

The Great Olivet Prophecy

of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherein are contrasted the Jewish and Christian calling and hope.

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I have taken this portion of the Word of God to set forth "The Christian calling and hope," as distinct from that of a Jew or a Gentile. There may be some who might demur to this. They are not convinced that it is a question of Christians, for example, in the parable of the Virgins.

There are those, on the one hand, who have been disposed to exaggerate, maintaining that even the foolish virgins are really Christians. There are some, on the other hand, who deny that the parable speaks of Christians at all. These will have it that not only the foolish virgins are not Christians —

which I believe to be quite true — but that the wise are not either, but what is commonly called the Jewish remnant. Now, I am of opinion that they are both mistaken; that in this Scripture we have positive evidence, of a clear and cogent kind, which ought to remove the doubts of any dispassionate mind, and to give with certainty the conviction that the Lord had real Christians in view in the wise virgins, and professing Christians in the foolish virgins. In order to demonstrate this more clearly, I will first draw your attention to the context, and then to the contents of the parable.

It is plain that from these two sources must be drawn the main evidence that the Lord Jesus has given by which we may form a sound judgment. That is to say, the Lord has given, in the surroundings of the parable, not a little to help us to understand its bearing and application. Then, again, what the general evidence of the context would lead to we shall find, I trust, entirely borne out by the specific contents of the parable. The language, the drift, the circumstances, the design all converge on Christendom; all point to the calling and hopes of the Christian; for alas! not only the parable instructs us, but it is a fact that we see now around us many who bear the Christian name with no reality.

The End of the Age.

First of all, then, we have the Lord's discourse, founded on the disciples pointing out, with not a little complacency, the grand buildings of the Temple.

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple; and His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them: See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

The Jewish system was tottering to its ruin; the temple, where the glory of God had once been, was itself about to be destroyed.

"And, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be?"

They were disturbed and distressed by such a thought. Was not He the Messiah? Was not He going to establish Israel? Was not He about to restore the tribes — which had been so long waiting — to the nationality of God's chosen people? What, then, would be the meaning of such solemn words as that all was to be razed to the ground? Jesus meets the questions, When these things should be, and What should be the sign of His coming, and of the end of the *age* — not of the world.

The Jews were not so ignorant on this head as many who have less excuse in the present day; they did not confound the end of the age with the end of the world. They knew well that God meant to bless this earth — to bless it as a whole, not merely His children passing through it, but the nations and the earth itself; to overthrow Satan's usurped dominion, and to deliver from the thralldom of the curse the whole creation. The disciples, who as Jews held all the hopes of their nation founded on prophetic testimony, were therefore anxious to know what should be the sign of His coming or presence, and of the end of the intervening time of sorrow and distress; for they were aware that it is only when He comes in power and glory that there can be an end of desolation. So the Lord explains that the time was not yet come; that they would be liable to be deceived about the time when the restoration of their people, and all this introduction of divine power to bless the earth, was nigh at hand.

"Take heed," said He, "that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

"And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled, for all these things

must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

It is the reverse of the glowing picture of the age of the Messiah's reign.

"He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2).

The new age is not yet come, nor can it while the Lord Jesus is away. Whatever may be the promises and hopes of men, all their scheming will not avail; all their expectations must be falsified. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom"; that is to say, a state quite contrary to what is held out for the kingdom. The prophets glowed as they looked forward in the Spirit to the time when

"the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills: and all nations shall flow into it. And out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2: 2, 3).

But the Lord intimates that the time is not yet at hand. There must still be the sorrows that belong to this age.

The New Age.

The new age would be characterised, not by the destruction of the earth, but by its renovation; not by the great White Throne, where the dead will be judged, but by the Lord coming to reign and govern the living. "For he shall come to judge the quick and the dead" (Acts 10: 42; 2 Tim. 4: 1) not the quick and the dead at the same time, but the quick first, the dead afterwards. The judgment of the quick (or, the living) traverses over a considerable tract of time; the judgment of the dead is at the close of all, before the eternal scene where all judgment will be ended, when nothing will remain but the blessing of those that are of God, such as are of the enemy having been judged for ever. The Lord explains that there must be an earthly time of manifold sorrow during this age before the blessed time begins for the earth in the new age. Whether it be the present era of sorrow, or the future dispensation of blessedness for the world, the end of "the world," as popularly held, is a false notion; the end of "the age" is the true thought. Man's day will close with the end of this age.

The new age will be under the government of the Lord Jesus. The fact that power will be exercised in rule supposes flesh and liability to disobedience. Evil will be put down; it may be kept thoroughly in check; but it needs the reign of the Lord to effect it. The eternal state differs essentially from this age. It will have no evil to be kept in check, but will display the peaceful dwelling of good in the presence of God, when evil has been judged, removed, and punished.

The Lord then pursues His sketch of what the disciples must expect.

"Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

"All these are the beginning of sorrows.

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My Name's sake.

"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matt. 24: 7- 13.)

This, again, is beyond controversy the close of what is going on now; not the end of the world in a physical sense, but of the period or dispensation which terminates with the appearing of the Lord Jesus in power and glory. His return to reign will open the new age.

Jewish disciples.

Then the Lord proceeds to give some indications of the closing scene of the age a little more definitely —

"When ye therefore shall see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place,

"Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains."

Nothing can be more distinct than this. The Lord Jesus is not here giving us the calling and hope of the Christian, but addressing the disciples in their then Jewish state and circumstances.

