



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 25:1–13

Gospel of Matthew

“The Ten Virgins, or the  
Qualifications for the Kingdom”

TRANSCRIPT

Now, our subject for this morning is “The Ten Virgins, or the Qualifications for the Kingdom,” and our Scripture reading is found in Matthew chapter 25 verse 1 through verse 13. So if you have your New Testaments, will you turn there and listen as I read these verses? I do want to make as I give the Scripture reading this morning one or two comments concerning the text which can be made now, and then I won’t have to say anything about them when the message follows in a few moments. The 25th verse begins, and remember the context is the context of the Olivet Discourse, the great prophetic discourse of our Lord,

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,  
who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”

A number of early manuscripts, some very early ones, add the words after bridegroom, “and the bride.” Dr. Chafer at Dallas Seminary used to love to make note of that, because the addition of the phrase, to meet the bridegroom and the bride, fit in well with his understanding of this passage, and so he liked that variant reading and used to comment upon it, and generally took it to be a genuine reading. Dr. Chafer Schaffer did not know Greek, and he did not know textual criticism, and

so what he did was just purely instinctive, and as is sometimes the case, the instinctive understanding of things based on the analogy of Scripture, the comparison of Scripture with Scripture, leads one to that which is true even though the technical knowledge may not be there.

Many modern scholars feel that that reading is a genuine reading at this place, because the early church had the idea not the biblical church but the early church following the New Testament times had the idea that when our Lord returned he would return *for* his bride, rather than with his bride, and so this text which says that they went out to meet the bridegroom *and the bride* would have been contrary to their ideas of what would happen when our Lord returned in his Second Advent, and so it is the opinion of many modern scholars that the words were eliminated by an early scribe in the manuscript tradition because they did not agree with their theology, and that certainly makes sense, because the scribes often did this.

It may well be that we are to read the words to meet the bridegroom and the bride, and in a moment, when I expound the text I’m going to say that I think—and I only say think—I think that that is the sense, whether the words are there specifically or not. Well, let’s continue with the reading in the 2nd verse:

“And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. For (add the word for, since the original text has a “for” at this point) for they that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all (this could be rendered “fell asleep” and went on slumbering.) They all fell asleep and were slumbering. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.”

(This text is interesting for those of you interested in the Bible, because if you travel to the British Museum, one of the things that you will see in the manuscript section, is some of the old manuscripts that they have in their collection. And one of the manuscripts which they have is Codex Alexandrinus, one of the leading manuscripts of the New Testament, and that manuscript begins with the 6th verse of Matthew chapter 25. It begins there, incidentally, not because the other chapters were not there, originally, but they have been lost, so this text is interesting from that standpoint.)

“But the cry is Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 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 going out present tense. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: (I think this probably should be rendered something like this.) We are afraid there is no possibility of there being enough for both of us, but go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage (probably we are to understand this as the marriage feast which was the consummation of the marriage) and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Now of course as we look at this from the standpoint of what is meant here, when it says, I know you not, or in the parallel, I have never known you, the force is the force of the same expression in 2 Timothy where the apostle says, “The Lord knoweth them that are his and let him

that nameth the name of Christ depart from inequity.” The knowledge is not the knowledge of identity, but the knowledge of selection and relationship. I know you not.

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word.

The Lord Jesus has answered the apostles’ questions concerning the doctrine of the Second Advent, and has turned to application of the things that he has been teaching them. The central thought of these verses in the central section of the Olivet Discourse is the thought of preparedness the importance of being ready.

We have seen this is several of the texts. We were first warned by our Lord that the coming is like lightning that shines out of the east and shines to the west, and we are told that the coming of the Son of man shall be like a flash of lightning, and then several times we are told to be ready. In the 42nd verse of the 24th chapter we read “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” And then in the 44th verse the Lord has said “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” So the thought that the Lord has been trying especially to set forth is that the coming of our Lord Jesus is uncertain, not only is it uncertain as to time, but it is unexpected. In fact, at the very moment that we think that it might not come, then his coming shall take place.

