Chapter 25

This chapter continues and concludes our Saviour’s discourse, which began in the foregoing chapter, concerning his second coming and the end of the world. This was his farewell sermon of caution, as that, Jn. 14:15, Jn. 14:16, was of comfort to his disciples; and they had need of both in a world of so much temptation and trouble as this is. The application of that discourse, was, Watch therefore, and be ye also ready. Now, in prosecution of these serious awakening cautions, in this chapter we have three parables, the scope of which is the same—to quicken us all with the utmost care and diligence to get ready for Christ’s second coming, which, in all his farewells to his church, mention was made of, as in that before he died (Jn. 14:2), in that at his ascension (Acts. 1:11), and in that at the shutting up of the canon of the scriptures, Rev. 22:20. Now it concerns us to prepare for Christ’s coming; I. That we may then be ready to attend upon him; and this is shown in the parable of the ten virgins (v. 1-13). II. That we may then be ready to give an account to him; and this is shown in the parable of the three servants (v. 14-30). III. That we may then be ready to receive from him our final sentence, and that it may be to eternal life; and this is shown in a more plain description of the process of the last judgment (v. 31-46). These are things of awful consideration, because of everlasting concern to every one of us.

Verses 1-13 Here, I. That in general which is to be illustrated is, the kingdom of heaven, the state of things under the gospel, the external kingdom of Christ, and the administration and success of it. Some of Christ’s parables had shown us what it is like now in the present reception of it, as ch.3. This tells us what it shall be like, when the mystery of God shall be finished, and that kingdom delivered up to the Father. The administration of Christ’s government, towards the ready and the unready in the great day, may be illustrated by this similitude; or the kingdom is put for the subjects of the kingdom. The professors of Christianity shall then be likened to these ten virgins, and shall be thus distinguished. II. That by which it is illustrated, is, a marriage solemnity. It was a custom sometimes used among the Jews on that occasion, that the bridegroom came, attended with his friends, late in the night, to the house of the bride, where she expected him, attended with her bride-maids; who, upon notice given of the bridegroom’s approach, were to go out with lamps in their hands, to light him into the house with ceremony and formality, in order to the celebrating of the nuptials with great mirth. And some think that on these occasions they had usually ten virgins; for the Jews never held a synagogue, circumcised, kept the passover, or contracted marriage, but ten persons at least were present. Boaz, when he married Ruth, had ten witnesses, Ruth 4:2. Now in this parable, the Bridegroom is our Lord Jesus Christ; he is so represented in the 45th Psalm, Solomon’s Song, and often in the New Testament. It bespeaks his singular and superlative love to, and his faithful and inviolable covenant with, his spouse the church. Believers are now betrothed to Christ (Hos. 2:19); but the solemnizing of the marriage is reserved for the great day, when the bride, the Lamb’s wife, will have made herself completely ready, Rev. 19:7, Rev. 19:8. The virgins are the professors of religion, members of the church; but here represented as her companions (Ps. 45:14), as elsewhere her children (Isa. 44:1), her ornaments, Isa. 49:18. They that follow the Lamb, are said to be virgins (Rev. 14:4); this denotes their beauty and purity; they are to be presented as chaste virgins to Christ, 2 Co. 11:2. The bridegroom is a king; so these virgins are maids of honour, virgins without number (Cant. 6:8), yet here said to be ten. 3. The office of these virgins is to meet the bridegroom, which is as much their happiness as their duty. They come to wait upon the...