Now this is an immense help for the understanding of the prophecy. For many persons now as of old have taken the whole discourse as if it were addressed to Christians as such; they imagine that it all describes the position of Christians at one time or another. But this is a fallacious idea. The Lord begins with the Jewish disciples before Christianity, properly speaking, was revealed. For Christianity supposes the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord: these are the pillars of Christianity. Without them you have the Lord Jesus still connected with Israel. The essential features of Christianity display themselves on the basis of redemption, and in the gift of the Holy Ghost consequent upon it.

Now, in all we have heard thus far, there is nothing that is essentially Christian. We have disciples: I doubt not believers, but believers looking for the Lord's return to reign over Israel. They are disciples whose expectations are in connection with the land of Palestine and the Temple; whose hopes embrace Israelitish ascendancy; whose fears are based upon the troubles or tribulations predicted for Israel by the prophets. Hence we see the Lord Himself deigns to refer to the prophecy of "Daniel the prophet." Does not this show that He was speaking of the same time, place, people, and circumstances as Daniel? Nothing can be clearer than that He is not describing Christians as such. What have Christians to do with Jerusalem or Judea? What have Christians to do with the Temple? They have no personal interest in those stones; they have no special connection with the grandeur of those buildings. The destruction of the Temple leaves Christianity unaffected, and where it was, in point of fact. We quite understand on the one hand that God saw fit that during Christianity the Jewish people and their Temple should be in ruins soon, if not immediately; as we know it was important on the other hand that Christianity should derive its force from God while the Temple had still an outward appearance.

Jerusalem and the Temple.

It was no mere concurrence of circumstances which gave birth to Christianity. It might have

been said that Christianity grew up as a natural development after Judaism had actually disappeared; that there had been an old religion in Jerusalem, and when this perished, then Christianity sprung up. But God took care that the Temple and the Jewish system should still continue for a season. It is true they were spiritually defunct. They remained to the eyes of men alive, but really before God they were dead.

The Lord, then, shows us clearly that He is speaking of disciples' hopes and fears. He, therefore warns certain persons who should be analagous to the disciples of that day; Jews who should be found at the end of the age, disciples in Jerusalem once more when there would be a Temple once more. For it is remarkable that Christ in speaking of the Temple gives it unity: the Temple may be built and destroyed, again built and destroyed, yet it is all counted the Temple, for God deals with things according to the place they assume. He views all that is done in His name as having a kind of moral unity. Hence we find this carried out with regard to Antichrist. The Temple, too, has been destroyed, and may be again, but it is still the Temple of God. In days yet future we know that, when rebuilt, it will be put to the most fearful uses to which any buildings have been applied since the world began; still it is called the Temple of God.

The Gospel of the Kingdom.

There will, then, be disciples — Jewish believers — keeping to the words of the Lord Jesus in the latter days of this age, for the Lord is clearly carrying on His thought to that time, this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all the nations, and then shall the end come. We know the end has not come yet. We are aware that this gospel of the kingdom needs yet to be preached as a witness in all the world to all the nations. But how far it will take effect is not said: there may be few believers, but there will be witnesses of the gospel of the kingdom sent out, like the disciples when He was here. It is not telling the people that He died and rose and went to heaven. They preached the kingdom of heaven was at hand before the end of the age. There will be Jewish disciples and believers who will preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, who will take up the testimony which the disciples were rendering in His day and will proclaim this to all nations at the very time that Satan will be prompting the Beast and the False Prophet to bring in the infernal kingdom — when there will be that base usurpation on the earth which Satan cannot longer continue in the heavens.

For a little while he will attempt to secure the sovereignty of the earth, and have a kingdom of his own. Then will be found the voices of faithful men, holding fast the old testimony, and proclaiming it unto all the nations when Christendom shall have gone into apostacy. These kingdoms may have their science and civilisation; but they will fall into the deepest depths of deceit and strong delusion. The mass of the Jews, too, will fall into the dreadful snare that the kingdom of God is come, when it is only the kingdom of the Beast and the Antichrist. Then will be heard those faithful Jews, going forth with power to proclaim that the true kingdom — the kingdom of heaven, not of the Beast that rises up out of the pit, but the kingdom of the heavens — is at hand, the kingdom that comes down from above, and of which the Lord Jesus is King.

The Kingdom of Heaven on the Earth.

When that kingdom is at hand, when the Lord is going to accomplish His word which was interrupted by His death and resurrection — for He is now, manifestly, out of the world — what He will then establish will be the kingdom of heaven on the earth. This is the true hope that God has given as far as the world is concerned. But the only One who can accomplish the work, and the only One,

too, who deserves the glory, is Jesus: all other men require to be saved and purified. He is the only One who has both a divine and a human claim. He is the Saviour available for all; He alone will have the dominion as of right. Thus, then, these faithful Jews — these disciples — when the mass of their nation are apostate, and when Christendom, too, is apostate, will renew the testimony in the latter day. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world to all nations, a final testimony of the true kingdom, while the false kingdom is set up in Satan's power.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached everywhere, and then shall the end come. This is not the character of the teaching that is given to us as Christians. If we look at the Epistles of Paul, where does he ever give us anything of this kind of warning? How could an idol in the Temple be a sign to you or me, if we were Christians in England, France, Germany, or in any part of America? How could it be a sign to us if anything new were set up in Jerusalem? But we can perfectly understand that if an idol should be set up to be worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem, it must be a most solemn sign of Satan's power over that people. And so the righteous will take warning and flee. It applies only to such as shall at that time be living in Jerusalem; but how could it be a sign to those scattered over all lands thousands of miles away?

It is no use saying that the thing may be communicated rapidly nowadays, for the whole thing is represented by our Lord as a signal for flight to those who saw it.

It is not that others may *hear*, but "when ye shall *see*" the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Then they are to flee.