It is a warning, also against life as usual, and he turns to Noah in the days of Noah to stress the fact that just as life was going on as usual before the flood, so life will be going on as usual before the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. There was English king of many centuries ago whose name was Ethelred. He never was ready and consequently, when the enemies of England attacked them, the only thing he could do was to try to buy them off, and he came to be known as Ethelred the

Unready. Now that might be a good name for many of us who are Christians if we are not careful to watch for the coming of our Lord Jesus.

Not content with illustrations to enforce his point, he brings out of his treasure an old medium, the parable, which we have not had for some time, and using the parable he further underlines the point that we are to be ready to watch. It seems plain that since this passage that we have read concludes with, watch therefore, that the main point he is trying to stress is the fact that we should be ready, that we should be prepared for the Second Advent.

But is there more than this? Perhaps so. What is preparedness? What does it mean, objectively, to be prepared. What does it mean, subjectively, to be prepared? Why should we be prepared? Well perhaps we can answer that very easily. What lies before those who are prepared? If we were to try to sum up what is said in this parable using something of the terms of the parable, it would be something like this. We would say objectively, preparedness is having one's lamp burning. That seems to be the point to have the oil—to have the lamp burning. And further, that qualifies us for an entrance into the messianic blessing. That seems to be that which lies back of the marriage feast.

Subjectively, looking particularly at the foolish virgins, subjectively, readiness is having one's vessel full of oil. And since oil is a standard symbol in Scripture for the Holy Spirit, then the point would be that subjectively, readiness consists in a vital relation to the life-giver. That is the having of reality in one's life not simply the form of godliness but having the power of it.

Walt Whitman was once listening to a lecture given by an astronomer. He said the hall was stuffy, and the lecturer was very dull. The subject was uninteresting to him, and finally when he could stand it no more. He got up he walked out of the stuffy hall, went out under the skies and took a look up at the stars themselves and he spoke of what it meant to him to look at the reality. The truth is that many of us, even those of us who are genuine Christians, spend a lot of time poring over the charts and diagrams of the truth of the Word of God, but often we have not really entered into a personal experience of it.

Now it is possible for us to be very active in religious things and not to have entered into an experience of that saving relationship with the Lord. That is important. We'll say something about that in a moment. And it is also possible that we as Christians who have truly believed know a great deal more truth objectively, perhaps in our knowledge, that we have not truly experienced. And so the text it seems to me has a word for both forms of indifference to spiritual things. The indifference of the unsaved and the different the indifference of the saved.

Our Lord begins after his warnings concerning the second coming and the need of preparedness for it. He begins his parable by saying then. Now that, then, is temporal, it seems to me, and it marks the connection, so that we are to think of the parable of the ten virgins as a parable of attitudes that one should have with reference to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. I think that this would indicate that what he has in mind is the time just preceding the Second Advent, and that the different attitudes that we may have are reflected then in this parable of the ten virgins.

You'll notice he talks about wise virgins and foolish virgins and just above he has said in verse 45, who then is a faithful and wise servant? So now he illustrates what it is to be a wise servant, and in the parable of the talents that follows, he will illustrate what it is to be a faithful servant. So these two parables illustrate the two sides of that statement, who then is a faithful and wise servant. A servant is to be both faithful, and he is to be wise. So we are going to talk about wisdom.

The story, the story of virgins who go out to meet the bridegroom and the bride as they return to the bridegroom's home to consummate the marriage is not a made up story. It's true to Palestinian life; true I think also to Eastern life in general. I do believe that the situation is, the bridegroom returns with the bride to his home for the feast. That has been debated, but that happens to be my own interpretation of it, and I hold it a little loosely because it is possible in this case that I am wrong as well as in other cases, but you know my penchant for being dogmatic, and so I want you to know that, occasionally, I do hold something rather loosely. I think that is the background.

Now I say this is not a made up story, because it illustrates the kinds of customs that they had concerning marriage. Now we look back in the past, and we see these customs and we say, my

wasn't it strange to have customs like that? For example, there were three stages in an ancient marriage. There was the stage of engagement. Now the engagement was made by the parents of the young man and the young lady. They concluded the arrangements, and certain promises were made, and the engagement took place arranged totally by the parents. Now I know that young people think that would be very, very bad, but I'm not at all sure that it is bad.

