

drowsy fits are coming on you, say as they in Jer. xxxv. 6, I dare not; my Father hath commanded me the contrary. Hath not God forbidden this? how can I rest in such a temper of soul?

6. Improve the death of Christ for the destroying this sleepy temper. The great design of Satan is to lull us asleep; now Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John iii. 8. Now, shall we tie those knots the faster that Christ came to unloose, and tear open those wounds that Christ came to bind up and heal? Therefore let this evil frame of soul be far from you.

SERMON V.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.—MAT. XXV. 5, 6.

THERE is one clause in the former verse that remaineth undiscussed, 'The bridegroom tarried,' which I shall speak to in this verse.

Where observe—

1. The time, *at midnight*.
2. The means of awakening the sleepy virgins, *there was a cry made*.
3. The matter of the cry, the unexpected coming of the bridegroom, *behold, the bridegroom cometh*.
4. An excitement to their duty, *go ye out to meet him*. Still the allusion is carried on to the matter from whence this parable is taken. There were virgins with the bridegroom, and virgins with the bride; and that the bridegroom might be received with esteem, and attended with all respect, some of them were to go before and raise the cry in season, to bring the virgins forth to meet him. So here, Christ sends a cry before him to admonish and exhort the church to prepare and meet him.

[1.] With respect to every particular soul, this cry is to be referred to the voice and importunity of them that are the children of the bride-chamber, or friends of the bridegroom, John iii. 29; who all tell us that the Lord is at hand, 1 Peter iv. 7; that he will shortly come, Heb. x. 37. And still the faithful ministers of the church do cry aloud, and call upon us to meet the bridegroom.

[2.] With respect to the general meeting of the church in one great rendezvous or congregation, it is meant of the trump of the archangel, spoken of in many places, which I shall quote by and by, calling us to come to judgment.

Doct. The bridegroom will certainly come, but at his own time; and then all shall be called upon to go forth to meet him.

I shall handle this point with respect to the circumstances of this parable.

1. I shall prove the certainty of his coming.
2. Speak of the tarrying of the bridegroom, or the delay of his coming.

3. His coming at midnight, or the uncertainty of the time when he will come.

4. The cry that is raised before his coming. Then I shall give every circumstance mentioned its due weight.

First, Of the certainty of his coming : it is needful to premise that, because the efficacy of the whole discourse dependeth upon it. Reason saith he may come, but faith saith he will come.

First, Reason saith he may come : It argueth—

1. From the nature of God. There is a God, and this God is just : it is agreeable to his general justice that it should be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do evil ; these principles are out of dispute, and supposed as the foundations of all religion. Now, supposing these principles, there must be a day of reckoning, for in the world the best go to the wall many times, and are exercised with poverty, disgrace, and scorn, when the wicked are full of plenty, and live at ease, Luke xvi. 25 ; 1 Cor. xv. 19. Sure it is that there is a God, and sure it is that he taketh care of human affairs, and will judge accordingly ; what is the reason then of this disproportion ? The wicked are reserved to future punishment, and the godly to future reward. Now the distinction that is put between men at death doth not suffice, for that is private, and doth not vindicate the justice of God in the eyes of the world, and that is but upon a part. We read of the spirits of just men made perfect, and the spirits that are now in prison ; but nothing of a reward for the body, or punishment for the body. The bodies of men, being servants of righteousness, or instruments of sin, surely ought to partake of weal or woe, of the curse or blessing that is due to the person ; for the body is, as Tertullian saith, the soul's sister and co-heir, and is to share with it in its estate. But at death the body is senseless, and mouldereth into dust, and till it be raised up again and joined to the soul, it can neither partake of weal or woe ; therefore there is a day when God will deal with the whole man ; otherwise, how shall the goodness of God, who is a liberal rewarder of virtue, appear, unless he render to the body a full recompense of the service it hath done the soul, in yielding up all its natural appetites, pleasures, interests, and satisfactions to the conduct of reason and grace, for the practice of that which is good ; or the justice of God, which is the avenger of sin, which would be too narrow and defective, unless it punish the body with the soul ? Usually the affections of the body debauch the soul, and the pleasures of the senses blind and misguide our reason. Certainly, the love of sin being rooted in bodily pleasures, it is fit it should be punished with pain, and such pain as is proportionable to the dignity of him against whom the offence is committed. Now God being of an infinite and unlimited dignity and authority, how could the punishment of the body by death be proportionable to the offence committed against an infinite God ? An outrage done to the supreme majesty of princes is punished more than an offence against an inferior person ; therefore there must be a time when the body shall be raised, to be capable of such a punishment. Besides, how could the soul be completely happy, since it was made for a body, if it should always remain a widow, and never meet with its old mate again ?