bridge groom when he appears, and in the mean time to wait for him. See here the nature of Christianity. As Christians, we profess ourselves to be, (1.) Attendants upon Christ, to do him honour, as the glorious Bridegroom, to be to him for a name and a praise, especially then when he shall come to be glorified in his saints. We must follow him as honorary servants do their masters, Jn. 12:26. Hold up the name, and hold forth the praise of the exalted Jesus; this is our business. (2.) Expectants of Christ, and of his second coming. As Christians, we profess, not only to believe and look for, but to love and long for, the appearing of Christ, and to act in our whole conversation with a regard to it. The second coming of Christ is the centre in which all the lines of our religion meet, and to which the whole of the divine life hath a constant reference and tendency. 4. Their chief concern is to have lights in their hands, when they attend the bridegroom, thus to do him honour and do him service. Note, Christians are children of light. The gospel is light, and they who receive it must not only be enlightened by it themselves, but must shine as lights, must hold it forth, Phil. 2:15, Phil. 2:16. This in general. Now concerning these ten virgins, we may observe,(1.) Their different character, with the proof and evidence of it.[1.] Their character was that five were wise, and five foolish (v. 2); and wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness; so saith Solomon, a competent judge, Eccl. 2:13. Note, Those of the same profession and denomination among men, may yet be of characters vastly different in the sight of God. Sincere Christians are the wise virgins, and hypocrites the foolish ones, as in another parable they are represented by wise and foolish builders. Note, Those are wise or foolish indeed, that are so in the affairs of their souls. True religion is true wisdom; sin is folly, but especially the sin of hypocrisy, for those are the greatest fools, that are wise in their own conceit, and those the worst of sinners, that feign themselves just men. Some observe from the equal number of the wise and foolish, what a charitable decorum (it is Archbishop Tillotson's expression) Christ observes, as if he would hope that the number of true believers was nearly equal to that of hypocrites, or, at least, would teach us to hope the best concerning those that profess religion, and to think of them with a bias to the charitable side. Though, in judging of ourselves, we ought to remember that the gate is strait, and few find it; yet, in judging of others, we ought to remember that the Captain of our salvation brings many sons to glory.[2.] The evidence of this character was in the very thing which they were to attend to; by that they are judged of. First, It was the folly of the foolish virgins, that they took their lamps, and took no oil with them, v. 3. They had just the oil enough to make their lamps burn for the present, to make a show with, as if they intended to meet the bridegroom; but no cruse or bottle of oil with them for a recruit if the bridegroom tarried; thus hypocrites, 1. They have no principle within. They have a lamp of profession in their hands, but have not in their hearts that stock of sound knowledge, rooted dispositions, and settled resolutions, which is necessary to carry them through the services and trials of the present state. They act under the influence of external inducements, but are void of spiritual life; like a tradesman, that sets up without a stock, or the seed on the stony ground, that wanted root. 2. They have no prospect of, nor make provision for, what is to come. They took lamps for a present show, but not oil for after use. This incogitancy is the ruin of many professors; all their care is to recommend themselves to their neighbours, whom they now converse with, not to approve themselves to Christ, whom they must hereafter appear before; as if any thing will serve, provide it will but serve for the present. Tell them of things not seen as yet, and you are like Lot to his sons-in-law, as one that mocked. They do not provide for hereafter, as the ant does, nor lay up for the time to come, 1 Tim. 6:19. Secondly, It was the wisdom of the wise virgins, that they took oil in their vessels with their lamps, v. 4. They had a good principle within, which would maintain and keep up their profession. The heart is the vessel, which it is
our wisdom to get furnished; for, out of a good treasure there, good things must be brought; but if that root be rottenness, the blossom will be dust. Grace is the oil which we must have in this vessel; in the tabernacle there was constant provision made of oil for the light, Ex. 35:14. Our light must shine before men in good works, but this cannot be, or not long, unless there be a fixed active principle in the heart, of faith in Christ, and love to God and our brethren, from which we must act in every thing we do in religion, with an eye to what is before us. They that took oil in their vessels, did it upon supposition that perhaps the bridegroom might tarry. Note, In looking forward it is good to prepare for the worst, to lay in for a long siege. But remember that this oil which keeps the lamps burning, is derived to the candlestick from Jesus Christ, the great and good Olive, by the golden pipes of the ordinances, as it is represented in that vision (Zec. 4:2, Zec. 4:3, Zec. 4:12), which is explained Jn. 1:16, Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. (2.) Their common fault, during the bridegroom’s delay; They all slumbered and slept, v. 5. Observe here, [1.] The bridegroom tarried, that is, he did not come out so soon as they expected. What we look for as certain, we are apt to think is very near; many in the apostles’ times imagined that the day of the Lord was at hand, but it is not so. Christ, as to us, seems to tarry, and yet really does not, Hab. 2:3. There is good reason for the Bridegroom’s tarrying; there are many intermediate counsels and purposes to be accomplished, the elect must all be called in, God’s patience must be