It is not then an announcement by wireless that there are these dismal doings in Jerusalem, but persons on the spot, who see evident tokens of the power that Satan is wielding, and that their nation is damnably guilty, who are at once to retire.

The Lord, it is plain by His call to the reader to understand, supposes that some would not understand. He supposes that there would be a very great tendency to mistake about it, and calls their special heed to the word. It is what concerned the Jew, as put down for a season by the Gentile; for Daniel speaks about these facts and not about the church. "When ye shall see" this, "then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains." Clearly this is no sign to the Christians scattered in all countries.

Take it as the Lord gives it, for there is no need to put in any words of our own. I am expounding what no believer can deny; and who can affirm that what I am deducing is not the plain meaning of the Lord's words, or that they will bear any other construction?

"Then let them which be in Judea flee to the Mountains;"

It is to be an instantaneous flight. There is no time to communicate with others. It is as much as can be done to save themselves.

"Let him which is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house;" — it is too late to think about doing this.

"Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." Immediate flight is the only hope of safety. What sort of safety? It is the saving of flesh — of natural life. Is this what the Christian is expecting? Not so. The Christian is looking for the coming of Christ, not to save his life, but to change and take him up to heaven.

The point here is escape, for it is not safe to remain. There is unprecedented trouble coming;

those who refuse to worship the idol will be put to death, and those who worship will be besieged and led into captivity largely. Therefore the Lord warns His disciples to flee in order that they may not be so troubled. It has nothing at all to do with the Christian's expectation of going up to heaven to meet the Lord "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." For, where would be the propriety of telling the Christian not to come down from the housetop at that time? Would it matter whether at the top or the bottom of the house? Thus it is perfectly plain that the Lord is here speaking simply of the Jew who sees this most startling sign of Satan's power, and is ordered at the peril of his life to make his escape. It is much more like Lot and his family going out of Sodom, than Abraham from a distance with the Lord.

Christ the Key to the Bible.

There is one thing to which I would call your attention regarding the Word of God: there is not a book in the world that has fared so hardly as the Bible. When other books are read men strive to understand them, but when they read the Bible they shut their eyes and give up its interpretation as hopeless. This is due to the blinding power of Satan: he does not wish it to be understood, only read as a task. This is not the way to treat the Word of God. I grant you we need a power above our own. To this end we cannot understand the Bible by forcing the lock; what we want is the key. But if you have Christ, you already have the key. In faith apply Christ to the Bible, and you can understand it. It is not a question of a superior mind or of great learning; — for the most learned have been the most foolish in their mistakes. The simple man who understands but his mother-tongue understands the Bible, if he with true simplicity submits himself to the Lord and has confidence in His love. This is produced by the Spirit of God: it is this only that makes men humble, that gives confidence in God and in His Word by taking away objects which overpower his own mind.

Suppose I am a red-hot Calvinist: I cannot understand the word which calls one to preach the gospel to every creature. Suppose I am a rather violent Arminian: I cannot understand the Scriptures which speak of "being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." Assuredly then the wisdom of the Christian is to be neither the one nor the other. He should take all the Scriptures simply as they stand.

Those who read the Scriptures carefully but believingly will understand what is infinitely better than anything found in the various schemes of men. It is just the same as regards the interpretation of prophecy as in doctrine. No man should assert that one part of the Word of God is sealed up and the other open. There was a time when it was so: when Daniel was called to have those very communications which we have been reading, he was told to seal up the book; John was called to have the same communications and yet greater ones, he was told NOT to seal up the book. Do you not see the difference and the reason of it? The principle was this — the Jews were incapable of entering into the true and full meaning of the future till Christ came, at least until the end comes. It will only be then, when the last days of this age are come, that the godly remnant will understand (Daniel 12: 10). The wicked shall not understand. You cannot separate moral condition from real intelligence of the Word of God. But the Christian already has, not Christ only, but the Spirit in virtue of redemption; and hence he is called and qualified to search all things, yea the deep things of God.

Further Jewish Signs.

It has been clearly shown that in all that the Lord Jesus had been teaching in His great Olivet discourse, He was speaking of disciples connected with the Temple, with Judea, with Jerusalem, and

not of Christians. Take these further proofs of it.

He says, "Pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath Day." The Lord's Day is our day, the first day of the week. The Jew rightly and properly keep's Jehovah's sabbaths. As to this, there are languages in Europe more correct than what we hear more commonly spoken around us. The Pope's tongue, the Italian, keeps up the right distinction; it always speaks of Saturday as the Sabbath Day, and Sunday as the Lord's day. How curious that it should be so, where such blind darkness reigns on almost everything else!

But these Jewish disciples contemplated here are told to pray that the time for their precipitate flight should not be in the winter nor on the Sabbath Day; for the one would be inconvenient from its inclemency, and on the other they could not go farther than a sabbath-day's journey. But how could this affect us as Christians? Even if once Jews, we are not any longer under such restrictions. The Lord is speaking not of Christians but of future Jewish disciples, connected with Jewish ritual, and filled with Jewish hopes.

Further, it is said,

"There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved."

All this is plain enough. It is not a question of the soul but of the salvation of the body. They should then live and be the subjects of the blessed reign and glory when the Lord comes. It is earthly glory here, not in heaven. For the elect's sake those days should be shortened.

"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

"Behold, I have told you before

"Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert, go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not." (Matt. 24: 23-26.)

It is clear and certain that the elect here are Jewish. What would be the effect of such sayings on your mind, suppose one were to tell you that the Lord was in London or Vienna? You would pity the poor fellow; you would feel that he could not be in his right senses unless he were an impostor. You, as a Christian, could not be deceived by such rumours for an instant.