2. It argueth from the providence of God. There are many judgments that are pledges that God will at length judge the world for sin; as the drowning of the old world, the burning of Sodom, the destruction of Jerusalem; these are a document and proof what God will do to the rest of ungodly ones, for they are set forth as an ensample, Jude 7. The force of the argument lieth in this, that God is the same, still in one mind, who can turn him? He hateth the sin of one as well as the other. In all his dispensations he is always consonant and like himself, Gal. iii. 20. If he would not put up with the sins of the old world, he will not put off the iniquities of the new; if he punished Sodom, he will punish others that sin in like manner; for he is not grown more indulgent to sin than he was before. Therefore, if it be not now, there will be a time when he will call them to an account and reckoning. When man first sinned, God did not immediately execute the sentence against him, but gave him time of repentance till he died; and since he giveth every man time and space, he would not have all the world be born at once, and die at once, but to live in several successions of ages, from father to son in divers generations, till he cometh to the period which providence hath fixed. Now, as he reckoneth with every man particularly at death, so with all the world at the end of time. Particular judgments show that God is not asleep, nor unmindful of human affairs, but the general judgment is deferred till then.

3. From the feelings of conscience. After sin committed men tremble, though there be none to call them to an account, as when the sin is secret, and the person powerful. Conscience is under a dread of divine justice, and the solemn process and triumph which one day it must have; hence conscience is sensible: Rom. ii. 8, Felix trembled when Paul reasoned of judgment to come, Acts xxiv. 25. There are hidden fears in the conscience, which is soon revived and awakened by the thought of this day. Every guilty person is a prisoner to divine justice, and being held in the invisible chains of conscience, standeth in dread of a great and general assize.

4. The conveniency of such a day.

[1.] To vindicate truth and honesty from the false judgment of the world. The best cause is often oppressed; there needeth a review of things by a higher court, that that which is good may be restored to its public honour, and evil may receive its proper shame. Christ will convince the world of his love to the saints, when he cometh 'to be admired in them,' 2 Thes. i. 10, and when their faith is 'found to praise and glory,' 1 Peter i. 7. Thus shall it be done to the men whom Christ will honour, proclaim their pardon, adorn them with grace, introduce them into their everlasting habitations, and this in the eyes of the scorning wicked; as that nobleman, 'Thine eyes shall see it, but not taste of it.' Then for their everlasting confusion, their crimes shall be repeated in the ears of all the world, and their false appearances shall be refuted.

[2.] That the counsels and courses of God's manifold wisdom and justice may be solemnly applauded. We now view providence by pieces; but then the whole context and coherence of it shall be set together, and the full history of all the world produced before the saints.