manifested, and the saints’ patience tried, the harvest of the earth must be ripened, and so must the harvest of heaven too. But though Christ tarry past our time, he will not tarry past the due time. [2.] While he tarried, those that waited for him, grew careless, and forgot what they were attending; They all slumbered and slept; as if they had given over looking for him; for when the Son of man cometh, he will not find faith, Lu. 18:8. Those that inferred the suddenness of it from its certainty, when that answered not their expectation, were apt from the delay to infer its uncertainty. The wise virgins slumbered, and the foolish slept; so some distinguish it; however, they were both faulty. The wise virgins kept their lamps burning, but did not keep themselves awake. Note, Too many good Christians, when they have been long in profession, grow remiss in their preparations for Christ’s second coming; they intermit their care, abate their zeal, their graces are not lively, nor their works found perfect before God; and though all love be not lost, yet the first love is left. If it was hard to the disciples to watch with Christ an hour, much more to watch with him an age. I sleep, saith the spouse, but my heart wakes, Observe, First, They slumbered, and then they slept. Note, One degree of carelessness and remissness makes way for another. Those that allow themselves in slumbering, will scarcely keep themselves from sleeping; therefore dread the beginning of spiritual decay; Venienti occurrite morbo—Attend to the first symptoms of disease. The ancients generally understood the virgins’ slumbering and sleeping of their dying; they all died, wise and foolish (Ps. 49:10), before judgment-day. So Ferus, Antequam veniat sponsus omnibus obdormiscendum est, hoc est, moriendum—Before the Bridegroom come, all must sleep, that is, die. So Calvin. But I think it is rather to be taken as we have opened it. (3.) The surprising summons given them, to attend the bridegroom (v. 6); At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh. Note, [1.] Though Christ tarry long, he will come at last; though he seem slow, he is sure. In his first coming, he was thought long by those that waited for the consolation of Israel; yet in the fulness of time he came; so his second coming, though long deferred, is not forgotten; his enemies shall find, to their cost, that forbearance is no acquittance; and his friends shall find, to their comfort, that the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and not lie. The year of the redeemed is fixed, and it will come. [2.] Christ’s coming will be at our midnight, when we least look for him, and are most disposed to take our rest. His coming for the relief and comfort of his people, often is when the
good intended seems to be at the greatest distance; and his coming to reckon with his enemies, is when they put the evil day furthest from them. It was at midnight that the first-born of Egypt were destroyed, and Israel delivered, Ex. 12:29. Death often comes when it is least expected; the soul is required this night, Lu. 12:20. Christ will come when he pleases, to show his sovereignty, and will not let us know when, to teach us our duty. [3.] When Christ comes, we must go forth to meet him. As Christians we are bound to attend all the motions of the Lord Jesus, and meet him in all his out-goings. When he comes to us at death, we must go forth out of the body, out of the world, to meet him with affections and workings of soul suitable to the discoveries we then expect him to make of himself. Go ye forth to meet him, is a call to those who are habitually prepared, to be actually ready. [4.] The notice given of Christ’s approach, and the call to meet him, will be awakening; There was a cry made. His first coming was not with any observation at all, nor did they say, Lo, here is Christ, or Lo, he is there; he was in the world, and the world knew him not; but his second coming will be with the observation of all the world; Every eye shall see him. There will be a cry from heaven, for he shall descend with a shout, Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment; and a cry from the earth too, a cry to rocks and mountains, Rev. 6:16. (4.) The address they all made to answer this summons (v. 7); They all arose, and trimmed their lamps, snuffed them and supplied them with oil and went about with all expedition to put themselves in a posture to receive the bridegroom. Now, [1.] This, in the wise virgins, bespeaks an actual preparation for the Bridegroom’s coming. Note, even those that are best prepared for death, have, upon the immediate arrests of it, work to do, to get themselves actually ready, that they may be found in peace (2 Pt. 1:14), found doing ch. 24:46), and not found naked, 2 Co. 5:3. It will be a day of search and enquiry; and it concerns us to think how we shall then be found. When we see the day approaching, we must address ourselves to our dying work with all seriousness, renewing our repentance for sin, our consent to the covenant, our farewells to the world; and our souls must be carried out toward God in suit with a lie in their right hand. [2.] In the foolish virgins, it denotes a vain confidence, and conceit of the goodness of their state, and their readiness for another world. Note, Even counterfeit graces will serve a man to make a show of when he comes to die, as well as they have done all his life long; the hypocrite’s hopes blaze when they are just expiring, like a lightening before death. (5.) The distress which the foolish virgins were in, for want of oil, v. 8, v. 9. This bespeaks, [1.] The apprehensions which some hypocrites have of the misery of their state, even on this side death, when God opens their eyes to see their folly, and themselves perishing with a lie in their right hand. Or, however, [2.] The real misery of their state on the other side death, and in the judgment; how far their fair, but false, profession of religion will be from availing them any thing for the present. The lamps of hypocrites often go out in this life; when they who have begun in the