As a matter of fact, I think I know a half a dozen marriages that would be a whole lot better if they had been arranged that way. Very often young people become involved with someone contrary to their parents' wishes and then, while occasionally those marriages do turn out all right; we do know of many illustrations of that. Nevertheless, very often, the parents are proved to have been the wise ones, and if the young people had followed their parents' advice, their marriages would not have broken up.

The second stage was the stage of betrothal. This was a ceremony a brief ceremony that was held at the bride's house and there mutual promises were exchanged by the contracting parties before witnesses. This was regarded as very significant. It was very binding. In fact it was so binding that if the bridegroom died before the marriage feast, held later, the bride was regarded as a widow even though the marriage had not been consummated.

Then finally about a year after the betrothal, the bridegroom would go to the bride's house, and he would take the bride, and they would have a marriage procession back to his own house which was to be their house. I think it is then that the virgins would come out to meet the procession. They would enter into the bridegroom's home, the doors would be shut, and the marriage feast would be celebrated. And this marriage feast frequently lasted for about a week and everybody rejoiced over the wedding. I'm sure that other things took place too, then. But that is ancient marriage, and that's the background of this little story that our Lord tells. I think it's important to remember that, because if we are to understand this passage we must understand those customs.

Now another thing that I want you to notice in the first verse is this. I think really this is a comment that pertains to this whole story. You’ll notice as you read through here that a great stress rests upon the virgins. Nothing is said about the bride specifically unless that reading is genuine at the end of verse 1. So the stress rests upon the virgins, and the stress rests upon the bridegroom. These are the two stresses of the parable, it seems.

There is a great deal of elaboration of detail here. We have the marriage procession, we have the oil, we have the lamps, we have the vessels in which the supply of the oil was contained, we have them meeting the bridegroom, we have the cry the bridegroom comes, we have the marriage feast, we have the shutting of the door, the attempt on the part of the foolish virgins to buy oil, their failure to do so, and their exclusion. All of this elaboration of detail leads us to believe that in this case, we should make some effort to identify the parties of this parable.

Now we must be careful in interpreting parables not to exercise our ingenuity above that which is proper, but I believe it is fair to say that we should identify the virgins, and we should attempt to make one or two other identities which we shall try to do as we go along.

With reference to the virgins the context suggests it seems to me very strongly the future generation of Israel that shall be upon the earth at the time of our Lord’s Advent. One thing that makes me think that is because verse 51 of chapter 24 ends with, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now we don’t have time to look at the passages that we have had this expression previously in the Gospel of Matthew, but there are a number of them. Chapter 8 verse 12 for example, and chapter 13 and verse 42, and then verses 49 and 50 of chapter 13, and verse 13 of chapter 22. In each one of these occurrences of the expression, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, the reference is to the sons of the kingdom or the generation of Israelites that shall be upon the earth at the time of the Second Advent. And since chapter 25 begins with, then at that time, I think that’s the preferable rendering here. Then we are to look forward to that generation that shall be on the earth when our Lord returns to the earth.



The virgins then suggest the future generation of the nation Israel. The bride, well it is more difficult to identify the bride, but since the virgins themselves are not the bride, we probably should identify the bride as the church of our Lord Jesus. There's one other thing I think we need to bear in mind as we read through and study through this parable, and it is this. That there are two levels of meaning in this parable, and I think this is true of almost all of the parables of the Gospel of Matthew—well really of the Gospels—but particularly of the Gospel of Matthew. There is an eschatological level of meaning, or a prophetic level of meaning, which is related to the grammatical, what we call grammatical-historical interpretation of the passage: what it essentially meant historically to the author and to the reader.

Now the eschatological meaning or the grammatical-historical meaning of this parable is simply this, that we have here the qualifications for entrance into the messianic marriage feast, or the kingdom of God upon the earth. Here are the qualifications for being a part of our Lord's millennial kingdom. That is the essential meaning of this parable, the parable of the ten virgins. But as is true of all of the passages of the Word of God, we have not only the grammatical-historical meaning, but we also have generally personal truth or principles that are found in each of these passages.

Now in this case the personal truth or the principle that is important here is the necessity of reality in one's spiritual life if there is to be true possession of the reality. So that in the stress upon the necessity of the virgins having a supply of oil that their lamps may truly burn, we are taught here the necessity of having a personal relationship to the king if we are to enter into that kingdom.