But it is clear that the Lord Jesus supposes considerable danger for the disciples here. In fact, being Jewish, not Christian, they might be deceived by the cry that He was here or there on earth; whereas no Christian could be in such danger. But the Jewish disciples were exposed to it. They were looking for the Lord's coming to the earth; they knew that the Lord's feet should stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.

Jerusalem and Judea.

It is clear, then, that the Jews might be taken in by such deceit. Not so the Christian. He knows that he will meet the Lord in the heavens, and that he will be taken up from the earth into the air to meet the Lord on high. But the deceits in question are addressed to such only as expected to meet the

Lord on the earth. The whole of the scene thus far consists of the Lord's instructions to disciples connected with Jerusalem and Judea, and has nothing at all to do with the Christians looking to join the Lord above. But here again is the reason why they are not to listen to false Christs.

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Learned men have applied all this to the Roman conquest. But the Roman army did not come out of the east, as the lightning is said to do here, nor did it shine unto the west: the very reverse would be a more apt figure, had the Romans been meant. So correctly has the Lord Jesus guarded against the misinterpretations of men.

I deny that the prophecy is obscure or ambiguous. There is no uncertain sound in the Bible. I grant you that there is no book so profound as the Word of God, but this does not hinder its clearness for the simplest. It is meant for the highest as well as the lowest. If it were of use only for one class, to the exclusion of the other, it could not be the Word of God; for what is of God must suit men in all conditions. I speak, of course, of believers: but still, even if the soul were in the densest natural ignorance, there is everything in the Bible to enlighten and establish such an one. If he be one who dives ever so much into the depths of God's mind, like the Apostle Paul, the Bible is still beyond him. "Now we know in part," said this very man, one of the greatest of its inspired writers. How truly divine is all this! Is it really so with any other book? If you are a man of ability, you may soon fathom another man's measure, but never the depths of the Bible, though free to search all. The fact is, you only begin to find out how little you know of the Bible when you are really advancing in the knowledge of it.

There is no discipline so wholesome as this, because, on the one hand, you are strengthened and encouraged, on the other hand you are humbled. This is exactly what the soul needs.

The Lord, then, has given these firm standing points, these landmarks, as it were, in the prophecy, which hinder us from being carried away by every wind of theory. We can see clearly what the Lord has set before us. I have not knowingly passed over anything material. There is no violence done to a word here. I wish to give nothing but a clear, distinct, and positive impression of the mind of the Lord as given in His Own words.

The Eagles and the Carcase.

It is next said,

"Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

Now, if you apply this to the church — to the Christian — what will you be able to make of it? Is the church the carcase? I have heard something still more dreadful. Men have not been wanting who say that the Lord is the reference! Such are the ideas expressed by such an attempt to interpret the prophecy on false grounds. Learned men, including some of the Fathers, taught this; and a great many of the moderns follow in their wake. The last notion I must beg to consider as very great irreverence as well as grossly mistaken. Understand me! I do not wish to fasten anything unfair upon any of them, but it appears to me a crude and unworthy interpretation, no matter how (according to the Christian scheme) they take the carcase, whether applying it to the church or to the Lord. Is the church a corpse? I believe it to be a living body. And the Lord is not regarded as a body dead or even alive, but as the Head. But the Lord a carcase! What are they dreaming about?

The whole effort is false. There is no getting a consistent meaning out of the passage when

interpreted of the church: the moment you apply it to the Jewish people, it becomes strikingly true. For the mass of the Jews will then be apostate, and the eagles or vultures who come together are figures of the divine judgments executed on the guilty people by the nations of the earth; but whatever may be the instruments, they are judgments of God executed by Him. If the Christians be the carcase, they are the object of the judgment, and there the eagles, or the executors of judgment, are gathered together. But this is not at all the relation of the Lord's coming to the Christian. Nor can the Christians be the eagles or instruments of divine vengeance, any more than the carcase, without abandoning all the truth and character of their calling. The changed saints undoubtedly will go up to meet the Lord; but is He then to be the carcase, and is the church the eagles? Thus, in such a scheme, you have only the choice of one evil less or greater than another; and it is generally thus with an erroneous interpretation. Apply it to the object the Lord had in view, and all is clear. This is the test of Scriptural truth: whenever you press a false interpretation, the general testimony of Scripture is dislocated.

Then the Lord adds,

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn,"

It is not here the believers with joy going up to meet the Lord, but the tribes of the earth mourning.

"And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

"And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. 24: 29-31.)

Who are the Elect?

Here many lay great stress upon gathering His elect. But the "elect" do not necessarily mean Christians. If you speak of elect now, it is so; but had God no "elect" before there were Christians? There were elect Gentiles. Take Job for one, and his friends, probably, also the same; were they not elect men? Melchizedek and others, were not they elect? Need I enumerate the elect of Israel in the past? We find clearly elect Gentiles as well as Jews and Christians. When we read about Christians, then the elect must be so explained; if we read about Jews, then the phrase applies to a Jewish election; and so with the nations. We must be governed by the context. As the Lord here is clearly speaking about Israel, the sense should not be ambiguous. When we have "His elect" named, He means the elect of those described, that is, of Israel. This is not at all to bring in arbitrary rules, but in fact a very plain and necessary principle.

Let us suppose a case in common life. If you go into a crockery shop, and choose out some of the things there, everybody understands how far the choice extends: to the seed shop next door it would not apply. Your *choice* or the *chosen* cannot be fairly said to be uncertain because you speak of it in two different places. The word applies equally to the things chosen in both shops. It is all simple enough in everyday matters; and so it is with Scripture.