[3.] Such a coming is necessary, that God may fit us with all kind of arguments against sin, and so a restraint will be put upon the heart against it. Many times sin and wickedness is acted in secret: Eccles. xii. 14, 'God will bring every work into the judgment, with every secret thought, whether it be good or evil;' and 1 Cor. iv. 5, 'Christ will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart.' Many make no conscience of secret sins, and if they make conscience of acts, yet not of thoughts; yet according to Christ's theology, malice is heart-murder, lustful inclinations heart-adultery, mind-imaginations are heart-idolatry. There may be a great deal of evil in a discontented thought against providence, Ps. lxxiii. 22. He that sinneth secretly is conscious to himself that he doth evil, and therefore seeketh a veil and covering. Men are unjust in secret, unclean in secret, envious in secret, declaim against God's children in secret, neglect duty in secret, sensual in secret, afraid that men should know it, yet not afraid of the great God. Man cannot damn us, man cannot fill our consciences with everlasting burnings. Now that we may be ashamed to commit those sins before God, the day of judgment is appointed to set these sins in order before us: Ps. i. 22, 'I will reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thee.'

Secondly, If it be doubtful to reason, it is sure to faith. Faith showeth he will come. The light of faith is more certain and more distinct. More certain, because it buildeth upon a divine testimony, which is more infallible than the guesses of reason, and yields us a more compendious way to confute atheism than our arguings, by which we are often entangled. It is so, for God hath said it. And it is more distinct. Nature could never find out the circumstances of that day; it only apprehendeth the coming of a judge; but by whom this judgment shall be managed, in what quality he shall come, as a bridegroom, and lord, and husband of the church, it knoweth nothing. In what manner he shall proceed, and with what company and attendance, all this we have from special revelation. Faith argueth—

1. From Christ's merit and purchase. Would he buy us at so dear a rate, and cast us off so lightly, as to come no more at us? Surely he that came to redeem us will come to save us; if he came to suffer, he will come to triumph. Faith seeing Christ upon the cross, determineth, I shall see him in the clouds. Would he be at all this cost and preparation for nothing, and purchase what he never meant to possess? It cannot be. If he came from heaven upon the one errand, will he not come upon the other? Surely Christ will not lose all this pains he hath taken to purchase to himself a people.

2. Faith argueth from Christ's affection to us, which is very great. Christ is not gone in anger, but about business, to set all things at rights for the great espousals. He that woeth a virgin, if he went away from her in anger, she might well suspect he would never see her again. As bridegrooms use to fetch their brides, so will Christ; we should never come at him otherwise: his love will not let him rest satisfied till we and he meet again to enjoy one another's company. Certainly he who delighted among the sons of men before the world was, Prov. viii. 31, who delighted to converse with his people in

human shape before his incarnation, who took pleasure to spend his time busily amongst them, and to 'dwell with them in the days of his flesh,' John ix. 45; in short, he that had a mind of returning before he went away, certainly he will once more leave heaven for their sakes. When he hath done his work there, he will return, and bring his people along with him to glory, and the full fruition of the promises. He will stay no longer than our affairs do require, John xiv. 3.

3. The affections of his saints to him, which Christ will satisfy. There are many that never saw him, and yet believed in him, and loved him heartily: 1 Peter i. 8, 'In whom believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' and John xx. 29, 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed.' Their faith is not misplaced, they shall find him such a one as was to be believed, loved, and obeyed. Now, to gratify their desires, Christ will appear and show himself: 'With these eyes shall I see my redeemer.' The children of God cannot look to heaven, but they remember they have a Saviour to come from thence: Phil. iii. 20, 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' Paul speaketh in his own name, and in the name of all those like himself. And Rev. xxii. 17, 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come.' The Holy Ghost breedeth the desire, and the church answereth the motion. Nature saith not, Come, but, Stay still. If it might go by voices, whether Christ should come or no, would carnal men give their votes this way? The voice of corrupt nature is, Depart, Job xxii. 14. Carnal men are of the mind of the devil: 'Art thou come to torment us before our time?' Mat. viii. But the Spirit in the bride raiseth these desires. Now, would Christ disappoint these desires which he hath raised in the hearts of his children, and set them a-longing, and a-looking, and a-groaning for that which shall never be? It cannot be imagined.