spirit, end in the flesh, and the hypocrisy breaks out in an open apostasy, 2 Pt. 2:20. The profession withers, and the credit of it is lost; the hopes fail, and the comfort of them is gone; how often is the candle of the wicked thus put out? Job. 21:17. Yet many a hypocrite keeps up his credit, and the comfort of his profession, such as it is, to the last; but what is it when God taketh away his soul? Job. 27:8. If his candle be not put out before him, it is put out with him, Job. 18:6. He shall lie down in sorrow, Isa. 50:11. The gains of a hypocritical profession will not follow a man to judgment, ch. 7:22, ch. 7:24. The lamps are gone out, when the hypocrite’s hope proves like the spider’s web (Job. 8:11, etc.), and like the giving up of the ghost (Job. 11:20), like Absalom’s mule that left him in the oak. Secondly, They wanted oil to supply them when they were going out. Note, Those that take up short of true grace, will certainly find the want of it one time or other. An external profession well humoured may carry a man far, but it will not carry him through; it may
light him along this world, but the damps of the valley of the shadow of death will put it out. Thirdly, They would gladly be beholden to the wise virgins for a supply out of their vessels; Give us of your oil. Note, The day is coming, when carnal hypocrites would gladly be found in the condition of true Christians. Those who now hate the strictness of religion, will, at death and judgment, wish for the solid comforts of it. Those who care not to live the life, yet would die the death, of the righteous. The day is coming when those who now look with contempt upon humble contrite saints, would gladly get an interest in them, and would value those as their best friends and benefactors, whom now they set with the dogs of their flock. Give us of your oil; that is, ”Speak a good word for us;” so some; but there is no occasion for vouchers in the great day, the Judge knows what is every man’s true character. But is it not well that they are brought to say, Give us of your oil? It is so; but, 1. This request was extorted by sensible necessity. Note, Those will see their need of grace hereafter, when it should save them, who will not see their need of grace now, when it should sanctify and rule them. (2.) It comes too late. God would have given them oil, had they asked in time; but there is no buying when the market is over, no bidding when the inch of candle is dropped. Fourthly, They were denied a share in their companions’ oil. It is a sad presage of a repulse with God, when they were thus repulsed by good people. The wise answered, Not so; that peremptory denial is not in the original, but supplied by the translators: these wise virgins would rather give a reason without a positive refusal, than (as many do) give a positive refusal without a reason. They were well inclined to help their neighbours in distress; but, We must not, we cannot, we dare not, do it, lest there be not enough for us and you; charity begins at home; but go, and buy for yourselves. Note, 1. Those that would be saved, must have grace of their own. Though we have benefit by the communion of saints, and the faith and prayers of others may now redound to our advantage, yet our own sanctification is indispensably necessary to our own salvation. The just shall live by his faith. Every man shall give account of himself, and therefore let every man prove his own work; for he cannot get another to muster for him in that day. Those that have most grace, have none to spare; all we have, is little enough for ourselves to appear before God in. The best have need to borrow from Christ, but they have none to lend to any of their neighbours. The church of Rome, which dreams of works of supererogation and the imputation of the righteousness of saints, forgets that it was the wisdom of the wise virgins to understand that they had but oil enough for themselves, and none for others. But observe, These wise virgins do not upbraid the foolish with their neglect, nor boast of their own forecast, nor torment them with suggestions tending to despair, but give them the best advice the case will bear, Go ye rather to them that sell. Note, Those that deal foolishly in the affairs of their souls, are to be pitied, and not insulted over; for who made thee to differ? When ministers attend such as have been mindless of God and their souls all their days, but are under death-bed convictions; and, because true repentance is never too late, direct them to repent, and turn to God, and close with Christ; yet, because late repentance is seldom true, they do but as these wise virgins did by the foolish, even made the best of bad. They can but tell them what is to be done, if it be not too late, but whether the door may not be shut before it is done, is an unspeakable hazard. It is good advice now, if it be taken in time, Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. Note, Those that would have grace, must have recourse to, and attend upon, the means of grace. See Isa. 55:1 (6.) The coming of the bridegroom, and the issue of all this different character of the wise and foolish virgins. See what came of it.[1.] While they went out to buy, the bridegroom came. Note, With regard to those that put off their great work to the last, it is a thousand to one, that they have not time to do it then. Getting grace is a work of time, and cannot be done in a hurry. While the poor awakened soul addresses itself, upon a sick bed, to