The Lord, I repeat, in all this context is speaking about Israel and their hopes. Consequently "his elect" must be interpreted according to the object in view. These elect ones are to be gathered "from one end of heaven to the other," not for blessing in heaven, but on earth. (Compare Isaiah 27)

The Parable of the Fig Tree.

Then "learn the parable of the fig tree." The fig tree is a well known symbol of Israel as a nation. This confirms what has been already said. In the Gospel of Luke, where the Lord takes a view of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, He reverts to this very symbol, but enlarged remarkably. He says "the fig tree, and all the trees." He does not speak of the latter in Matthew, because He is only in this part looking at the Jew; but in Luke He is looking at the Gentile as well as the Jew, and hence adds, "and all the trees." (Compare Luke 21. as the authority for this statement.)

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matt. 24: 32- 34; Luke 21: 29).

This Generation.

Now mark the phrase "all these things" — namely, from the first troubles down to the last, and the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Clearly "this generation" does not mean, what some impute to it, a mere period of thirty years, or a man's life. The phrase means, what it frequently does in Scripture, a line continued by certain moral features entirely independent of length of time. Hence we find in the Psalms very particularly this use of "generation." I will give you one text which proves it in the most convincing manner. In Psalm 12: 7 we read

"Thou shalt keep them, O Jehovah, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."

This generation is supposed to go on, and it is an evil generation, a generation which has no faith, a stubborn Christ-rejecting generation. "This generation," the Christ-rejecting race of the Jews, is not to pass away till all these things be fulfilled. Hence the same generation which crucified the Lord of glory is going on still, and will till He comes again in the clouds of heaven.

"A Generation to Come."

But the grace of God will make them anew, "a generation to come" (Psalm 78). The Lord will judge the unbelievers at last, dealing with them righteously after His immense long-suffering, but delivering a godly remnant in His grace. The Lord has great things in store for Israel. There will be this double action — that is to say, the mass of them filling up the cup of iniquity which their fathers began to fill; and the remnant, who will be the holy seed, the Israel of the millennial day. Of the former He speaks when He says that "this generation " shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled Of that day knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (verses 34-36).

The next comparison (verses 36-42) is not to the fig tree nor anything else taken from the physical world. A figure is taken from the dealings of God in the Old Testament,

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered the ark,

"And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left.

"Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."

Taken or Left?

Instead of being an indiscriminate slaughter or captivity such as the Jews had executed upon them by the Romans, there is a direct contrast to this. Here there is discrimination: one man shall be taken and the other left; one woman taken and another left. The Lord will deal with perfect discernment in each case: not so did the Romans, not so any army that ever took a city. We know there is no time, no thought, no desire for discrimination. It is wholesale bloodshed or slavery. Thus it was when Titus took the city; so alas! it too often is unto this day. But when the Lord Jesus comes, it will not be so.

Then the Lord winds up this part of His prophecy by saying,

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

"But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

There, I believe, closes the portion of this prophecy which refers to the Jews. He began by referring to the Jewish disciples, because the disciples were really Jews then, though believers. He took them up just as they were; and we know they subsequently became Christians. They passed into a new relationship. Not that they had not faith before; but when Christ rose from the dead, and went up to heaven, a new state of things was founded in connection with Him then and there.

The Christian and Jewish Hope Contrasted.

Hence the same disciples merged into a new form and power of relationship with God. They were brought no longer to expect the Lord's restoration of the kingdom to Israel as their proper hope, but, contrariwise, that the Lord would come to receive them to Himself, and take them to the Father's home in heaven. This is the Christians' hope; this is what they wait for. The Lord is calling them out from the earth to Himself. They had been expecting the Lord to come and establish them on the earth up to the day when the Lord Jesus went up and sent down the Holy Ghost. Christianity comes in as an entirely new thing. It is the calling of the Christians out of the world, waiting till Christ comes to take them up to heaven. The Lord Jesus, having accomplished redemption, has Himself first taken His seat in heaven; then the disciples become heavenly, and are being transformed spiritually: finally, at His coming, the Lord Jesus will take them completely out of their natural condition, conformed to His Own glorious body. The state of things on earth since redemption wrought at Calvary till He come to take us to be with Him on high, is truly to be called Christianity.

I do not deny that the saints of old, before Christianity came in, will share in the resurrection, when they, too, are to shine in the likeness of Christ. Only there is this enormous difference meanwhile. We are brought, since His cross, into conscious salvation and new relationships.

From this point the Lord begins to open out a new thing, namely, what the disciples were going to become. And evidently this is the proper order. The Lord had begun with them as they were, and

then He leads on to what they were to become, with the new relationships of Christ dead and risen, when also fresh power was given by the Holy Ghost. As a mark of this, you will see that the Lord drops all allusion to Judea, and all reference to the temple, prophets, and sabbath. The Lord opens out now into parables of a general and comprehensive nature which would be equally as true at Timbuctu as at Jerusalem — it does not matter where. They belong to Christianity; to that which Christ died and rose to establish by the mission of the Spirit. The Lord here shows us this opening out into wider principles of a moral nature, which embrace all the true disciples, wherever they might be in this world, at any time till He comes. Hence we find three parables which apply to this.

The Faithful and Wise Servant.

The first parable is the wise servant contrasted with the evil one. It is a question of faithful service in the house, the duty of the highest and the duty of the lowest, not of intelligent activity in trading with goods given as in the parable of the talents, chap. 25. The form is very striking. We have, as you see, a double profession; and this in relation with the Lord, not with Israel as before.

