

Disentanglement

Matthew 24: 37-41, 44-51; Matthew 25: 1-13.

An Address by F. B. Hole.

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One verse of the hymn we have just sung should impress us; —

"Lord, Lord, Thy fair creation groans,
The air, the earth, the sea,
In unison with all our hearts
And calls aloud for Thee."

When some seventy or eighty years ago the late Sir Edward Denny wrote those beautiful words he could hardly have foreseen what was coming literally in our days. No verse of a hymn came more strongly to my mind during the Great War than that one. The air, with the modern developments of aviation, the earth, with its thundering battalions and big guns, and the sea, with its deadly submarines, were all groaning under man's perversity and iniquity and strife. Sad to say, man, the chiefest of God's works, made as God's representative, is himself the worker of all the mischief. Not the dumb creatures, but man is the mischief-maker in this sad world of ours, and everybody knows it. The world, whether you look at it politically, industrially, socially, or in any other way, is in a state of hopeless tangle. Perhaps somebody here tonight may turn and say, "Yes; but you are a Christian. You speakers are part of the Christian church, and you cannot afford to throw stones at us, who have no pretension to Christianity, for you Christians are in the most terrible state of tangle." That is honestly and at once admitted. Tangles are to be found on every hand. Striving does not help matters. It is like the fly when it goes blundering into the spider's web. The more it struggles the more tightly it gets caught. Its very struggles only entangle it more deeply in the thing from which it desires to be free. The world has its struggles, its plans, and its schemes, but every effort, however well-intentioned, will only land it further into the tangle.

Now I want to speak to you of the Lord Jesus Christ and His advent as the grand solution of every problem. He is the great disentangler of all the entanglements. This Gospel of Matthew specially emphasizes that side of things. I trust you have sufficiently read your Bibles to remember that Matthew 13 is the great parable chapter, the chapter of seven parables, beginning with the parable of the sower. I want to remind you particularly of the parable of the tares and the wheat. Though the good seed was sown in the field of the world by the Lord Jesus Christ, the devil got to work and sowed darnel, a thing which in its earlier stages exactly resembles wheat, but is not wheat. In that parable we have the Lord Jesus Christ instructing us, who may be the servants of Christ in these days, that it is not our commission to put the world right. The field is the world, not the church. In the world you have this mixture. We look abroad through Christendom tonight, and we see this strange mixture on every hand. The tares are hopelessly mixed up with the wheat, and the instructions of the Master to His servants are not to attempt to sever the tares from the wheat, lest in so doing they root up the wheat. We have not the discernment necessary for the task. He shows us that what man cannot accomplish is going to be accomplished at the end of the age by God Himself, using angelic ministry.

You pass on through the parables of that chapter, and the last of the seven is the parable of the net, which gathers out fish of every kind, some perfectly good for human consumption, some perfectly

worthless. The sorting is going to take place. There are those who will sort every good fish out of the mass that the worthless may be discarded. That is disentanglement again.

Then, passing on to Matthew 24 where we began to read, you have the coming of the Lord distinctly foretold, and when He comes He is going to differentiate. There will be two men in the field, and two women grinding at the mill — one shall be taken and the other left. Who can read the heart and act thus but One, the Lord Jesus Christ, at His advent? He will disentangle. He holds up before us in an ideal way the good servant, and then He presents to us the evil servant, and He tells us that the coming of the Son of Man is that which will put the evil servant and the good servant respectively in their places for ever.

We read in Matthew 25 that the kingdom of heaven was likened unto ten virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and five of them were foolish, but nobody knew they were wise and foolish as yet. Time had to elapse before the thing was proved. They were externally alike. The difference was that some had only lamps with wicks, but the wise had oil in their vessels with their lamps. It was not the day of glass containers to lamps, where you can easily see whether you have oil or not. It was hidden. It was an inside thing that differentiated between the wise and the foolish. When there went forth a cry heralding the return of the absent bridegroom there began to be a shaking. Then agitation was written upon many faces, and then discoveries were made. The wise had oil in their vessels and the foolish had no oil. So the line of demarcation was drawn.