4. From the constitution of the church. He hath dispensed gifts and graces there, and left ordinances there; and he will come, and require an account of things during his absence, how we have improved our talents, Mat. xxv. 31, how things have been managed in his house: 1 Tim. vi. 14, 'Keep my commandments without rebuke, till the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.' Christ is now removed from us, retired within the curtains of the heavens; but he will come again: 1 Cor. xvi. 22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema maranatha;' that is, cursed till the Lord come.

5. From his promise. We have his word in pawn. It is an ancient promise, made long ago: Jude 15, 'Behold the Lord cometh;' and hath been received in all ages by the Lord's messengers; Moses, and David, and Solomon, and Daniel, and Job, and Zechariah, and Malachi; and revived by Christ at his departure, John xiv. 3; by the angel, Acts i. 11. And the apostles everywhere put us in mind of Christ's coming. Now we may reason thus: *Fidelis Deus in omnibus, in ultimo non deficiet.* God hath ever stood to his word, many inter-venient providences, yet promises still accomplished; not one word of God hath failed. Every one that hath had experience of God may

make that acknowledgment that Joshua did : Josh. xxiii. 14, ' Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you.' As unlikely things have come to pass, that have been foretold in the word. Were the old believers deceived, that expected his coming in the flesh? Surely God never meant to deceive us. He will come again : ' If it were not so, I would have told you,' John xiv. 3. Christ's deed and performance never gave his word the lie.

6. His promise is solemnly confirmed—

[1.] By an outward sign and memorial : 2 Cor. xi. 26, ' For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death until he come.' God knew he had to do with distrustful creatures, therefore left a monument to keep the promise a-foot in the church, and to revive our hopes. Would Christ institute an ordinance for the solemn remembrance of his appearing, if he meant no more to come at us?

[2.] By a real pledge, his Spirit dwelling in us. He is gone to heaven, to prepare heaven for us, and hath left his Spirit with us to prepare us for heaven. He hath left his Spirit in the church, and doth give out frequent tokens of love, to show that he doth not forget us. Christ and a believer are not strange. There is a constant intercourse between them. We are absent from him in the body, but there are frequent messages of love. We hear from him in the word, prayer, supper, and will he not come again that is so mindful of us at every turn? He did not forget us in his exaltation, as the butler forgot Joseph; when preferred at court, he did not remember Joseph in prison. Now, in his Father's house, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and will not always leave us liable to sinning and suffering. Surely he that quickeneth us by the influences of his grace, and refresheth us with the tastes of his love, he will come again. In short, what would our faith be worth if Christ would not come again? Here we have but a slender enjoyment of Christ; our full communion is when he taketh us to himself.

Secondly, I shall now speak of the tarrying of the bridegroom, ' While the bridegroom tarried.' What! is Christ more backward than the church, that goeth forth to meet him? They are ready with their lamps, but he delayeth his coming.

Ans. 1. Some understand it of our opinion, not the reality of the thing. Though Christ come always with the soonest, yet to us he seemeth to tarry. Why? Because earnest desires crave a present satisfaction, and ' hope deferred maketh the heart sick,' Prov. xiii. 12; and Prov. x. 26, ' As vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.' Expectation is in itself tedious, especially when accompanied with difficulties. Certainly being accompanied with present troubles, it is more tedious. The flesh groweth impatient after its own ease; and in this sense the bridegroom is not slack, but we are hasty. I do observe it the rather, because the same happeneth when we expect Christ to help us in our particular distresses. Because of the impatiency of the flesh, and the levity of our minds, and the weariness of expectation, the time seemeth

long. There is our time, and Christ's time. Our time is always with us, but his time is not come: Jer. xiv. 19, 'We looked for peace, and there is no good; for the time of healing, and behold trouble.' In this sense Christ only seemeth to delay his coming. We are eager upon enjoyment, we would have it now.

Ans. 2. Really. He doth tarry, and suspends his coming. There is a great efflux of time between his ascension and second coming, and that for wise reasons.