This was not the case in Judaism. There was an enormous unbelieving mass in former times getting into idolatry and all kinds of wickedness, always persecuting the believer. But one of the characteristic marks of Christendom is that all are professors of Christ, whether truly or falsely. The Lord in the parable says the faithful and wise servant is to be made ruler over all his goods. But the evil servant says in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming"; it is not a mere notion. One may always have his notions; and one is none the better for them. But the Lord refers to what was deep and real, the heart's indifference to the appearing of Jesus. The evil servant says in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming"; he believes what he likes, and what he likes is that the Lord should delay His coming. If you love anyone, you want to see him. The absence of the person you love is trying to you. There may be the wisest reasons for delay, but the delay taxes your patience; and your hope of the speedy return of the one you love is the greatest joy to your heart.

All That Love His Appearing.

The Lord gives this feeling and strengthens it. Granted, that it may be hindered by false prophetic notions; yet there is in the heart of all true Christians a desire for the coming of Christ: only, when the soul is not in peace through a full gospel, it is afraid. And those who give them this kind of gospel are responsible for it; those who keep souls in fear do the greatest possible injury to the Church of God. I am not speaking of such as set forth Christ or His work falsely, but even of those who do not preach it fully, who fear to set forth the full value of the sacrifice of Christ, and the perfect deliverance which His death and resurrection have wrought for the believer. The result of this defect in teaching is that Christians are apt to be alarmed instead of rejoicing at the thought of the coming of Christ.

They do not own that the acceptance of Christ means the acceptance of the believer; they do not believe that the Lord by His death has not only put away their sins but also dealt with their sinful nature completely; and this in order to their walking now in the Spirit, to be followed by a perfect conformity to Christ's image in resurrection at His coming.

You cannot exaggerate what Christ has wrought for the believer; if you are resting on His redemption, all difficulties God-ward are taken away. Then there is nothing left but the duty of serving Him now, and the delight of seeing Him then, as also of worshipping both now and for ever.

He has done all for you to bring you to God, and to take you out of every evil. How can the

believer not rejoice in this? I believe with my heart that all Christians, I care not where or who they are, have joy and delight in the prospect of His coming.

Notwithstanding all their imperfect notions, I am sure all Christians love Christ here, and are waiting for Him too. I may shock some of my zealous pre-millennialist friends; but I believe this hope belongs to every Christian.

There may be false prophetic views which hinder; but as the new nature does go out towards Christ, so it longs for the day when it will be ever with Christ. Speaking generally, waiting for Christ supposes longing for His coming; but if put in certain forms and propositions, this may never be found out. If you want to show that men do not look for Christ's coming, you can have abundant grounds for working on. On the other hand, I think God will give you sufficient evidence that all who are His really look and long for His coming.

Only let the children of God get clear of those clouds of noxious and unwholesome vapours that are constantly rising up between the Lord and them.

If you bring in a millennium at the present time, it is hard to see Christ's coming clearly; it acts as a cloud, which dulls the hope of that day. It may not destroy the hope, but one thus looks for the Lord's coming in an imperfect manner.

The Great Tribulation Jewish.

If you bring in a great tribulation first, this would enfeeble the hope greatly; it tends to produce a depressing effect, and to fill the heart with trouble.

The one puts a mistaken hope between you and the coming of the Lord, giving meanwhile a dreamy excitement in waiting for that day. The other case gives you a sort of spiritual nightmare, an oppressive feeling in the thought that you must go through so dreadful a crisis.

I believe, my friends, that the Scriptures deliver us from both the dream and the nightmare. I believe they entitle the believer to wait for Christ as simply as a child, being perfectly certain that God is true and our hope blessed. Again, I believe there is a tribulation to come, but not for the Christian. When He is speaking about the Jew, you can understand it well: for why does this great tribulation come upon him? Because of his idolatry; it is for him a moral retribution, with which the Christian has nothing at all to do. It is the judgment of God on the Jewish people; they who were called to be witnesses against idolatry at last fall into the dreadful snare of allowing the "Abomination of Desolation" to be put into the sanctuary of God: then the tribulation comes upon them. There is no connection between this and the Christian looking for Christ; and here the prophecy of the blessed Lord drops all allusion to anything of the kind. What He presents is, that when He returns, it is as *Son of man*, a title which is always used in reference to His coming in judgment, as in John 5: 27:

"The Father hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man."

When He comes as judge, He deals with the evil servant, cuts him asunder, and assigns him his portion with hypocrites.

The Ten Virgins.

Then comes the parable read to-night. I call your attention particularly to it. I have been long in coming to the ten virgins; but it is only right to disengage the Christian from the thought that the early

part of this prophecy refers to him: such an idea completely perverts his judgment.

But we have also in our day to do with another and opposite error, an error that takes away the parable of the virgins from properly applying to the Christian. Now I suggest, on the contrary, that it has nothing to do with the Jewish remnant directly, who, are not called to go out to meet the Bridegroom, and will not be exposed to the temptation of going to sleep. But many an one might have been a Jewish disciple and then have ceased to be one; practically such became Christians, in the true sense of the term, as Peter uses the word in his 1st Epistle, and Luke in Acts (Acts 11: 26).

In this parable, then, the Lord shows the kingdom of heaven to be likened unto ten virgins. They all went forth to bear their testimony to Christ; the lamp was to give light. They were to shine as lights in the world; each taking her lamp went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

The Ten Virgins Christian not Jewish.