Someone will say, "Is not this intended to teach us the way in which the Lord will differentiate between the faithful of His people, and those who are less faithful? Is not this a picture of the devoted Christian on the one hand, and the unspiritual and worldly on the other?" My answer to that unhesitatingly is "No." My reason for so saying is the answer the Lord Himself makes to the foolish virgins in verse 12. They come afterwards, and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." What does He say? "I used to know you, but now I have forgotten you"? "I do know you, but I am not going to own that I know you until you reform your ways, and behave rather better"? That would suit some theories, but He said, "I know you not." There is another verse that says, "The Lord knoweth them that are His," so that they represent those who are not His. There is a vast amount of mere pretension, without any corresponding reality. There are lots of people who claim the Christian name nominally, but the root of the matter is not in them. At this point, let us challenge our own hearts. Where do we stand as to this? Who is there here tonight that would say, "I am a church member, I am a deacon; I am a Sunday-school worker"? You may appeal to certain external things, but nothing that is merely external is going to stand in the presence of God. Inward reality and fidelity are the two things which the Lord Jesus is going to own when He comes again.

I did not read on, for time did not permit. When Jesus Christ comes again there is going to be a great multitude of the professing church disentangled. Let every heart in the presence of God search out for itself how it stands in reference to this. Then comes the parable of the servants, and you find exactly the same thing in principle. In this parable, as given to us in Matthew's gospel — distinguishing it from a similar one in Luke — the servants who were real and true and faithful are all welcomed and all rewarded. The man who had five talents made other five talents, and he enters into the joy of his Lord. But there was another servant who did not know his Lord. He was under the most terrible misconception about the one whom he professed to know and serve. He was judged out of his own mouth as a wicked and slothful servant. The Lord knew how to put His hand upon the man who, though a professed servant of His, was no true servant at all.

Make no mistake about it, the coming of the Lord is going to see a complete disentanglement

among the professed servants of the Lord. There are thousands of men taking the place of being ministers of Christ, and what a disentanglement is going to ensue! As the servants of Christ we must all of us face the fact that the coming of Christ is going to bring all into the light, and He is going to draw the line most definitely between that which is genuine and true, and that which is false.

The end of the chapter, that well-known passage about the Son of Man appearing in His glory with the holy angels, shows the same solemn fact. Before Him shall be gathered all nations, not the dead but the nations. When the Lord Jesus comes back in His glory and publicly appears, living nations on this earth will have to stand in His presence, and with a master hand He will divide them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. He will make no mistake about it. Every man will be appointed to his own place. All will be made plain with infallible truth and justice. The tangles of earth will be untied. People say, "We wish we could get things straightened." It will be a very serious matter. You will be put into your place, and I in mine, and all will be resolved in His presence. You notice, do you not? the ground on which the Lord Jesus is going to divide the sheep from the goats. Everything will depend on how these people have treated certain men whom He acknowledges as His brethren, who were His messengers. It will be a perfectly just ground of judgment. He says in effect, "You expressed your attitude towards Myself by the way you treated My representatives." That is a well-known principle amongst men. It certainly is a well-known Biblical principle. How can we express our gratitude towards the Lord Jesus Christ today? The blatant atheist may shake his poor little fist in the sky, but as a rule he vents his spleen upon the nearest Christian. That is really all that he can do. He cannot get at the great Master, so if he can find one of His humble servants he will administer a blow to him. That explains a great deal of the animosity expended against Christians today. They may glory in it, if it is for their Master's sake.

The Lord Jesus Christ is going to differentiate. His gospel is acting after that fashion today, only we await the coming of the Master Himself for the thing to be done in absolute perfection. Thank God, the crooked places are going to be made straight. The mountains of human pride are going to be brought down, and the valleys are going to be lifted up. One who can grapple with all earth's problems is coming. He will put the world right. In that hour how will you stand? You need not wait to know. You may know as you now ask your own heart, "What is my present attitude towards Christ?"