1. That all this while there may be space for the world to repent. *Mora sponsi pœnitentię tempus est*, saith Jerome: Rom. ii. 4, 'Despistest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' There is *finis operis et operantis*. Whatever God's intentions be, his dealings, his forbearance and long-suffering should lead us to repentance. God useth great patience to the wicked: Rom. ix. 22, 'Endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.' So Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent, and she repented not.' God giveth leave to repent, visible means to repent, and space to repent, even there where he giveth not effectual grace. Wicked men abuse his patience, take encouragement from thence to run into all extravagancy; but God's aim is to leave them without excuse.

2. That all the elect may be gathered: 2 Peter iii. 9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' God would have the world filled with mankind, and endure for many generations, till it come to that period which his providence hath appointed. And what is that period? Till all that belong to the election of his grace be brought in to him; for all things are for the elect's sake. Now when his number is full, he will come. These were not to be born all at once; and it requireth time and pains to work upon each elect soul after they are come into the world: therefore 'he is not slack as men are slack.' Men's slowness in performing their promises cometh from their unwillingness, or backwardness to do the thing; or from impotency and weakness, or want of foresight of all possible difficulties; or else from their forgetfulness. None of these are in God: not forgetfulness; for 'he is mindful of his people,' Ps. cxi. 5. He will not stay longer than the appointed time. Not backwardness; for he waiteth, as well as you wait, for the fittest time, Isa. xxx. 18. Not from weariness; for he can do whatever he will.

3. To exercise our patience to the full: Col. i. 24, 'Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you; that fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in the flesh for his body's sake, which is his church.' Not as if Christ's personal sufferings for the redemption of sinners were imperfect, and so to be supplied by the sufferings of others: no; it is meant of Christ mystical. So the sufferings are not perfect, or filled up, till every member of his body endure their allotted portion and share. This cup goeth by course, and round: Christ first, we next. It goeth from hand to hand, while the world continueth: James i. 4, 'Let patience have its perfect work.' That cannot be but under

great and long troubles. And as it is for the exercise of our patience, so to awaken our desires: 2 Peter iii. 12, 'Looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of God.' Hasten it by your prayers, and further the great works that are to be done before. God will not bestow heaven upon us as we lay on gilding and fair colours on wood or stone, that have no sense of it, nor desire of it; but we must first groan, Rom. viii. 23.

Thirdly, His coming at midnight. He tarried somewhat beyond the season, to show that he would come unlooked for. Jerome saith it was an ancient tradition that Christ should come at midnight; and therefore in the vigil, or watch before Easter, anciently they were not wont to be sent away till midnight: 'But of that day and hour knoweth no man.' It is put for an unexpected time; as Zech. xiii. 9, 'At evening it shall be light.' Christ cometh when he is least expected, when the world groweth secure, and his own people weary with looking. His coming is often compared in scripture to the coming of a thief in the night: 1 Thes. v. 2, 'For ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night;' by way of surprise; the thief doth not make appointment, nor forewarn the good man of the house: Luke xii. 46, 'The Lord of those servants shall come in a day that he looketh not for him.' Now God hideth this day from us.

1. To show his sovereignty: Prov. xxv. 2, 'The glory of God is to conceal a thing.' There are *arcana imperii*: and the time and season of his coming to judgment is one of God's secrets.

2. That we might always keep ready: Rev. iii. 3, 'Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee;' and Rev. xvi. 15, 'Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth.' Cæsar would never let his soldiers know his resolution for battle onset, or the removal of his camp, *ut paratum et intentum momentis omnibus quo vellet statim educeret*, that they might be always in a ready posture. So Christ's coming at the last day will be by way of surprisal, that he may have us always ready. Had it been expedient for us to know, he would have told us of it. Men will say, if they knew just the hour and the day, they would be found praying. But you should always watch and be ready, because you 'know not the hour.' Would our preparation be hastened, think you? No; we should say as they, Isa. xxii. 13, 'And behold joy and gladness, slaying of oxen, and killing of sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die;' and 1 Cor. xv. 32, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' Therefore Christ will choose his own time.

Fourthly, I come to speak of the cry made. The cry is the means whereby God rouseth them up out of this slumber. Christ sendeth his cry to awaken souls before his coming. This cry is twofold:—

1. The more remote cry; which is for the rousing of particular persons in all ages; and that is the voice of the ministry of the word. Thus Christ at his first coming had a crier went before him to alarm the world, and prepare them for his reception; and that was John the Baptist: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness.' So still before his second coming he hath some to raise a cry. The cry of the word

is often spoken of in scripture: Prov. i. 24, 'I cried to them, and they would not hear.' So Isa. lviii. 1, 'Cry aloud, lift up thy voice like a trumpet.' And it is the great means to awaken us out of our security. All God's faithful servants in all ages have been crying, 'The Lord is at hand.' Our work is to rouse up the hearts of men, that they may be prepared more and more for the joyful receiving of Christ at his coming. We should not keep silence, nor deal sleepily. It is a convincing powerful word that is a cry; and it is your duty to be awakened by the cry. If this word be not entertained, he hath his rod: Ps. ii. 5, 'Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.' So Micah vi. 9, 'The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city; and the man of wisdom shall see thy name. Hear ye the rod, and him that hath appointed it.' We shall hear the voice of the rough teacher. The word crieth; and if the word be not heard, the rod crieth. We need all kinds of excitations to rouse us out of our careless walking, and heartless praying, and negligent sleepy thoughts; that we may think more seriously of the coming of the bridegroom.

2. There is a more immediate and general cry, for rousing and raising up all at once; and that is the trump of the archangel, spoken of in many places: John v. 28, 29, 'The dead in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation.' The means employed in the resurrection is the voice of Christ Jesus, who shall 'descend with a shout,' 1 Thes. iv. 16, and with the 'sound of a trumpet' sounded by angels: Mat. xxiv. 31, 'He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet.' So 1 Cor. xv. 52, 'The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.' Christ, that had a forerunner at his first coming, hath also at his second. This trumpet soundeth to summon all to appear before Christ's tribunal to be judged. There was an audible trumpet at the giving of the law, Exod. xix. 20. This sound shall be heard all the world over.

Use 1. Let us improve this to the particular use of Christ's coming, either in a way of mercy to his people, or in a way of judgment.

1. In a way of mercy. The Lord tarrieth sometimes when men think he should come sooner: John xi. 6, Jesus loved Lazarus; and he abode still two days in the same place that he was when he heard that he was sick. Let there be no misconstruction. It is not want of love, nor want of power: he could raise him up when he was ready to stink. He may delay our help till a fit time come, wherein his glory may shine forth, and the mercy be more conspicuous. To come late is many times the best time. God keepeth back his best blessings for a while; and detaineth them long in his own hands before they come unto us. Therefore wait his leisure. Expectation is tedious, and reckoneth every minute. Strong desires are importunate; and usually we go by an ill count: not by eternity, but time. The timing of all things is in God's hand; not left to our foolish fancies, but his wise ordering. The dial sometimes goeth before the sun; so doth our time before God's time. We would make short work for faith and patience; and so our graces would not be found to praise and honour. In all such cases let us remember—

[1.] The Lord hath chosen the fittest time, Eccles. iii. 11; it will not

come one jot too soon, or too late; but the fittest time for him to give and us to receive.

[2.] God is very precise in keeping his time: Exod. xii. 41, 42, 'And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the host of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.'

[3.] God stayeth for us, rather than we for him. Christ will come before we are ready. The great let of mercy was, the people's hearts were not prepared.

[4.] Every delay will bring some advantage. There is somewhat more of ourselves, and somewhat more of God to be discovered: some intervening experience that is worth the having, before full and final deliverance cometh, Isa. xl. 31; Ps. cxxxviii. 39.

2. In a way of judgment. Sometimes Christ raiseth the cry, and giveth notice of great changes. It concerneth us to take notice of this voice, that we may not be taken unprovided: Amos iv. 12. 'Thus will I do unto thee; prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.' When God threateneth, we had need make serious preparation how we shall prevent or bear the stroke of an angry God. It is good counsel: Luke xiv. 31, 32, 'When a king goeth to war against another king, he sitteth down and considereth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth terms of peace.' There needs in such cases serious preparation. The work will be the more difficult when the storm is broken out upon you.

Use 2. We may improve this as to his coming to us by death, or rather our coming to him. The end of time and all things in it are near to every particular person. Christ and we are to meet shortly; it should be our care to meet him by true and serious repentance, that we may meet him with joy. We are frail creatures, and within a very little while death will summon us to appear before the Lord; and when you die, you are speedily to come to your trial. Now are all things ready?

1. Is Christ your bridegroom? Was there ever a solemn covenant struck between you and him, as Hosea iii. 3, by renouncing all other husbands, and giving up yourselves to do his will?

2. Are your lamps burning, your graces kept in exercise, and shining forth to the Lord's glory? Are you in a constant and continual readiness to have immediate communion with Christ, or to set sail into the world to come? It should be a cheerful thing to you to depart hence, Phil. i. 23.

3. Have you oil in your vessels; such a deep and powerful work as will keep up this affection? Are these things in you, and 'abound in you'? 2 Peter i. 8-11. What hast thou that others have not, that shall never see God's face? Can you say as Christ, John xvii. 4, 'I have glorified thee upon earth; I have finished the work thou hast given me to do'? Have you been adding one grace to another, so

that now you have nothing to do but to wait for the crowning of all?

Use 3. We should improve it as to Christ's general coming. If it be so that the bridegroom will certainly come, but at his own time—

1. Then be not of the number of those scoffers and mockers that either deny or doubt of his coming. The most part of men expect no such matter; the profane scoff at it, and would fain shake off this bridle and restraint upon their lusts, 2 Peter iii. 3. Therefore take heed of the whispers of atheism, which would tempt us to turn unto the world and present things, and give over our hopes. Most men's faith about the eternal recompenses is but pretended, at best but too cold and speculative; an opinion rather than a sound belief, as appeareth by the little fruit and effect it hath upon them; for if we had such a belief of them as we have of other things, we should be 'other manner of persons, in all holy conversation and godliness.' Two things are to be wondered at, viz., that any man should doubt of the Christian faith that is acquainted with it; and that, having embraced it, should live sinfully and carelessly. Therefore believe it as if you saw it: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead,' &c.

2. Take heed of apprehending it as a thing afar off; look upon it as sure and near, to hasten your preparation. It cannot be long to the end of time, if we compare the remainder with what is past, and the whole with eternity: Ps. xc. 4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.' Alas! it is nothing to the true measure of things: 'He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.' Therefore we should have more quick and lively thoughts and apprehensions about it, such as will awaken us out of our security.

3. Take heed of a cold and ineffectual thinking of it. There is a certain time appointed, and when that appointed time is come, he will certainly appear; therefore look for it and long for it. The saints are described by their looking for it: Titus ii. 13, 'Looking for the blessed hope;' Phil. iii. 20, 'From whence we look for a Saviour;' and Heb. ix. 28. Actual expectation enliveneth all our actions. Rebecca espied Isaac a great way off. Faith and hope standeth ready to embrace him. And also by their longing for it, 2 Tim. iv. 8; Rev. xxii. 17, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.' Long for it for Christ's sake, and your own sakes. For Christ's sake: His interest is concerned in it, that the glory of his person may be cleared. His first coming was obscure; but now he will come in great splendour, accompanied with his holy hosts, ten thousands of saints and angels: 1 Peter iv. 13, 'That when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.' His justice will then be demonstrated: Acts xvii. 31, 'He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness;' and 2 Thes. i. 6, 7, 'It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you that are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed with his mighty angels.' And long for it for your own sake; it is a day of the manifestation of the sons of God, Rom. viii. 19. Then you shall receive your reward to the full: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Then is the fullest manifestation of the love of God.

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