Now this is characteristic of the Christian. The Israelite did not separate from the world of which he was head. The Christian goes forth to meet Christ, who is gone to heaven. If he be a Jew, he leaves his ancient glories behind. Whether the greatest grandee in the Gentile world, or of the poorest condition, he alike abandons his old obscurity or his old grandeur. He willingly forgets all that is of the world. He is called out of every snare which can fascinate or arrest the heart of man. He has got a new and all-absorbing object in Christ; and Christ in joy and blessedness. It is not the Judge coming to deal with the wicked. If a Christian goes forth to meet the Bridegroom, does such a parable fitly bring images of terror? The Christian knows well that the same Jesus who is the Bridegroom is the Judge; he knows well that Jesus will be the Judge of those who oppose Him; but He is not the Judge and the Bridegroom in the same associations, or to the same persons. Where would be the sense of such confusion? The Lord purposely brings in the bright figure of the Bridegroom to those who are waiting for Him.

But there are other elements of moment. Here are persons true and false. They are not presented as one object: consequently the idea of the Bride is not the thought. When we talk about Christians, real or professing, we do not fix our mind on unity; we think of individuals who go forth. He was about to show profession, and so brings in foolish as well as wise virgins. It is Christ looking at Christians professing the Lord truly or falsely, not as the Bride of Christ. The Christians are all characterised by quitting every object on earth to meet the Bridegroom. Even the Jew, attached as he was to the old religion (and they had a religion which could boast an antiquity before which all others grow pale) — the Jew leaves all to go forth unto Him, as says the Apostle in Hebrews 13, "bearing His reproach."

Here you have the same principle. As the Christian, even though a Jew, was called to leave all the old things behind, so here they went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps but no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

The Outpouring of the Spirit.

Is it true that the Jewish remnant at the end of the age are to have oil in their vessels? They will never have oil in their vessels till the Lord Jesus comes and pours the Spirit on them. We must remember oil symbolically means the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not merely the washing by the Spirit — even were it vitally: I grant you the Jewish remnant will have that. They will be really cleansed by the Word in the heart. The disciples who will be found at the end of the age will not

receive the outpouring of the Spirit till the Lord appears; they wait for that day. It is only when the kingdom comes that the outpouring of the Spirit will be for them. They will go through a very serious process first. When they see the Lord Jesus, they will mourn as for an only child. They will have a fountain opened in Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness; but the power of the Holy Ghost will be given only when they have seen the Lord. So far it is quite different with the Christian, who, as you know, receives the oil or unction from the Holy One while the Lord is away. The Jewish remnant will only receive it when the Lord comes back. Again, they will not go forth from Jerusalem until the tribulation is at hand. It is a fleeing from the enemy's power and its consequences. It is a flight from the sore scourge in retribution and judgment for their iniquity; it is no going forth to meet in joy.

For the Christian has another course and hope altogether. Whether it be light or dark, the Christian goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. What is the original hope of the Christian? It is our object and calling revealed from heaven. That object is Christ, the blessed One Whose coming he awaits: hence he goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. Not so the Jewish remnant; they expect to see the Lord coming to deliver them by the putting down of their enemies. The Christian waits to be called up out of the world; the Jew waits for the Lord to come into the world. It is a totally different expectation. The parable speaks solely of the Christian. It does not refer to the Jewish remnant.

The Foolish Virgins.

We shall see more proof of this. It is said that the wise took oil in their vessels: the foolish took no oil. This meets another error. It has been supposed that the foolish virgins mean Christians who are not pre-millennarians, which gives a very undue value to correct notions of prophecy. I grant you entirely that those who look for the Lord to come before that reign are in my judgment right; and I am quite sure that those who put the millennium before the Lord's coming are mistaken. But I can never sympathise with those who put a slight upon such Christians as have not been taught as you and I. These are self-flattering delusions, and are mere manifestations that bear the brand of sect or school written on them. I am persuaded that the best blessings we have are those which God confers on the body of Christ. That is to say, all those in whom the Holy Ghost dwells — those who rest on Christ and redemption. These are the men spoken of here. The Holy Ghost is a divine spring for sustaining testimony, as well as a divine power of understanding the Word of God.

The foolish virgins never had oil. Some ask how can they have had their lamps burning. The answer is easy. They could burn the wick: there is no mystery about that. The foolish virgins were not real Christians. The weakest Christian has the oil, as well as the strongest. The apostle John so tells not the fathers, nor the young men, but the babes, the little children. He tells the feeblest they have the unction from the Holy One (1 John 2: 20). For those who had no oil could not be Christians. Hence a deeper evil is in question than denying the millennium to be after Christ's second coming or before it. The heart was wrong as to the Lord — a thing more momentous than right notions about prophecy.

If you have Christ, if you know the blood of sprinkling, if you rest on a crucified and risen Saviour, you surely have the oil in your vessels. You are not one of the foolish virgins. Their folly consisted in something much more than in a right or wrong prophetic scheme. The foolish lived despising God and His grace; and, consequently, not having the Spirit of Christ, they were none of His. The foolish virgins have not the Holy Spirit; so the Lord says and deals with them.

We often think of the early Christians with their great advantages, we see that, many of the Scriptures applying to them fully — we can only get the principle of them. But I will call your attention to the fact here that there are other Scriptures which apply more emphatically to us now.

There is thus what I may call a divine compensation. We can only take the general spirit of what was said to the Corinthians. For instance, they had tongues; they had miraculous powers among them. You know that we have them not. There are certain persons who pretend to have them: wherever there are pretensions to such gifts, their falsity is soon found out.

The fact is that God, for the wisest reasons, has not been pleased to continue these miraculous powers. The present condition of the church would make it to be a moral impossibility that God should bestow any of these miraculous virtues. For if the Lord were to restore them now, I should like to ask where? Most people would begin with themselves. If the Lord were to restore them now on Christendom as a whole it would be to sanction, as if all right, a rationalistic Protestantism and an idolatrous Romanism.

The Lord could not thus sanction the broken fragments of His house, or put this honour upon its actual condition. We are ready to be high enough, we are prone enough to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and the Lord will not help us to be more so.

But He has left what is infinitely better — He continues everything due to Christ and good for the soul which walks with God. He has taken away nothing needful for edification. He still gives peace and joy in believing. Now as of old He puts this inward power in the church; but He marked it of old with a brilliant signature, as it were, before the world. Those who look for the restoration of these powers are not alive to the fallen condition of the church. I hold it to be most important to the Christian to know what the church was and what it is, and to grieve before God for the difference. I have no sympathy with the Christian now who is not a mourner because of the state of the church. It is well to have joy in the Lord, but we should be humbled about ourselves and the church. You ought to feel deeply this condition for the Lord's sake. In this parable, you will observe, the Lord marks the failure from the original calling, "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." There is a state of forgetfulness of the Lord's return.

The Midnight Cry.

But now mark another thing: it is midnight, and there was a cry made, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go forth to meet Him." Has that been fulfilled? I believe it has, or rather that it is being fulfilled now. The Lord has interposed to break the present slumbering condition of Christendom, doing so not only for the wise, but for the foolish.

Once more come the foolish virgins to the wise, saying, "Give us of your oil"; but this is beyond the Christian, and the wise bid them "Go buy for yourselves." There is One Who sells, but freely, without money and without price: to buy even from an apostle is fatal.

There is only one means of procuring the oil. It is solely through Christ Himself, without money and without price. As the cry goes forth, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh," many realize that they are not in a fit state to meet the Lord. They are troubled with the rumour of they know not what. The consequence, then, of this midnight cry is that a double activity is going on. For the Lord is awakening those who know Himself, who are wise by His grace, to go forth and meet the Bridegroom. The others, if indirectly, are none the less powerfully affected by the cry and its effects.

The Shut Door.

At length the Bridegroom comes, and "they that were ready went in to the marriage, and the door

was shut!"

Afterwards come the foolish virgins. Now they cry, but it is with horror and despair. In an agony they cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the Lord of peace, the Giver of life and glory, has only to tell them, "I know you not." Do not tell me this is said about real believers. It is said of the foolish virgins who had no oil; of those who bore the name of the Lord, but had not the Holy Ghost. Of and to them it was said that the Lord knew them not. "Watch, therefore," says He, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

There is no authority for what follows ("wherein the Son of man cometh"). You have heard the names of Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf; of Dean Alford, Bishop Wordsworth, and Dr. Tregelles in this country. I am not giving you a peculiar thought in the least, for all biblical critics worthy of the name agree in this omission as required by the best authorities. Copyists added the clause from ch. 24, bringing in the sense of the coming Judge. But this is quite different from what the Lord here urges, which is the delight of meeting, yea, the going forth to meet Him, the Bridegroom. Man, as such, must be judged; all tribes of the earth mourn before the Son of man. But the calling and hope of the Christian is fraught with other and joyous expectations; and this spite of their unfaithfulness during the night whilst He tarried.

If the faithful and wise servant, contrasted with "that evil servant," set forth the general place of the servant of the Lord, faithful or the contrary, the parable of the talents shows us those who trade with the goods of Christ, and that goodness in this work turns on confidence in Him and His grace. (Verses 14- 30)

Judgment of the Living Nations.

Then, from ver. 31 to the end, we have the judgment of the Gentiles, or all the nations, by the Son of man when He returns and reigns. Those who treated well or ill His messengers, "His brethren," who proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom before the end, are severed to His right hand or left respectively, as the sheep or the goats. It is the judgment of the quick at the beginning of the millennial reign, as far as the nations are concerned. But that judgment is final. It is not the judgment of the dead, or of the secrets of the heart. The one question for decision is their conduct towards His brethren, or the Jewish preachers of the kingdom after the Christians are gone from the scene. Faith only will enable any Gentile to deal with them kindly in that day; and those who do so inherit the kingdom. It is no question here of heaven or resurrection.

This last scene is clearly the third part of our Lord's prophecy, the principle and nature of His procedure towards all the nations (as distinct from Israel, and, of course, from Christians) after He enters on "the kingdom." At the beginning, when the Lord was here of old, as well as just before the end of this age, there will be an active testimony to the kingdom: only the final preaching will be in all the habitable world to all the nations, not as at first restricted to the land of Israel. Now the King is come and judgment of the quick proceeds accordingly. Mix this up with the judgment of the dead (the wicked dead, of course; for the righteous dead are supposed in Rev. 20: 4 to be received long before, and the righteous living of the millennium do not die), and all is chaos. You lose the specific teaching both of Matt. 25: 31-46, and of Rev. 20: 12-15, the one being the Lord's judgment of the Gentiles living on the earth (good and bad), when He comes to reign over the world, the other His judgment of the wicked dead raised after the millennial reign is concluded before the Eternal State.

The true view of the King, judging all the nations in Matt. 25, it will be observed, alone explains,

first, why the King's brethren should be regarded as a company distinct from the sheep; secondly, why there should be no scrutiny into all work, or ways of those who stand before the throne, but only the question how they behave to His brethren who are to carry the gospel of the kingdom among all the nations before the end comes.

These envoys being either slighted in hate or honoured in love, the King now repays with interest the astonished Gentiles. Who does not see the contrast with the righteous and the unrighteous in the resurrection state? As the wicked will then feel in all its horrors their just and everlasting condemnation, so for the saints the perfect state will have come, and they shall know even as they are known.

W. Kelly.