repentance and prayer, in awful confusion, it scarcely knows which end to begin at, or what to do first; and presently death comes, judgment comes, and the work is undone, and the poor sinner undone for ever. This comes of having oil to buy when we should burn it, and grace to get when we should use it. The bridegroom came. Note, Our Lord Jesus will come to his people, at the great day, as a Bridegroom; will come in pomp and rich attire, attended with his friends: now that the Bridegroom is taken away from us, we fast (ch. 9:15), but then will be an everlasting feast. Then the Bridegroom will fetch home his bride, to be where he is (Jn. 17:24), and will rejoice over his bride, Isa. 62:5. [2.] They that were ready, went in with him to the marriage. Note, First, To be eternally glorified is to go in with Christ to the marriage, to be in his immediate presence, and in the most intimate fellowship and communion with him in a state of eternal rest, joy, and plenty. Secondly, Those, and those only, shall go to heaven hereafter, that are made ready for heaven here, that are wrought to the self-same thing, 2 Co. 5:5. Thirdly, The suddenness of death, and of Christ’s coming to us then, will be no obstruction to our happiness, if we have been habitually prepared. [3.] The door was shut, as is usual when all the company is come, that are to be admitted. The door was shut, First, To secure those that were within; that, being now made pillars in the house of our God, they may go no more out, Rev. 3:12. Adam was put into paradise, but the door was left open and so he went out again; but when glorified saints are put into the heavenly paradise, they are shut in. Secondly, To exclude those that were out. The state of saints and sinners will then be unalterably fixed, and those that are shut out then, will be shut out for ever. Now the gate is strait, yet it is open; but then it will be shut and bolted, and a great gulf fixed. This was like the shutting of the door of the ark when Noah was in; as he was thereby preserved, so all the rest were finally abandoned. [4.] The foolish virgins came when it was too late (v. 11); Afterward came also the other virgins. Note, First, There are many that will seek admission into heaven when it is too late; as profane Esau, who afterward would have inherited the blessing. God and religion will be glorified by those late solicitations, though sinners will not be saved by them; it is for the honour of Lord, Lord, that, of fervent and importunate prayer, that those who slight it now, will flee to it shortly, and it will not be called whining and canting then. Secondly, The vain confidence of hypocrites will carry them very far in their expectations of happiness. They go to heaven-gate, and demand entrance, and yet are shut out; lifted up to heaven in a fond conceit of the goodness of their state, and yet thrust down to hell. [5.] They were rejected, as Esau was (v. 12); I know you not. Note, We are all concerned to seek the Lord while he may be found; for there is a time coming when he will not be found. Time was, when, Lord, Lord, open to us, would have sped well, by virtue of that promise, Knock, and it shall be opened to you; but now it comes too late. The sentence is solemnly bound on with, Verily I say unto you, which amounts to no less than swearing in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest. It bespeaks him resolved, and them silenced by it. Lastly, Here is a practical inference drawn from this parable (v. 13); Watch therefore, We had it before ch. 24:42, and here it is repeated as the most needful caution. Note, 1. Our great duty is to watch, to attend to the business of our souls with the utmost diligence and circumspection. Be awake, and be wakeful. 2. It is a good reason for our watching, that the time of our Lord’s coming is very uncertain; we know neither the day nor the hour. Therefore every day and every hour we must be ready, and not off our watch any day in the year, or any hour in the day. Be thou in the fear of the Lord every day and all the day long.
Matthew Poole, Annotations
ed unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet *the bride-
groom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were wise took their lamps, and took with them oil; but they
were foolish that took no oil with them.

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are
blown out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, *Ye foolish, know ye not that each one of you had her own lamp? or do ye not rather think toCustomize your content!
REFLECTIONS.

Let us apply our hearts to the obvious instructions which this well-known parable so naturally suggests. We are under a religious profession: our lamps are in our hands; and we go forth as those that expect to meet Christ; as those that desire and hope to be admitted to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. But, alas, how few are there that are truly prepared for such a blessedness! Would to God there were reason to hope that the Christian church were so equally divided, that five of ten in it had the oil of divine grace in their hearts, to render them burning and shining lights!

* Such feasts used to be celebrated in the night. Various Jewish customs on these occasions are here alluded to.
† This last clause, in which the Son of man cometh, is not in many ancient MSS. or versions, nor is it quoted by the fathers. But it seems well supplied: as are the words the Son of man in the beginning of the next verse, rather than the kingdom of heaven; neither of which is in the Greek, which begins, Like a man travelling. Ed.

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Let even such as have it be upon their guard; for our Lord intimates that the wise as well as the foolish virgins are too apt to slumber and sleep, and carelessly to intermit that watch which they ought constantly to maintain. There may be, at an unexpected time, a midnight cry. Happy the souls that can hear it with pleasure; being not only habitually but actually ready to obey the summons! Happy they that have their lains girded, and their lamps burning!

The foolish virgins saw their error too late: they applied to the wise; but their application was vain. And as vain will the hope of those be who trust to the intercession of departed saints, or any supposed redundancy of merit in them, while they are themselves strangers to a holy temper and life. In vain will they cry, Lord, Lord, open to us. The door of mercy will be shut for ever, and the workers of iniquity utterly disowned. The day of grace has its limits; and for those that have trifled it away there remaineth nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever!