothing to perfection. All are not exposed to great trials. Oh! nothing but a real conversion will qualify us for the kingdom of heaven. The foolish virgins' case was as fair and as good as the other, till the bridegroom came: Mat. xviii. 3, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' The sentence is absolute and peremptory. So John iii. 3, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nothing less than renewing grace will serve the turn. Be a man in appearance better or worse, a gross sinner, or a painted pharisee, a hopeful beginner, or one of long standing, 'Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God.'

Use 1. To show how far from salvation some are, if those that have some kind of faith, and hope, and love, may come short; as for instance—(1.) All practical atheists and infidels, that scoff at Christ's coming: 2 Peter iii. 3, 4, 'In the last days there shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying, Where is the promise of his coming?' Some, that they may sin the more securely, question the second coming of Christ, or banish out of their hearts the thoughts of the day of judgment. Many that went out to meet the bridegroom yet were foolish virgins, and were shut out. (2.) Flagitious persons, or scandalous sinners, that neither respect Christ nor his people, that make no show nor preparation, are neither virgins, nor do they take their lamps; if they have a historical certainty, not a temporary faith. How much then of the Christian world would be cut off before we come to an accurate and exquisite trial? 2 Peter iii. 11, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' and Gal. v. 24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof.' If this be a sure rule to try by, what a multitude of Christians are there that do not belong to Christ, that by a real profession have given up their names to him!

Use 2. Is caution to us all. Let us take heed we do not deceive ourselves, or rest satisfied with the picture of godliness. An army would be very cautious if they knew beforehand that one-half of them should be destroyed. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Among the virgin professors that hold out an honourable profession, many will be found foolish. Yea, when Christ had said, 'One of you shall betray me;' 'Lord, is it I, is it I?' said the disciples. Now you are here told, not one, but many. Now go home, and say,

Lord, is it I? In the purest churches many may lie hid and not discerned. Oh! therefore take not up with weak and groundless hopes.

1. Do not please yourselves by being of such a sect or such a profession. Men think the safest place to lie asleep in is Christ's own lap. If they are of such a party, they think they are safe; but consider, lead may be cast into all forms, an angel or devil, but it is lead still. Consider God is an exact and impartial judge: 1 Peter iii. 17, 'If you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth all men;' his people as well as others, if they build upon their profession. Do not content yourselves with a form of godliness, though never so strict; nor a name of godliness, though never so renowned. These were virgins, not defiled with error or idolatry, or the scandalous customs or fashions of the world; yet some of them were foolish virgins.

2. Do not content yourselves that you do not take up a profession and an intention of religion merely to serve the times and yourselves of it, not knowing yourselves intentionally and industriously to counterfeit; as Judas, that followed Christ for the bag, being in his heart a traitor and a thief from the beginning, John xiii. 6; or as Simon Magus at first hoped to make as good market of his new faith as his old sorcery, professed to believe in Christ out of design. Nay, a man that, for anything he knoweth or perceiveth, may think that he is in good earnest, yet he may be a temporary, though he is no temporiser. Christ knew them that knew not themselves, John ii. 24. To speak in a word, though you may know nothing of guile, yet do not content yourselves with that merely.

3. Do not rest in this, that you find some real work, and go no further. A man's heart may be softened, but not opened to the purpose: he may have a love and liking of religion, and yet not come under the power of it; some flashes of comfort, yet seek his happiness in worldly things; some desires and good inclinations, and yet be slothful and negligent in the main, in mortifying lusts, or not perfecting holiness, and fain would have some part in Christ, but yet make but slender preparation, get oil in his lamp, but not in his vessel; fain he would have the blessings of grace and glory, if bare wishes and desires would do it; fain would go to heaven, but would do nothing for it, unless it be in a lazy, cold, and dull preparation; doth not make it the chief business of his life to know the will of God and do it.

Use 3. Is to exhort us to be very serious in our preparation for the coming of the Lord; or, as the apostle cautions the Ephesians, Eph. v. 15, 16, 'See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' To this end consider—

1. That our whole life is nothing else but a preparation for Christ's coming. The common duty of all Christians is to go forth and meet the bridegroom; or, to make sure of life eternal is the necessary business we have to do in the world. Our whole life was appointed for this end, and all the time we spend here is worse than lost, if it be not employed and used for this end. It is now preparation time; these are the months of our purification for our immortal souls; therefore our continual care should be to make ready.

2. We may defer this work too long, we cannot begin it too soon. The foolish virgins would get oil in their vessels, but it was too late.

Never any complained of beginning with God too soon: many could have wished they had known the ways of righteousness sooner, Rom. xiii. 11; many have judged 'the time past more than enough,' 1 Peter iv. 3.

3. It is not so slight and easy a thing to get to heaven as the world imagineth: Mat. vii. 14, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter and shall not be able.' Many deceive themselves; it is not so broad as the opinions of some, as the practices of more would make it, and the carnal hearts of all would have it. Broader or narrower it cannot be than Christ hath left it. In the general, a man may come much too short, none go over. Oh! when you do but consider that many are afar off. Eph. ii. 13, and some are near, as Christ told the young man, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven;' and others are scarcely saved, and some enter abundantly, it concerns us therefore to take heed to ourselves.

4. This is your wisdom. There is a great deal of do in the world about wisdom: Job xi. 12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise.' A man cannot endure to be counted a fool, will sooner own a vice in morals than a weakness in intellects. Now wisdom lieth in providence, and folly in negligence, especially in weighty matters. These wise virgins provided oil in their vessels, and the wise builder built upon a rock. They are wise in God's account, whatever the world thinketh of them, that are wise for heavenly things, and govern their hearts and ways exactly, Eph. v. 14, 15; and they are fools that never mind the good of their souls.

What would you have us do? I will only press you to three things:—

[1.] Let your belief be sound and firm to the great articles of Christianity. It is faith enlivens all our notions of God: John vi. 69, 'We believe and are sure that thou art Jesus the Son of God.'

[2.] Let your resolutions for God be unbounded, Ps. cxix. 112. You never knew a man fall off from God, but he loved some secret lust, some corruption was left unmortified, though for the present it did not appear to the party himself; this in time will break out, and cause some scandalous fall.

[3.] I would have you put it out of all question by the lively exercise of your grace, and by your diligence in the spiritual life, Phil. ii. 12; and in time it will grow up into an evidence, 2 Peter i. 5; Luke xiii. 3. Nothing will yield you comfort but the exercising and increasing grace.

SERMON II.

They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.—MAT. XXV. 3, 4.

Nor only the openly wicked, those that eat and drink with the drunken, are rejected, but those that have some show of godliness; yea, hopeful beginnings, but not improved, is the drift of this parable.