Now that is a truth that pertains to all parts of the Word of God. If there is one thing that is stressed in the Bible it is that it is insufficient to have a profession of faith alone. And we really do need that in the 20th century, and we really do need it in our evangelical churches. Because there are many who sit in evangelical churches, just like this evangelical church, who attend the meetings week after week and who have a measure of outward interest in spiritual things, but who do not have a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus. That is evident by the way of life that characterizes them. If it

were not for the fact that they attended on Sunday morning, you could not tell the difference between them and the world.

Now that is a very serious thing. And it's an extremely serious thing to remember that when the final test of life comes, all profession shall fade away in the presence of him whose eyes are like a flame of fire.

Now of course, this also has application for us who are Christians, too, who probably have received Jesus Christ as personal Savior and do have the sense of the knowledge of him and the assurance of life, but we are not really living up to our profession. And our understanding of spiritual things is far ahead of our appropriation of that truth. So both of these levels of truth are important.

Not long ago, I read a statement by a candid Jewish rabbi. He had these words to say. He said, “Be that as it may, the consciousness of the presence of God has come to millions of men and women through Jesus. That it is personality which is the essence of his power should be evident to every objective student of Christian literature. The significant fact is that time has not faded the vividness of his image. Poetry still sings his praise. He is still the living comrade of countless lives. No Muslim ever sings, Mohammed, lover of my soul, nor does any Jew ever say of Moses the teacher, I need thee every hour. The genius of Jesus is not one of doctrine nor of organization”—now remember this is a Jewish rabbi speaking—“it is distinctly one of direct influence. He brought God near to men through his presence. He made the divine personal for myriads of worshipers, and posterity and gratitude has made his personality divine.”

Now we would express it otherwise. We would say that posterity has no power to make Jesus Christ other than what he was. That posterity has only discovered the fact of his divine singularity. But the Jewish rabbis caught hold of one important truth that characterizes Christianity, and that is that the disciples of the Lord Jesus have a personal relationship with Him. O God, the psalmist said, Thou Art my God, and that's the spirit of a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.

The description of the parable follows. Verse 1, I think is proleptic; that is, it is anticipatory of the sense of the whole parable: the kingdom of heaven is likened to ten virgins who took their

lamps and went out to meet a bridegroom, or the king, and the journeying forth that is referred to in verse 1 is not finally referred to until verse 10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. In other words, it is stated in verse 1 as an anticipatory thing, and then the author goes back and explains why the foolish failed to meet him.

There is already a note of tragedy here, because we have ten going out to meet the bridegroom, and evidently so far as outward appearances are concerned, the ten looked alike. They each were virgins; they each were there to celebrate the coming of the bridegroom; they each, evidently, outwardly at least, by their actions expressed that they were, to use Paul's words, “loving his appearing,” so that the likeness between the two is striking. The profession of all ten appears to be almost identical.

The only thing that distinguishes them is the oil in the cruet or the vessel—some had oil and some did not. Each had lamps. As a matter of fact, even the foolish are able to light their lamps. Wicks burn. They burn smokily, but nevertheless they burn for a while, but there was no oil. Everything else looks the same. That's how close profession of faith and possession of faith may appear to the outsider.

Well, there follows a word concerning the preparations in verses 2 through 4. If we were wanted to be ingenious in our interpretation, and we're all tempted to do that every now and then why were there ten? Well ten happens to be the number of testing in the Bible. Perhaps ten are chosen for that reason, but we cannot prove that.

The significance of the lamps is rather obvious. This has to do with testimony. You see, a true believer does give a definite testimony that persists, and I guess if a man wanted to impinge a doctrine of the Bible on one of the figures found in a parable, he might talk on the perseverance of the saints, here, but it would be much better to settle that doctrine on Scripture texts that teach it plainly than upon this.

What is the oil? Well oil in the Bible is clearly a figure of the Holy Spirit. I don't think that there should be much objection to that. Even liberal and conservative scholars can agree that that is the biblical sense of the figure of oil. One thing that I think probably should be commented upon is that the Lord says that five were wise and five were foolish, and the foolish took no oil in their lamps.

Now you might think that this was just pure forgetfulness, but it's not likely that that is reason that they were foolish. Oil in one's vessel is so obvious a thing, that it's the kind of thing that you have to stretch your imagine a little to imagine someone forgetting something as important as that. So it probably is more likely the truth that they had intentionally left the oil, did not want to bother with it, so it seems to me that probably this is willfulness rather than forgetfulness. But again perhaps we cannot be too dogmatic about that.

The point of this illustration up to this point is simply that a person may go out to meet the Lord with everything apparently in order, but if there is no reality, then the Lord Jesus, in his piercing judgment shall make that manifest. One of the writers has said, “True there can be no right burning of the lamp of a Christian profession without the oil of the spirit in the vessel of the heart, but there may be a flare which looks much the same in a dark. A dry wick will burn, though smokily. The stupendous folly of these witless five virgins was not that they made no provision for the future, but that they did not understand the requirements for the present. What they did was as absurd as it is to light a lamp without oil. They were not hypocrites in the sense of consciously pretending to be what they were not, but they thought outward profession and the doing of certain acts enough to make them of the bridegroom's company. They stuck rootless flowers in their gardens as children do, and thought they would smell sweet in his nostrils.”

Now our story continues here with words concerning a waiting period, and I have commented on this several times, and I'm going to do it again because, if you ever read liberal commentaries on the books of the Bible—and I find that many people do; they go into book stores and they buy liberal commentaries. They sometimes find help in liberal commentaries, because

occasionally there is help in liberal commentaries, particularly concerning the culture and other forms of comments concerning the life of biblical times. It's in the spiritual truth that they are often so lacking. You will often find in the midst of works that do have some value, comments that are doctrinally wrong, and I commented on one. I'll repeat it again since it's two weeks since I was with you.

It is quite common for contemporary scholars in this section of the New Testament to say that the Lord Jesus was mistaken concerning his Second Advent. He says he doesn't know the day or hour of his coming, but they say no he was mistaken. He thought that he would come again before that generation passed away, for did he not say this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled? So Jesus really thought that he would return while this generation of Jews who were with him on the earth in his first coming would still be living, but he was wrong.

Now we've already seen some illustrations of certain aspects of his teaching which point to the fact that he did give indications that the period between the First Advent and the Second Advent would be a rather lengthy period of time. He didn't know the precise day and hour of his return; that was something the Father kept for himself. In his human nature he did not know, not in his divine nature. In his divine nature he knows the end from the beginning. He's the alpha and the omega. But he limited himself in his knowledge of the precise day and hour of his Second Advent. But he did know, revealed by the Father to him, that there would be a lengthy period of time between the first coming and the second coming. In the section on the parables, Matthew chapter 13 remember, he speaks of that period as a period of the sowing of the seed, which takes time.

Now here, he gives another indication of a length of time, for in the 5th verse we read, “While the bridegroom tarried,” so you see right here in the little story he tells he gives you a hint that there is going to be a delay, a delay long enough for some people to think, well, he's not going to really come back again at all.

Now there is no blame, incidentally, attached in this parable to the fact that they all, all ten of them slumbered and slept. That is, they fell asleep and went on slumbering. Evidently, the kind of

sleeping that they were doing is the kind of sleeping in which you anticipate something, but it's light sleep. It's the catches of little snatches of sleep here and there, like I had last night, because my wife's not home to wake me up on Sunday morning, and I set the alarm clock, but I'd just come in yesterday afternoon, and I didn't know whether the alarm clock was still working or not, [laughter] and so I woke up a half a dozen times during the night and looked over at the clock. I was ready for seven o'clock but I was also doing a little sleeping, too. I think that's probably what is in mind here. While the bridegroom tarried, these virgins who were waiting for him to come with his bride to his home, they fell asleep, and they were slumbering then suddenly at midnight there is the cry, behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Now the cry is suggestive of the suddenness of the coming, of course; a point that we've mentioned several times in the preceding section. Then our Lord speaks of the response. The virgins arise. They trim their lamps. They get ready to light them. They all light their lamps, but when the five who are foolish virgins light theirs, they flicker a little bit and smoke rises, and they discover that they are going out, because they don't have any oil in their vessels. Incidentally, the word for meeting is a word that was used for the meeting of an official a dignitary, and that word is very appropriate here, because this is, you see, a story about the meeting of our Lord at his official *parousia* or his Second Advent.

Now it is at this point when our Lord returns that the difference between the two, the foolish virgins and the wise virgins, is seen. It's when the Lord comes that things come to be seen in their real light. When they say our lamps are going out, there is a world of suppressed terror and shock in that, because it has come home to them that they are unprepared to meet the king. One of the commentators had said that the lamps burned until the bridegroom came but then they shivered into darkness, and so all of the professions of outward religion shall shiver into darkness, when in the presence of our Lord at his Second Advent, and his all-seeing eyes, reality shall be manifested.

There is going to be a great recognition of reality in denominational headquarters at the time of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Now it may be true that at the present time, men can write

books like *The Myth of God Incarnate* and attack the deity of the Lord Jesus. They can have their lamps shining in the present time without any vessels, and without any oil in their vessels, but when the Lord comes, then we shall see where the reality really exists. And furthermore, all of our human standards which we so boldly and vociferously set forth as the standards of God shall be seen to be nothing but chaff in that day.

There are people who say, you know, we are all going to heaven the same place but we're going different ways. You know, you would think that you would get tired of hearing that and the world wouldn't even use it any more, but Friday a week ago, I got off the plane in Edmonton about 10 o'clock, and it must have been a champagne flight—I didn't know it—but it must have been a champagne flight. I had already eaten on the plane from Dallas to Minneapolis, and so they when they served another meal. I turned it down, and I didn't partake of it. Evidently it was a one of those champagne flights and one of the brethren who got off was rather inebriated, [laughter] and as we were standing—now I could tell that, because of the drift of the odor that passed by me as he stood by my side knowing that real well from ancient experiences in college myself. [Laughter]

Well we got into conversation at around the customs, we were all waiting there, and he asked me what I was doing. Incidentally he reminded me of that woman who went up to the counter and was buying an airplane ticket and she asked about the flight, and the man behind the counter was very anxious to sell her on this particular flight, and he said, it's a wonderful flight, why we give you a wonderful meal and all of the champagne that you can drink, and she said, do you mean that's one of those flights where we get on as a passenger and get off as baggage? [Laughter]

And this man was getting off, but he wasn't quite baggage, yet, but he was definitely feeling rather good. And we engaged in conversation, and when he found out I was a preacher that interested him even more, and then he went on to tell me that he trained for the ministry too, and what was startling was that he said that he had spent several years in Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, one of the finest of the Lutheran seminaries, and a seminary that in the past has been very sound in the Word of God, and here he was a man who had not only left the ministry—there's

nothing wrong with that if you are still serving the Lord—but he obviously was a person now who had no faith.

He said to me, well I know of course what you believe and that’s all right for you, but it’s just not for me at the present time. And then he came out with the words, you know, we’re all going to the same place. We’re just going in different ways. Well I didn’t make any comment on the way he was going. It certainly was a very happy way for him, [laughter] but unfortunately at the Second Advent things are going to be a little different.

You know, it is a sad thing of course for a person to make a great profession as the virgins did here, and to find that all of their profession fades into nothing nothingness when they meet the bridegroom. But it’s really bad, too, for those who are genuine Christians, who have a genuine profession of faith that is there, is reality, but they have lapsed into indifference. Perhaps not the indifference of the person who has been religious, and that’s all. One of the one of the commentators that I’ve always enjoyed reading has said concerning the Laodiceans, who evidently were not Christians at all—there is some question about this—but the Lord Jesus said concerning the Laodiceans that they were neither cold nor hot. They were lukewarm. He said, I wish that you were cold or hot, but because you’re not I’m going to vomit you forth being lukewarm. This commentator said the Laodiceans prided themselves on being tolerant, broad, middle-of-the-roaders. One can almost hear them say, we’re not extreme radicals nor ultraconservatives. We are fundamental modernists and modern fundamentalists. We are disciples of the great happy medium.

Dr. Frank Crain has said that his religion was the religion of the great common denominator of all the faiths. And then the commentator said, so the Laodiceans did not belong to the Iceland of frigid intellectualism nor to the Terra del Fuego of flaming evangelicalism. They dwelt along the temperate zone of tasteless, spiritual tepidity. [Laughter] Well when the Lord comes we’re going to see where the tasteless, spiritual tepidity really exists among the flocks that come out to the churches that are supposed to honor the Lord Jesus.



The parable continues, when the cry comes, the wise take their lamps, they trim them, and with their oil they go out to meet the bridegroom or the king. But as for the foolish, they notice now that they do not have the oil. They ask for the oil from the wise because their lamps are going out, and the wise said, we’re sorry, there’s no possibility of there being enough for both of us. You go to those that sell and buy for yourselves.

But of course it’s too late. It’s twelve o’clock at night, and even the stores that stay open late are not open any longer. So while they went off to buy, the bridegroom came, and the wise virgins went in with him to the marriage feast, and notice those fateful words in the 10th verse, and the door was shut. There is silence.

Nothing is said, incidentally, about what happened once they went into the marriage feast. Why? Well how could we possibly understand the blessing of what it is to be with the Lord? One of the characteristic things of the Bible is that it never tells us really what heaven is like. We’re given all kinds of figures of speech, but no one really knows because we couldn’t possibly understand if it were really told us. And there is silence so far as the inside is concerned. The doors shut. The windows have their blinds drawn, and we can only imagine the blessedness of what it is to be with the king in his kingdom in fellowship with him.

But then the foolish virgins come, and they come to the door and they shout, Lord Lord open to us, recalling the words of our Lord when he said, not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but they that do the will of God. It’s even possible he says back in the 7th chapter to prophesy in my name, to do mighty works in my name, but I still say, I never knew you, because it is possible for us to have a great profession and not have any reality. Lord, Lord open to us!

The Bible makes it so plain that there are sheep and goats—we’ll talk about them a couple of weeks from now in this very Gospel—sheep and goats. There are bad fish and there are good fish. There is wheat and there are tares. There is a division in humanity made by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well the application follows in the 13th verse, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh.” The foolish are unable to obtain the oil, for it’s too late, and no one can give it to them. One must procure it for oneself and it is bought without money and without price. Watch.

Let me conclude by making just these comments. This parable teaches, then, that qualification for entrance into the kingdom is the possession of the oil of the Holy Spirit. He that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his, the apostle says later in Romans chapter 8. It is the possession of the Holy Spirit that marks out the true believer from the world. He has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we testify, Abba Father. If we do not have the spirit of Christ dwelling within us, we do not belong to him. The test of Christianity is the possession of the personal third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We may have a great regard for religion, we may have a great regard for objective truth, but if we do not have the person of the Holy Spirit we do not belong to him.

Religion is not enough. One must have reality. And there are some things we cannot obtain at the last minute. There are some things that cannot be borrowed. Eternal life cannot be borrowed from our friends. It cannot be borrowed from our father. It cannot be borrowed from our children. It is something we must have for ourselves, and the shutting of the door, while it means acceptance and while it means blessedness and bliss for five of the virgins who are wise, it means exclusion from the other, so that the wedding bells become the funeral knell for the five lost virgins, reminding us of a stanza that we sometimes sing, “Almost persuaded harvest is past, almost persuaded doom comes at last / almost cannot avail, almost is but to fail / sad, sad that bitter wail, almost but lost.”

If you’re here this morning and you have never come to this personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, let me remind you again that our Lord has offered an atonement for sinners. For those who know our Lord in reality, they have come to know that they have borne the judgment of the broken law and the curse of offense against God in their substitute who has died for them. It would be, I think, a most terrible thing for you to come in this auditorium today and pass out of this

auditorium without the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, having heard that he dies for sinners among which company you are. May God the Holy Spirit bring home to your heart your desperate condition that you do not have any oil in your lamp, that you need this oil, that you cannot abide the coming of the Son of God to earth without this oil. You cannot possibly enter in and enjoy the marriage feast. May God give you grace to go out and buy this oil without money, without price, through trust in the redeeming work that the Son of God has offered. So we call upon you to put your trust in him whom to know is life eternal. May God bring you to that decision. Only God can. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to thee for these words of our Lord Jesus which so speak to us of the necessity of reality in our own lives, and Lord, we pray that they may speak to us who are Christians just as strongly. O what a profession we often make and how little of application there sometimes exists in our hearts. O God, help us to be prepared and ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now may grace, mercy, and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.