

The Lord's Prophecy on Olivet in Matthew 24-25

W. Kelly.

(Section 1 of Three Prophetic Gems)

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Chapter 1

The Jewish Disciples

INTRODUCTION

In the discourse given in Matthew 24-25 the Lord unfolds, first, the future of the Jewish disciples; secondly, that of the Christian profession; and thirdly, that of all the nations tested by the gospel of the Kingdom before the end comes, and He Himself reigns. Such are the simple divisions of the two chapters of this study, and so it was or will be in fact. The discourse grew in the Lord's wisdom out of the disciples directing His attention to the splendor of the buildings of the temple, from which their hearts were not yet weaned. They believed that Jesus was the Christ and that they were born of God, but their hearts were associated with Israel's hopes, until the day that He ascended to heaven (Acts 1: 6-11), though theirs was no small advance when He rose from the dead.

The Lord therefore begins with His disciples as they then were. They fittingly also represent those who are to succeed in the latter day when the work of gathering out the Christian company for heavenly glory is complete, and God begins to prepare His people on earth for the reign of the returning Son of man. It is also the historic order. No other division of the subject matter could be so satisfactory. In this connection the disciples were viewed not only generally throughout the Gospel, but evidently when He sent forth the twelve in Matthew 10. "Depart not into a way of Gentiles, and into a city of Samaritans enter ye not, but go rather unto the lost sheep of Israel's house. And as ye go preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens hath drawn nigh." This was superseded by the Christian testimony, as we shall see still more markedly in the discourse on Olivet, but it is plain from verse 23 that this Jewish mission will go forth again before the end, "for verily I say to you, Ye shall not have finished the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come." Christianity is a parenthesis.

In Matthew 23 the Lord says to the crowds and to His disciples, "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all things therefore whatever they tell you, do and keep; but do not after their works, for they say and do not" (vv. 2-3). The disciples clearly are here viewed not as Christians, but as Jews, and this is confirmed by the pointed language of verse 34 to the end of the chapter. Sad as the retribution must be, a change will come to the people before His return. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, for I say unto you, Ye shall in now wise see me henceforth until ye say, Blessed [be] he who cometh in Jehovah's name." Thus the repentance of a remnant will pave the way for His return; some suffering to death for His name, others preserved to welcome the Son of Man when He comes. We hear much of both in the Psalms and the Prophets, as well as in the Revelation.

The first part of the discourse with its various sections suitably follows in Matthew 24: 1-44.

THE TEMPLE DESTROYED

"And Jesus went out, and was going forth from the temple, and his disciples came to [him] to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said to them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say to you, Not a stone shall be in anywise left here on a stone, which shall not be thrown down" (vv. 1-2).

The rejected Messiah pronounces sentence: most solemn to hear for believing Jews who justly regarded the temple as the great external or public witness of the one true God and His worship on

earth. It had been destroyed before, after reigning sons of David apostasized and made it the seat of Gentile idols. But had not there been a gracious return (not of Israel, it is true, but) of a Jewish remnant from Babylon to rebuild the city and temple and to await Messiah? Alas! now, He whom they believed to be the anointed Son of David doomed it to another demolition which should not linger, when not the first (Babylon) but the last Gentile world-power (Rome) should execute it. Its destruction was not because of idols, but because the Jews were first to refuse and then by Gentiles, crucify their own Jehovah-Messiah. These were two impeachments which Isaiah so long ago had predicted against the chosen people (vv. 40-48 and 49-57).

WHEN WILL THE TEMPLE BE DESTROYED? WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF THE LORD'S COMING?

“And as he was sitting upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what [is] the sign of Thy coming, and of the completion of age? And Jesus answering said to them, See that no one mislead you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and they shall mislead many. And ye shall be about to hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled; for they must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nations shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in places. But all these [are the] beginning of travails. Then shall they give you up to tribulation and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated by all the nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be stumbled, and give up one another, and hate one another: and many false prophets shall arise, and shall mislead many. And because lawlessness shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall grow cool. But he who endured to [the] end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable [earth] for a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end come” (vv. 3-14).

From Mark 13: 3 we learn that Peter, James, John and Andrew were those who thus enquired, When shall these things (the temple's destruction) be? and What is the sign of His coming and of the consummation of the age? In Luke 21 we find the first of these questions fully answered. There we find the overthrow of the city with the temple, and Jerusalem trodden down by Gentiles till their times be fulfilled, running on still since the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus. This is distinctly severed from the Son of Man's coming when the redemption of the godly Jews draws near. Here in Matthew, the answer as to the impending ruin, already given in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 7) is passed by and the Lord passes on to the second question which brings together the sign of His coming and of the completion of the age. Prophecy is not of isolated solution.

It is important to note the error in the KJV of confounding the age of “the age” with that of “the world” (v. 3). The coming age of a thousand years and more is after the age that still is, and before the eternal scene. Even disciples, as yet preoccupied with Jewish hopes and prejudices, and wholly unintelligent of the new, heavenly associations of Christianity, knew better. It is clear in the Greek that they did not say “of the world,” but “of the age.” The Lord in Matthew 13: 38, 40 had amply guarded against such a confusion. The field or sowing-place was “the world,” the judgment on the darnel and the display of the wheat would be at the close of “the age.” The new age, the Millennium, will be characterized by the King reigning in righteousness when the Father's kingdom is come on high and the Son of Man's here below, when His will is to be done on earth as in heaven.

The Lord first gives a general sketch of the ruin about to ensue. Moral improvement, truth prevalent, peace for mankind, as yet were misleading dreams against which they should be on their

guard. The rejection of Himself would open the door to many false claimants to lead many astray. Wars and their rumors would be heard. Only when He takes His great power and reigns could it be otherwise, as Isaiah predicts. His disciples were not to be disturbed or deceived. Such evil things must be because the King was rejected, and the end is not yet. Instead of learning war no more as when He comes in His kingdom, national shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Also, there will be providential inflictions such as famines and pestilences and earthquakes in various places. Yet all these are a beginning of birth-throes. At this time His disciples would be objects of persecution, betrayed and even killed by all the Gentiles because of His name. Worse still, stumbling would befall many and mutual treachery and hatred would be among themselves. Many false prophets would rise and mislead many, and because of the lawlessness that would abound the love of the many would grow cold. But he who endured to the end would be saved.

The Lord in these verses is contemplating people with Jewish expectations, and tried by Jewish opposition and unbelief with the hatred of all the nations. The one who endured is specially assured. The Deliverer will come in due time, but not a word about the Church nor the gospel in its depth. Yet “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the habitable earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then shall come the end.” It is a testimony with fruit everywhere, without a word of effect farther. The *change* for dead and for living, for heaven and for earth, is reserved for Him who is worthy, the rejected Christ at His coming.

The remarkable and evident fact is that the Lord has here before Him Jewish disciples in early days with their counterpart before the end, but without reference to the Christian light and privilege which would come in. So we have plain enough proof in Acts and James, that in Jerusalem there was persistence in this respect that has often struck Christian readers as strange, not only after the great Pentecost was fulfilled, but to the even of the destruction of the city and sanctuary. Hebrews, written just before that destruction, gave God's final warning and proof that for the Christian, the Jewish system was now null and void. In this way one can apprehend how the Lord provides instruction for Jewish disciples before the end is come. Still thus far all is general, but from verse 15 we are given much that is precise, He Himself referring to the last chapter of Daniel.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE LORD'S COMING (VV. 15-31)

“When therefore ye shall see the abomination of desolation that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in [the] holy place (let the reader understand), then let those in Judaea flee unto the mountains; let not he who is upon the house come down to take the things out of the house; and let not he who is in the field return back to take his cloak. But woe to those with child and to those who suckle in those days! But pray that your flight be not in winter nor on sabbath. For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from world's beginning until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be cut short. Then if any one say to you, Behold, here [is] the Christ, or there, believe [him] not; for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall give great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you before. If therefore they say to you, Behold, [he is] in the desert, go not forth; Behold, [he is] in the inner chambers, believe not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and appeareth unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered. But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall 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 land mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds

of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from [one] end of heavens to the other” (vv. 15-31).

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION; HISTORICAL AND FUTURE

Here we learn the awful mark of Jewish wickedness — guilty and fatal alliance with the Gentiles, as Daniel warned. An abomination also had been set up by order of Antiochus Epiphanes long before Messiah's first advent. This idol was set up in the holy place. It brought desolation on all who acted or submitted. It also drew out the uncompromising opposition of the Maccabees. This was predicted fully and plainly in Daniel 11: 31, as the pious heroism that rejected the abomination follows. For this reason it is the more distinguishable from the similar but greater future apostasy. For all has been accomplished up to verse 35, where a blank is implied leading to the “time of the end,” which we have here also in Matthew. Then “the king” of the last time appears, not “of the north” as Antiochus Epiphanes had been in his day, still less “of the south” (Egypt), but distinct from both. At the time of the end the king of the south will push at him, and the king of the north will come against him (Dan. 11: 40). He is thus the object of hostility to both, and has for his sphere “the goodly land” which is physically between those two powers of the future.

He is also more widely the great religious enemy of Jehovah and His Christ. While reigning over the land of Israel, he will set himself forth supremely in the temple of God. This is the “man of sin” whom the apostle portrays in 2 Thessalonians 2, citing or applying Daniel's words. The Lord refers in Daniel 12: 11 to this future abomination of desolation with which is connected a date of 1290 days and a supplement of 45 more, before the blessed time comes which the then-faithful of Israel await. Then the prophet himself shall rest and stand in his lot and the Son of man shall reign over, not Israel only, but all peoples, nations and tongues. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom shall not be destroyed.

The divine design was to present us with the Roman capture of Jerusalem and its results in Luke 21: 20-24. But here the Lord passes these over in the corresponding place of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and dwells only on the unequalled wickedness and tribulation of the future days, expressly said to be followed “immediately” by His own coming in clouds with great power and glory, closing man's evil age and opening the long-desired day of Jehovah. Luke omits that awful crisis.

The Lord makes this public act of apostasy the signal for immediate flight. As the sign for flight is unmistakable, so are those disciples contemplated by the Lord: “then let those in Judea flee unto the mountains.” This could not be Christians who, as we know from other Scriptures, will have been translated to heaven. God, upon their disappearance, works in souls by His Word and Spirit to also have an earthly people first and especially among the Jews, the mass of whom are then deceived by the Antichrist. The godly Jewish remnant are in question, and the Lord here points out that their danger is so immediate that there is no time to come down from the housetop and go into the house to get their property: they must flee at once. If one is in the field, let him not turn back even to pick up his coat. It touched the Lord to think of women at such a crisis, impeded personally or by their babes. He urges prayer that the flight might not be in the rigor of winter or to the dishonor of sabbath. Can any Christian fail to see that godly Jews are here in view? From “the holy place” in verse 15 to “sabbath” in verse 20, all points to Jewish disciples at that future time and in that limited area.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The tribulation comes next (vv. 21, 22). “In the world ye have tribulation” applies to the Christian in principle, but no specific tribulation is ever held out for him. He should expect it always. All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The tribulation beyond parallel even for the Jews is during the last three-and-a-half years from the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the sanctuary. It is a judicial dealing of God through their enemies because of their bold apostasy. It has nothing to do with the Christian except that merely professing Christian fully share it. The Gentiles as such play their part in it; so we read in Revelation 7 of “the great tribulation” out of which comes a crowd of faithful ones who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Jews and the Gentiles in that latter day will be thus visited in their respective measures, when the Christians are no longer here but in heaven with Christ. Those days are cut short for the elect’s sake: otherwise no flesh would be saved. Here the Lord speaks of Jewish disciples preserved on earth for His kingdom, not of Christians who endure suffering and then reign with Him when changed at His coming, which is not even supposed in this question.

No less clear are the intimations in verses 23-26. They suppose Jewish dangers and deceits of the most trying kind, but not at all such as Christians are exposed to. We know that when the Lord Jesus comes for us, we shall be changed, dead or living, and be caught up to meet Him in the air. This is so definitely revealed in 1 Thessalonians — a letter written to correct the mistake in the assembly of Thessalonians, just gathered unto the Lord name — that it is hard to conceive of a Christian not now apprised of it. Hence were any to tell him that Christ was here or there, in Rome or in London, he would reject it and treat the alleged as a false christ and the herald as a false prophet. Nor would great signs and prodigies weigh in support of so glaring a contradiction of the word of the Lord. But Jewish believers who have no such promise [as the Rapture] did and will need the Lord’s fore-warning to keep them from the snare. Whether some say, He is in the desert or in the inner chambers, they were to believe neither. “For as the lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.” This is not how the apostle John speaks of His coming to receive us to Himself. Rather, He comes as the Bridegroom for the bride.

The lightning flash appropriately describes His judicial presence for the Jewish disciples beset with Jewish and Gentile enemies who are animated with satanic rage and hatred. This is fully confirmed by the figure attached: “wherever the carcass is, there shall be gathered the eagles” — the swift instruments of divine vengeance on the dead prey which ought to have been a living witness for God. What a contrast with His coming and our gathering together unto Him! — the blessed motive to deliver the deceived Thessalonians from being troubled by the false assertion that His day was actually there (as in 2 Thessalonians 2: 1, 2).

THE LORD’S APPEARING

Then the Lord states that “immediately after the tribulation of those days” there would be a total subversion of governmental order above — the sun, the moon, the stars — “and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken,” signs physically of the great change in progress for the earth. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in the heavens.” His appearing there on high is the sign of His coming to set up His kingdom and judge the living. “And then shall all the tribes of the land” (the context seems to favor this rendering, rather than “of the earth: ” the word means either) lament — a result never expressed with His coming to translate us. “For they see Him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” He acts on and by more than men. He has His angels, and these

“He shall send with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather His elect,” meaning here those of Israel as well as of Judah who are written in the book, “from one end of the heavens to the other.” We may compare it with the many references in the Psalms and the Prophets, Isaiah especially.

A PARENTHESIS ON BIBLE INTERPRETATION

To interpret Scripture we need a power and wisdom above our own. We cannot understand by forcing the lock: the key is needed, and grace gives it in Christ as taught by the Word and Spirit of God. If you have Christ by faith, you already have the key. In faith apply Him to the Bible, and the Holy Spirit enables you to understand it. It is not a question of a superior mind or of great learning: many learned men have been foolish in their mistakes. The simple saint who knows neither Greek nor Hebrew may understand the Bible if he with true simplicity submits himself to the Lord and has confidence in His love. This understanding is produced by the Spirit of God: only this makes people humble and gives confidence in God and in His Word by taking away objects which darken, misdirect or overpower one's own mind.

Take the advice of a friend: read the Scriptures prayerfully but believingly, and you will understand what is infinitely better than anything found in the various schemes of man. It is just the same as regards the interpretation of prophecy as in doctrine. No person should be able to convince a Christian that one part of the Word of God is sealed up and the other open. Once it was so. When Daniel received those very communications to which the Lord directs the reader, he was told to seal up the book. When John was called to have the same communications and yet greater ones, he was told *not* to seal up the book. Perhaps you have seen the difference and the reason of it: Jewish saints could not enter into the true and full meaning of the future till Christ came at least until the end arrives. Then, when the last days of this age are here, the godly remnant will understand. The wicked shall not understand. You cannot separate moral condition from real intelligence of God's Word. But the Christian already has both Christ and the Holy Spirit in virtue of redemption. Hence, he is called and qualified to search all things, yea the deep things of God. They are now, including the things to come, revealed fully and finally.

When the grace of God gives faith and the desire to do the will of God, then people become able to understand both doctrine and prophecy. They learn that all the revealed mind of God centers in Christ, not in the first man. When you are not bent on finding in prophecy England or America, some epidemic, or your own time; when you are delivered by grace from all such prepossessions, then with Him as your Object you have a fit moral condition because the absorbing ideas of unspiritual people no longer govern and blind you. Hence the only way to understand any part of the Bible is just by grace to give up for Christ our own will and prejudices. Thus we can face anything. We are no longer afraid of what God has to reveal. We don't try to read anything of our own into the Bible, but are content to gather God's meaning from it. May this be truly our desire and endeavor..

THE SABBATH AND THE LORD'S DAY

It has been clearly shown that thus far the Lord Jesus speaks of disciples connected with the temple, and Judaea and Jerusalem, but not of Christians. Take these further proofs of it. He says, “And pray that your flight be not in winter nor on a sabbath day.” The Lord's day is our day, the first day of the week. The Jew rightly and properly kept Jehovah's sabbaths. As to this, there are languages in Europe more exact than English. The Italian keep sup the right distinction; it always speaks of Saturday as the sabbath day and Sunday as the Lord's day.

In our own land there has been a great deal of confusion as to the sabbath and the Lord's day. The Lord' day differs from the sabbath by a higher degree of sanctity, not by leaving Christians free to do their own will on other days, but by calling them to do the Lord's will on that day in a complete separation to His glory, the holy services of divine honor in works of faith and labors of love. In short, the Lord's day differs essentially from the sabbath in that it is the day of grace, not of law, and the day of new creation, not of the old. The consequence of seeing this will be important differences in heart and practice.

Suppose a Christian had the strength to walk 20 miles on the Lord's day and to preach the gospel six or seven times. Would he be guilty of transgressing God's will? It is hoped that not a single person would think so; yet if really under the sabbath law it would be a violation. What can absolve from the obligations of that day? All under the law are bound within defined limits. Are Jews free to use the sabbath in indefinite labor even for what you know to be the active purposes of goodness? We must obey in our relationship.

Granted that the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath, but are the Jewish disciples also lords of the sabbath? You cannot do freely what you count ever so good: Jews are under stringent regulations as to that day. If the sabbath is your day, you are required to keep it as such. Likewise, you, a Christian, have to do with the Lord's day, and seek to understand its meaning and be true to it. Without question the Lord's day is a day of consecration to worship and to the work of the Lord. It is not the last day of a laborious week, a day of rest. It is a day that is devoted to the Lord Jesus, especially to communion with His own in the world. Nor is there sin in the most strenuous labor for souls: on the contrary such labor in the Lord is good and blessed wherever it is found, if He guide in it (and we need this).

The Jewish disciples contemplated here are told to pray that the time for their precipitate flight should not be in the winter nor on a sabbath day. The one would from its inclemency seriously impede, 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 no longer under such restrictions. The Lord is speaking not of a Christian, but of future Jewish disciples, subject to the law and its ritual and animated by Jewish hopes.

THE JEWISH ELECT DISCIPLES

Further, it is said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not even from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would be saved." All this is plain enough. It is not a question of heavenly things, but of His Kingdom. They sought to live here and be the subjects of the blessed reign and gory when the Lord comes. It is glory on earth, not in heaven. "But for the elect's sake those days should be shortened."

"Then, if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is the Christ, or there, believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as if possible to mislead even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, Behold, [he is] in the desert, go not forth: Behold, [he is] in the inner chambers, believe [it] not."

It is clear that the elect here are Jewish. A Christian would unlikely be deceived by such rumors for an instant. But the Lord Jesus supposes considerable danger for such disciples as are here. In fact, being Jewish (not Christian), they might be deceived by the cry that He [the Messiah] was here on earth, whereas no Christian could be in danger, who awaits the Son of God from heaven. Yet the Jewish disciples were exposed to it. Looking as they were for the Lord's coming to the earth, they knew that the Lord's feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives. They might thus be taken in by deceits. Not so the Christian. He knows that he is to be with the Lord in the heavens, being for this

taken up out of this world into the air to meet the Lord on high. Thus the deceits in question are addressed only to those who expect 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 Judaea, and has nothing to do with the Christians looking to join the Lord above.

Here again is the reason why even Jewish disciples should not listen. "For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and is seen even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." This is not the Roman conquest. The army of Titus 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 distinctly has the Lord Jesus guarded against the misinterpretations of men! The Son of Man's coming will be quite different and will surprise all like the lightning. There will be no question of going here or there to seek Him.

The Lord then has given these disciples landmarks in the prophecy, which hinder us from being carried away by every wind of theory. We may see clearly what the Holy Spirit has set before us. Nothing important has been knowingly passed over, nor any violence done to a word. The desire is to give a clear, distinct and positive impression of the mind of the Lord as conveyed in His own words. The disciples furnish occasion for others in the main like themselves in Judaea at the close of the age.

THE CARCASE

Then it is said, "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will be gathered together the eagles" (v. 28). Apply this to the Church or to the Christian, and what can you make of it? Is the Church "the carcase"? The Church united to Christ by the Holy Spirit is His body: it is a wondrous privilege and a blessed truth, but is the Church a carcase? Surely not: it is His living body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Nor is the Lord ever regarded as a body dead or merely alive, but as the risen and glorified Head.

The moment you refer "His carcase" to the Jewish people, it becomes strikingly true. The mass of the Jews then will be apostate, and the eagles or vultures who flock there are figures of the divine judgments executed on the guilty people by the hostile nations of the earth. Whatever may be the instruments, they are judgments of God executed at this time. If the Christians were the carcase, they must be the object of the judgment, for there the eagles, figures of those who execute judgment, are gathered together. But this is not the relation of the Lord's coming to the Christian. Nor can any 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 will go up to meet the Lord, but is He then to be the carcase and are the Church the eagles? In such a scheme, there is only the choice of one evil less or greater than another, which is generally so with an erroneous interpretation. Apply it to the object the Lord had in view and harshness disappears. This is the test of scriptural truth: whenever people press a false interpretation, the general testimony of Scripture is confused and dislocated or contradicted thereby.

JERUSALEM'S LAST CRISIS (WITH THE EMPHASIS OF EACH GOSPEL)

Then the Lord adds, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (v. 29).

A popular view makes this verse the Lord's beginning to speak of His return personally. This destroys the force of "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" and breaks the connection with

the true transition to the last days in verse 15 which introduces precise details of that epoch in their order. They are synchronized with the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom in all the habitable earth as a witness to all the nations in the general history, “and then shall the end come.” Thenceforward it is, and we have what happens in the temple, Judaea and strictly Jewish concerns at the end of the age. This is shown clearly by the reference to Daniel 12: 11. The prophet there tells us that “from the time that the continual [holocaust] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolation set up, [there shall be] 1290 days,” with a supplement in verse 12 of “45 days” more to complete the incoming of the blessed time. Now count as men like from the siege of Titus, 1335 years for days. Nothing of the sort is brought in. The starting-point is wrong, and all modes of rectification are vain.

In reality we have here the last future crisis in and round Jerusalem, though it seems the gospel of the Kingdom goes on by godly Jews outside over the earth about the same time, the days in the prophet being literal days as here in verse 22. What has misled most is confounding the different language and truth in Matthew 24: 15 etc. (who both give us what is entirely future) with that of Luke 21: 20-24 which is entirely past, except the treading down of Jerusalem by Gentiles while Gentiles times last, etc. These verses cover exclusively the Roman sack and its consequences to this day. Luke's future reference commences with verse 25 and onward. It is an error to mix up this Roman episode in Luke with the pointedly different description in Matthew and Mark which omit this, and then converge on the future only. They speak of the abomination of desolation and of the unequalled tribulation, on which Luke is silent. Rather, Luke tells of the Romans investing Jerusalem and of that desolation, of which Matthew and Mark are silent. Luke is silent about the tribulation without parallel, speaking only of “days of vengeance and great distress upon the land and wrath to this people.” The other Evangelists are silent on the extreme slaughter of the Jews by the Roman army and their captivity into all the nations, with the notable prolonged fact that Jerusalem should be trodden down by Gentiles till their times are over, as they are not yet. All this is as carefully presented in Luke in exact consistency with the Spirit's design in his Gospel, as the other two omit it, being devoted to the unprecedented horrors of the future which Luke omits.

All three Gospels take up the closing scene. Luke doesn't say “Immediately after the tribulation” etc., since he had not alluded to it, but he joins the other two about signs in sun, moon and stars, though as usual noticing moral state beyond the others. Next, all speak of the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Luke then alone adds, “But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads because your redemption draweth nigh.” Can any Christian fail to see that the heavenly saints are not here in view? We already have in Him redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our offenses whereas those here represented have yet to enjoy it in His Kingdom.

Luke's presentation is valuable for settling the true force of “this generation shall in no wise pass till all things have taken place” — among them, the end of Gentile supremacy over Israel and Jerusalem. The desire to limit “this generation” to the destruction of their city by the Romans, is thus precluded. Further, at the consummation of the age the revived Roman Empire will not be against the apostate Jews. It will be an ally of the Antichrist or willful king of Palestine, when the king of the north at the time of the end comes against him like a whirlwind, with chariots and with horsemen and with many ships. But each power shall perish successively and horribly under the Lord of lords and King of kings.

THE EVENTS SURROUNDING HIS APPEARING

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall the tribes of the earth

mourn” (v. 30). The Son of Man appearing in heaven is the sign of His coming to enforce His claim on earth. It is not here the believers with joy going up to meet the Lord, but the tribes of the earth, or at least of the land, mourning when the sign appears. “And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth 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” (v. 31). Here too, light is given to decide that the coming of the Son of man is in view of the land, Israel (or at least the chosen), and not to receive the heavenly ones for association with Himself in the Father' house.

He is seen coming on the clouds of heaven before He sends forth His angels to gather together His elect from the four winds. Now it is a matter of positive revelation by the apostle Paul (Col. 3: 4) that “When Christ our (or, your) life shall be manifested then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory.” It is not the moment when we are changed and caught up to meet Him in the air, but the time when we are with Him manifested in glory. The heavenly saints are already with Him when He comes judicially as Son of man, for to execute judgment is His given office as such (John 5: 27). They are with Him already, not then translated, called and chosen and faithful. They are not angels (who are not “called” nor said to be “faithful”), but saints (Rev. 17: 14).

We learn from Revelation 19: 14 that the armies that are in the heaven followed Him upon white horses clothed in white pure byss, the righteousnesses of saints as interpreted just before, whereas angelic clothing had been said to be pure bright linen (Rev. 15: 6). The elders, who represent the saints as chiefs of the royal priesthood, are seen on high from Revelation 4 to 19. Here they first appear in the quality of bride for the marriage of the Lamb above, and next accompany Him as armies when He goes forth from heaven to judge and war in righteousness. Hence it is in the teeth of Scripture that we can be on the earth and see Him appear as the glorious Son of Man in heaven coming to judge the living. On the contrary we shall then be manifested together with Him when He is manifested in glory.

The Lord had already intimated it before Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians 15 and Colossians 3. Though spoken it was long after Paul had departed to be with Christ that John 14 was written, and still longer for Revelation Revelation 4-19. These Scriptures reveal that Christ will come to change and translate to heaven the heavenly saints. Enoch (Jude 14) and Zechariah (Zech. 14: 5) say they come *with* Him: a truth repeated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3: 13, 1 Thess. 4: 14). Then in verses 15-17 Paul gives a new revelation to explain that this will be by His coming *for* them by His descent from heaven with a shout of command which gathers them in a moment to Himself. Clearly then “the elect,” subsequently gathered after the Lord appears, are not heavenly saints, but rather His restored people, the nucleus of godly Israel, in harmony with the context.

HIS ELECT

Too many lay great stress upon gathering “His elect.” Don't be too quick, my friends. The “elect” may not necessarily mean Christians. If one speak of elect now, it is so, but had God no heavenly “elect” before there were Christians? And after these are taken to heaven, will there be no elect on earth? Was God precluded from showing mercy on earth because His sovereign grace had given us and the Old Testament saints our respective places in heaven? There were elect Gentiles in patriarchal days and later too. Take Job and his friends: were they not elect men? Melchisedek, Jethro, and others; were not they elect? Need one enumerate the elect of Israel in the past? We clearly find elect Gentiles as well as Jews and Christians. When we read of Christianity, then the elect must be so explained; if we read about a Jewish state, then the phrase applies to a Jewish election, and so with the nations too. We must

be governed by the context. As the Lord here is simply speaking about Israel, the sense should not be ambiguous. When we have “his elect” named, He means the elect of those described, of Israel. This is not to bring in arbitrary rules. It is in fact a very plain and necessary principle of exposition.

The Lord in all the 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,” yet not for heaven but on earth. (Compare Isaiah 27, Isaiah 65, Romans 11: 5, 7, 28.

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree.” The fig tree is a well known symbol of Israel as a nation. In Luke, where the Lord views both Gentiles and Jews, He employs this very symbol, but enlarged remarkably. He says “the fig tree and all the trees.” The latter are not spoken of in Matthew because this part only looks at the Jew, but in Luke, referring to the Gentile as well as the Jew, He adds, “and all the trees.” The latter are not spoken of in Matthew because this part only looks at the Jew, but in Luke, referring to the Gentile as well as the Jew, He adds, “and all the trees.” Compare Luke 21: 29.

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree. When its branch is now become tender and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know that it (or, he) is near, at the doors. Verily I say to you, This generation shall not pass away till all these things have come to pass” (vv. 32-34).

Mark the phrase “all these things,” 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 here “this generation” cannot mean a mere period of thirty years, or a man's life. The phrase signifies, what it frequently does in Scripture, a line characterized by certain moral tokens entirely independent of a brief limit of time. Hence we find particularly in the Psalms, this use of “generation.” One text is enough to prove it. In Psalm 72: 7 we read “Thou shalt keep them, O Jehovah, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever.” “This generation” is supposed to go on, and it is an evil generation, a generation which has no faith, a stubborn and Christ-rejecting generation. “This generation” or the non-believing race of the Jews is not to pass away till all these things have taken place. Thus the same generation which crucified the Lord of glory is going on still, and will, till He comes again in the clouds of heaven. They *are* still the same proud, self-righteous, Christ-rejecting race as they were then.

The grace of God will make them anew, “a generation to come.” The Lord will judge the unbelievers at last, dealing with them righteously after His immense patience, but delivering a godly remnant in His grace. The Messiah has great things in store for Israel. There will be this double action, that the mass of them will fill up the cup of iniquity which their fathers began, while the remnant will become the holy seed, the Israel of the millennial day. He speaks of the former when saying that “this generation shall not pass away till all these things have come to pass.

“The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of the heavens, but the Father only” (vv. 35, 36).

THE DAYS OF NOAH

The next comparison is not to the fig tree or 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 Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man; for as in those days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women [shall be] grinding at the mill, one is taken and one is left” (vv. 37-40).

Had heavenly saints been in question, Enoch would be the appropriate Old Testament type, but as the Lord meant non-raptured saints who are carried through the waters of judgment, He justly chose Noah as the pattern for the remnant to be on the earth.

Again, instead of such an indiscriminate slaughter or such a captivity as was executed upon the Jews by the Romans, there is a direct and plain contrast. Here is unfailing discrimination: one man taken and one left, one woman taken and another left. The Lord will deal with perfect discernment in each case: The Romans did not, nor any army that ever took a city. Notoriously if not necessarily at such a time, there is little thought of, or time for discrimination. The rule is wholesale bloodshed and often slavery. It was especially so when Titus sacked Jerusalem. But when the Lord Jesus comes in judgment of the living on earth, it will be otherwise. One, whether of men or of women, is taken for judgment, one left for blessing in the land.

CONCLUSION

“Watch therefore, for ye know not on what day your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the house-master had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be digged through. Therefore, be ye also ready, for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (vv. 42-44).

These verses close the portion of the prophecy which refers to the Jews. It began by referring to the Jewish remnant because the disciples as yet were such, though believers. Christ took them up just as they were, though they subsequently became Christians. They then passed into a new relationship. They already had faith in Him, but instead of His reigning and blessing them on the earth, another order of things was founded in connection with His ascension to heaven. Hence the same disciples merged into a new form of relationship with God, of which the Holy Spirit sent forth was the power. They were taught no longer to expect the Lord's restoration of the kingdom 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 Christian's hope; this is what they await. The Lord calls them out from everything on earth to Himself. They had been expecting the Lord to establish them on the earth up to the day when the Lord Jesus went up to send down the Holy Spirit.

Christianity thus comes in, as if a door had been opened and let them into an entirely new circle. The disciples at the beginning were on one side of the door, the disciples at the end would be on the other side. The door opens and the new thing, the Church, passes through. It is the calling of Christians out of the world, of those called in one body, waiting till Christ comes to receive them to Himself and take them where He is. The Lord Jesus, having accomplished redemption, has Himself first taken His seat in heaven. Thus the disciples become heavenly (1 Cor. 15: 48) and are being transformed spiritually (2 Cor. 13: 18). Finally, at His coming, the Lord Jesus will take them completely out of their natural environment, conformed in body to His own glorious body. The state of things on earth since redemption, till He comes to take us to be with Him on high, is called Christianity.

It is not denied that the saints of old, before Christianity came in, will share in the resurrection, when they too will shine in the likeness of Christ. But there is an enormous difference meanwhile. We

are brought, since His cross, into salvation, with new relationships in union with Himself. Then the Holy Spirit gives a fresh and incomparably greater power to those who are now gathered to His name. It is possible that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were more faithful than many, perhaps than most of us. We cannot take high ground, but we boast in God and of what Christ has given us. He brings in “grace and truth” which makes our unfaithfulness manifest, for the greater the Christian privileges, the more strictly is our unfaithfulness measured. But the hope does not make us ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Very striking is the fact that the title “the Son of man” is not mentioned again until the third section where all the nations come into review. The clause containing that title in “the Christian portion” (Matthew 25: 13) is spurious in the KJV. In Daniel 7 we see this title used when He comes to deal with the Gentile powers (the last in particular) to the deliverance of the Jewish people and His universal dominion over all peoples and tongues.

It has to do with His presence for the earth, but does not rise to His heavenly glory nor to our association with Him there. Hence the need of the intermediate part of the great discourse, in which the Lord communicated as much as those addressed could then bear, leaving it to the Holy Spirit when sent from heaven to lead into all the truth. It is here that failure in faith and hope is found even among true saints, especially when they lean on that frail reed, human tradition, against which the Lord directed the keenest arrow.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION

Matthew 24: 45 - 25: 30

INTRODUCTION

From this point the Lord begins to open out a new thing — that which the disciples were going to enter. Evidently this was the proper order. The Lord had begun with them as they were. He then leads on to what they were soon to become, with the new relationships to Christ dead and risen, when fresh power would be given by the Holy Spirit. As a mark of this, you will see that the Lord drops all allusion to Judaea and any reference to the temple, the prophets and the sabbath.

The Lord widens 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 bear upon Christianity. What Christ died and rose to establish by the mission of the Spirit is not one of the narrow systems of men, or of their broad worldly associations. Christianity is only exclusive of sin. It is the practical expression of Christ, not only in grace and truth, but in resulting practice. The Lord definitely marks this opening out into wider principles of a moral nature, which embrace all Christian disciples, wherever they might be in this world, and at any time till He comes. Hence we find three characteristic parables.

THE FIRST PARABLE

The first parable is the prudent 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 the excellent activity with variety of spiritual endowment in each for trading with his lord's goods as given in the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25). The form is very striking. We have, seen as one, a profession carried out and ending very differently, and this in relation with the Lord, not with Israel as before.

“Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman whom his lord set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed [is] that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find so doing. Verily I say to you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if that evil bondman shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow-bondmen, and shall eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that bondman shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (vv. 45-51).

It was another case with the nation. In Judaism there was an enormous unbelieving mass in former times falling into idolatry and all kinds of wickedness, and hence persecuting the faithful brethren. But one of the characteristic marks of Christendom is that all are professors of Christ, whether truly or falsely, and it is therefore presented here as one whole. The Lord in the parable says the faithful and prudent servant shall be made ruler over all His goods. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing. It is the responsibility of all in the house. Hence He goes on to say, “But if that evil servant” etc. They are surprisingly joined. On what does his ruin depend? “In his heart” the evil servant says, “My lord delayeth.” His coming is not a mere idea: man likes to have his notions and no one is the better for them. This refers to what is deep and real — the heart's indifference to the coming of the Master. The evil servant says in his heart, “My lord delayeth.” He believes what he likes, and what he likes is that the Lord should delay His coming.

THE EFFECT OF THE LORD'S COMING MISUNDERSTOOD

It is most affecting to see that the Lord treats the putting off of His return as leading to assumption within and laxity without. That evil servant, when he says in his heart (for so it is), My lord delayeth, shall begin also to beat his fellow servants and shall eat and drink with the drunken. What a contrast with Christ, and what a practical denial of Him! It led the professor back to the world in self-exalting oppression and in allowed intimacy with the ungodly and immoral. He is therefore appointed, when the Lord comes, to have his part with the hypocrites. The Lord does not treat him as a Jew or a Greek, but according to his responsibility.

How different it is with the faithful and prudent servant! He waits and longs for the Lord because he loves Him who first loved us. Hence the hope of Christ is quite distinct from prophecy. One might be greatly versed in the prophetic word and wholly lack that hope; one might be filled with the hope and be altogether unacquainted with prophecy. Next to believing in Christ for life and redemption, with worship and service and walk following, the Christian needs and is called to wait for the Son of God from heaven. Now if you love anyone, you delight to see him. The absence of the beloved person is trying to you. There may be the wisest reasons for delay, but the delay taxes your patience, and the hope of the speedy return of the one you love is the greatest joy.

The Lord gives this feeling and strengthens it toward Himself. It is the proper hope of the Christian — not the kingdom, but Christ. Grant that it may be hindered by the influence of prophetic notions; yet there is in the heart of all true Christians a genuine desire for the coming of Christ. But when one is not in peace through a full gospel, one is afraid. Those who give them an uncertain gospel are responsible for it. As they thus keep people in dread, they do the greatest injury to the grace of God.

We do not speak of those who falsify Christ or His work, but of those who preach it partially, who fear to set forth the full value of the sacrifice of Christ in 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 immediate hope of Christ's coming.

Such Christians do not understand that the acceptance of Christ is the acceptance of a Christian. They have not learned the truth that the Lord by His death has not only effaced their sins, but that their sinful nature condemned completely so they can walk now in the Spirit, to be followed by a perfect conformity to Christ's image in resurrection at His coming (Rom. 8: 1-4, 11, 29).

Who can exaggerate what Christ has wrought for the believer? If you rest on His redemption, all difficulties Godward are taken away. Then there is nothing left except the need of daily self-judgment for every inconsistency, the duty of serving Him now and the delight of being with Him and seeing Him then, as also of worshipping both now and forever by grace. He has done all to bring us to God, taking us out of every evil. How can the believer not rejoice in this and in Him? Therefore all Christians, wherever or whoever they may be, are entitled to have joy and delight, though for many, dimmed by the prospect of His coming due to improper teaching.

Notwithstanding all their imperfect notions, it is certain that all Christians love Christ and in principle await Him too. This may not please some pre-millennialist friends, but surely this hope belongs to every Christian.

There are false prophetic views which hinder, but as the new nature goes out toward Christ, so it longs for the time when we shall be forever with the Lord. Waiting for Christ supposes waiting for His coming. If the object be to prove that many Christians do not look for Christ's coming, abundant grounds appear for working on. But if you are child-like, God gives sufficient evidence that those who are Christ's, notwithstanding obstacles, do look and long for His coming.

The children of God need to get clear of those clouds of noxious and unwholesome vapors that constantly rise up between the Lord and them. Let them cherish the hope He gave them. If you bring in a millennium first, it is hard to see Christ's coming clearly: it acts as a veil which dulls the hope of that day. It may not destroy the hope; yet one cannot help but look for His coming in an imperfect manner. If you bring in a great tribulation first, this also lowers the outlook and greatly enfeebles the hope. It occupies one with evils as they rise, produces a depressing effect, and fills the heart with that judicial trouble and its corresponding desolations. These are the mistakes of theorists. The one puts a wrong expectation between you and the coming of the Lord, kindling meanwhile a dreamy excitement in waiting for that day. The other case produces a sort of spiritual nightmare, an oppressive feeling in the thought that the Church must go through the dreadful tribulation.

Be assured, my brethren, that the Scriptures deliver us from both the dream and the nightmare. They entitle the believer to wait for Christ as simply as a child, being perfectly certain that God's Word is as true as our hope is blessed. There is to be God's glorious kingdom, but the Lord Jesus will bring it in at His coming to earth. The great tribulation shall come, but not for the Christian. When it is a question about the Jew, you can understand it well, for why does the greatest tribulation come upon him? Because of idolatry — the worship of the Beast and the Antichrist! It is for him a moral retribution with which the Christian has nothing directly to do. The predicted trouble falls on the apostate nations and the Jews. Those who ought to be witnesses of Jehovah and His Christ will at last fall into the dreadful snare of allowing the abomination to be put into the sanctuary of God.

What connection is there between this and the Christian looking for Christ? Here the prophecy of the blessed Lord drops all allusion to anything unique to Israel. His coming will be for the solemn

judgment of all who pervert grace and indulge in unrighteousness, receiving a sentence so much the more stern because the gospel reveals God perfectly in light and love, which they abuse to fleshly license. Scripture teaches the Christian not only to wait for Christ as his proper and dearest hope, but also for His appearing and kingdom when wrong will be redressed and righteousness rewarded and evil put down forever to His honor and glory. Yes, we love His appearing and His kingdom when the proud shall be abased, the meek inherit the earth, Satan be set aside and the Lord exalted publicly without a rival or a foe. It is a blessed hope, but we have the better and higher hope of being with Him where He is, that we may behold His glory which the Father gave Him because He loved Him before the world's foundation.

THE SECOND PARABLE (The 10 Virgins)

Then comes the parable of the ten virgins. It is needed to disengage the Christian from the thought that the early part of this discourse is about him: such an idea completely perverts his judgment. Rather, as we have seen, it presents the Jewish people distinctively. Here we have a then future comparison of the kingdom of the heavens.

“Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened to ten virgins, the which took their torches and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish and five were prudent. For the foolish took their torches and took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches. Now, the bridegroom tarrying, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight a cry was made, Behold, the bridegroom! go ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their torches. And the foolish said to the prudent, Give us of your oil, for our torches are going out. But the prudent answered, saying, Peradventure there be not enough for us and you. Go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and those ready went in with him to the marriage-feast, and the door was shut. Afterward came also the rest of the virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering, said, Verily I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25: 1-13).

In our day we have another and opposite error, an error that takes away the parable of the virgins from applying to the Christian. On the contrary it has nothing directly to do with the Jewish remnant. They are not called to go out to meet the Bridegroom. They could not have oil in their vessels, and lastly they will not be exposed to the temptation of going to sleep. The Jews ought to abide where they are, or only flee to escape death in their refusal of idolatry. Those who survive for the Lord's appearing and their own deliverance, only receive the Holy Spirit after He appears. All is in contrast with the Christian position.

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

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 had been a Jew, he would thus leave his ancient associations and hopes behind. Again, if the greatest person in the Gentile world, or if 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 arrest or fascinate the heart of man. He has got a new and all-absorbing object in Christ — Christ in heavenly joy and blessedness.

It is not the Judge coming to deal with the wicked. If the Christian goes forth to meet the

Bridegroom, does such a parable bring an image of terror? He well knows that the same Jesus who is the Bridegroom will be the Judge; he well knows that Jesus will put down all those who oppose Him, but He is not the Judge and the Bridegroom to the same persons, any more than both will be true of Him at the same precise time. Where would be the sense of such confusion? The Lord purposely brings in the bright figure of the Bridegroom to Christians who are waiting for Him.

There also are other important elements. Here are persons true or false. They are not presented as one object: consequently the idea of the bride* is not the expressed aim. When we talk about Christians, real or nominal, we do not fix our mind on unity; we think of individuals who go forth. Christ was about to present *profession*, and so introduces foolish as well as wise virgins. He therefore looks at Christians professing His name truly or falsely, not at the Church, the bride of the Lamb. The Christians are here characterized 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 of greater antiquity than any others), when become a Christian, leaves all to go forth unto Him, as we read in Hebrews 13: 13, "bearing His reproach."

*It is a strange fact, however, that two uncial MSS. (DX), eight cursives, several ancient versions, including the Itala and Vulgate, and fathers Greek and Latin endorse this addition, and represent the virgins as going to meet the "Bridegroom and the Bride." Of course, it is a mere gloss. Had a bride been named, it would have detracted from the perfect finish of the parable and brought in confusion, as Christians real or in name are meant by the ten who go forth to meet the Lord.

Here you have the same great principle. As the Christian, even though once a Jew, was called to leave the old order behind, so the virgins went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five foolish. Those who were foolish took their torches, but no oil with them. The prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches.

Is it true that the Jewish remnant at the end of the age could have oil in their vessels? They will only have such an anointing when the Lord Jesus comes and sheds the Spirit on them. Oil symbolically means the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not merely the washing by the Spirit, however vital: the Jewish remnant will have this. They will be cleansed in the heart by the Word. The Jewish disciples who will be found at the end of the age do not receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit till the Lord appears. They wait for that day. It is only when the kingdom comes that the power of the Holy Spirit will be upon them. They will when converted welcome Him, saying, Blessed be He who comes in Jehovah's name. They then will go through a serious inward process: when they see the Lord Jesus, they mourn as for an only Son. They have a fountain opened in Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness, but the power of the Holy Spirit will be given only after they have seen the Lord. The *Christian* receives the oil or anointing from the Holy One while the Lord is unseen and on high.

Again, with the Jew there is no time when, as we see in these virgins, a class goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. The Jewish disciples will not disappear from Jerusalem until the idol is set up and the great tribulation is at hand. Then they flee from the enemy's power and its dread consequences from God. It is a flight from the overflowing scourge in retribution and judgment for the people's iniquity. It is no going forth to meet the Bridegroom in joyful hope as here.

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 in, from and for heaven. That object is Christ, the blessed One whose grace has been proven and whose coming is awaited. Hence, he goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. The Jewish remnant rather expect to see the Lord coming to deliver them by putting down their enemies. As Christ

ascended, so the Christian waits to be caught up *out* of the world; the Jewish saint waits for the Lord to come judicially *into* the world, which also is our later expectation. The parable speaks solely of the Christian and in no way refers to the Jewish remnant.

We shall see other proofs of this. It is said that the wise took oil in their vessels: the foolish took no oil. The best blessings we have are those which God confers on His children, on the body of Christ — on all those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, who rest on Christ and His redemption. These are the persons spoken of as wise. The Holy Spirit is the divine spring for sustaining testimony as well as the divine power for understanding the Word of God and for communion with the Father and the Son.

The foolish virgins never had oil in their vessels. Some ask how they can have had their torches burning. The answer is easy. They could light the torch: there is no mystery about that. The foolish virgins were not real Christians. The weakest Christian as well as the strongest has the oil. The apostle John so tells not the father nor the young men, but the babes, the little children. He tells the feeblest that they have an anointing from the Holy One. Thus, those who had no oil could not be Christians, in any real, full or divine sense of the name. They were strangers to the Lord's grace.

If you have Christ, if you know the blood of sprinkling, if you rest on a crucified and risen Savior, you have the oil in your vessels. You are not one of the foolish virgins. The foolish lived a life of religious levity, not necessarily hypocritical, but of self-deception, ignoring God and His grace. Consequently, not having the Spirit of Christ, they were none of His.

We often think of the early Christians with their great advantages, with many of the Scriptures applying to them fully, while we can only get the principle of them. But your attention is called here to the fact that there are other Scriptures which apply more emphatically to us now. There is thus what one may call a *divine compensation*. We can only take the general spirit of what was said to the Corinthians. For instance, they had the gift of tongues and other miraculous powers among them, while we have not. Alas! wherever there are now pretensions to sign gifts, their falsity or worse 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 makes it a moral impossibility for God to presently bestow these extraordinary virtues. If the Lord were to restore them now, one might ask, Where? Most people would begin with themselves. Were the Lord to confer these powers upon the various sects of Christendom, it would be putting His seal of approval upon what His Word says is wrong. How could He thus contradict Himself? How could He thus sanction the broken fragments of His house or put honor upon its fallen condition? Without this we still are ready to be self-satisfied. We are too prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and the Lord will not help us to be more so.

He, however, has left what is infinitely better: He continues everything due to Christ. He has taken away nothing needful for edification [building up]. He still gives peace and joy in believing. Now as of old He puts this inward power in the Church, but He once marked it with a brilliant signature before the world. Those who look for the restoration of these powers do not understand what befits our fallen condition. It is morally important for the Christian to know what the Church was at first and what it is now, and to grieve before God at the difference. What sympathy ought there to be with the Christian 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. Ought we not for the Lord's sake to feel deeply the actual condition of ruin?

In the parable the Lord points out the failure from the original calling. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all nodded and went asleep." What a state of departure, resulting from forgetfulness of the

Lord's return! It was a general and total insensibility to the blessed hope. When sleepy, they happily turned in here or there to rest. They no longer went forth to meet the Bridegroom. The wise who had the oil in their vessels slept like the foolish who had none.

Mark another thing. It is midnight, and there was a cry made, "Behold, the bridegroom, go forth to meet him." Has this been fulfilled? It is being fulfilled now. It is a cry made by divine grace. No sign appeared, no outward warning, no seeing of a prophecy accomplished, as for the Jewish remnant in chapter 24. God works in us invisibly by His Word and Spirit. The Lord intervenes to break the long slumbering condition of Christendom for both the wise and the foolish.

There have been times when men were impressed with the fear that judgment-day was coming. They yielded to sore panic at the cry that "the end of the world" was at hand. In the year 600 they were sure it would be then. But time passed on, and the end of the world did not come. They slumbered again. Then, in the year 1000 there was yet greater alarm all over western Christendom. The clergy took advantage of this and got the barons and people to give their gold and their labor, lands and possessions to build grand cathedrals and religious houses, some of which exist to the present day. This fear passed away when the end of the world did not come. Then followed a long and deep slumber.

In past ages there was alarm, sometimes to the utmost degree. This state is represented in the mediaeval hymn or dirge, "Dies Irae," the extreme expression of Catholic terror. Such was the feeling of the middle ages. Since then, Protestants have tried to get power into their hands. But this means seizing the earth at the present, not quitting all to meet Christ.

The momentous fact is that two spiritual characteristics, distinct from ancient or mediaeval or modern views, mark off truth from error as to this. Are we not to be humbled because of the evil that has been done in Christendom? Are we not practically to take our stand on what was the Lord's will from the first? If the Lord at the outset called all Christians to go out to meet Him, they always should cherish this as their calling and joy. The consequence of a revival of the Christian hope of meeting the Lord is resumption of the original position of going forth to meet the Bridegroom. How could believers continue in what they know to be false and unscriptural, if they look for the Lord to come back any day? Thus the practical effect is immediate and immense where heart and conscience are true to Him. Compare Luke 12: 35-37 for the proper moral posture.

Awe-stricken, the foolish virgins come to the wise, saying, "Give us of your oil," but this is beyond what the Christian can do. The wise bid them "Go, buy oil for yourselves." There is One who sells, but freely, without money and without price: to buy even from an apostle is fatal. The cry was given to revive the hope: it also had the effect of recalling to the original and only right attitude of the saints toward Christ. It was enough to sever the wise from the foolish, as ones alone ready to act accordingly. It was too late for the foolish: who but One could give what they wanted?

All the machinery of religion does not change people's state or suppose real renewal. The decking of ecclesiastical buildings, the costumes of clergymen, the modern taste for church music, simply show that the foolish virgins are at work. They are not in a fit state to meet the Lord, and fear it themselves. The consequence, then, of this midnight cry is that a double activity is going on. The Lord is awakening those who know Himself and are wise by His grace, to go forth to meet the Bridegroom. The others, if indirectly, are also powerfully but in their own way affected by the cry, but its effects do not rise above nature and the earth.

Utterly ignorant of the grace of God, they are trying to make up by "earnestness." They do not know that they are far from God, dead in trespasses and sins: their superstitious trust in religious forms such as baptismal regeneration blind them. So they think, or hope, that being "earnest" they may

somehow or other get right at last. What delusion! If you ask them whether their sins are blotted out and if they are saved by grace, they count it presumption. They are as ignorant of the true power and privilege of redemption as the heathen or the Jew. They have no Spirit-taught certainty that the Son of man came down to save the lost.

As sinners, we need a Savior and a divine salvation; as saints, let us seek a calm but complete devotedness to the name, word, and work of the Lord Jesus. But man prefers his own works. To win the world he finds that pictorial representations of Christian facts or forms act most on the masses and attract the light, sentimental, despairing and even profane. Individuals in the midst of such religion may use a certain measure of the gospel to win people, but they subject Christ Himself to the "church." But the movement as a whole is just the activity of the foolish virgins who do not have the oil and in vain try to get it as best they can.

The Bridegroom finally comes, and "they who 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. Their religious energy is seen to be of the old man. In agony they say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the Lord of peace, the Giver of life and glory, can only tell them, "I know you not." This is not said to faulty believers. It is said to the foolish virgins who had no oil — to those who bore the name of the Lord, but did not have the Spirit of Christ. "Watch, therefore," He says, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

There is no authority for what follows in the KJV: "wherein the Son of man cometh." Copyists added the clause from Matthew 24: 42 and brought in the sense of the coming Judge. But this is incongruous with what the Lord here urges, which is the delight of going forth to meet Him the Bridegroom. Man as such must be judged: all the guilty tribes mourn before the Son of man. But the calling and hope of the Christian is filled with other and joyous expectations in spite of their unfaithfulness during the night while He tarried, for *all* slumbered and slept.

This middle parable is a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens. Here only is found a dispensational view of the state of things among those professedly Christ's on earth while He is on high. Here accordingly, the constant expectation of those who took the place of entering into the interests of His love is treated, with the issue at the end for such as were "foolish" and had no share in the anointing of the Spirit, for this alone could enable any to be "ready" to go in with Christ to the marriage. The "then" of the comparison (Matt. 25: 1), when judgment is executed on the evil servant of Matthew 24, carries us up to the foolish virgins shut out and disowned by Him: a complete proof that they were not saints. Indeed, the theory that any member of Christ's body will be left behind when He comes to receive His own to Himself and translate them to the Father's house, is opposed to the clearest testimony of Scripture, and unworthy of a spiritual mind. Think of Christ's body without an ear or an eye or a finger or a toe — the Bridge of the Lamb mutilated and deformed in glory! "They who are Christ's as His coming," not some who have some external mark or believe some subordinate truth, will be raised to share the kingdom when He reigns and to be with Him before the kingdom and during it and after it. All such will have His presence and love in a glory deeper and higher. The scheme that denies this revealed certainty as in John 17: 24, Romans 5: 17, 1 Thessalonians 4: 17 (last clause) and Revelation 22: 5 is not only anti-scriptural but repulsive and destructive of all sound judgment and of the best affections.

THE THIRD PARABLE (The Talents)

In the third parable we do not have the collective responsibility so strikingly depicted from other objects and attaching to the Bridegroom's coming, as in the second, but a kind of pendant on it.

“For [it is] as [if] a man going abroad called his own bondmen and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his several ability, and went his way. Straightway he who received the five talents proceeded and traded with them, and made other five talents. Likewise also he [who received] the two, and he gained other two. But he who received the one went off and dug in the earth and hid the money of his lord. After a long time the lord of those bondmen cometh and settlenth account with them. And he who received the five talents came forward and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst to me five talents: behold, I gained five other talents [besides them]. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many: enter into the joy of thy lord. And he also who [received] the two talents said, Lord, two talents thou deliveredst to me: behold, I gained other two talents. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many: enter into the joy of thy lord. And he also who had received the one talent came forward and said, Lord, I knew thee, that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering whence thou didst not scatter; and being afraid I went off and hid thy talent in the earth; behold, thou hast that which is thine. But his lord answering said to him, Wicked and slothful bondman, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not and gather whence I scattered not. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have got mine own with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give [it] to him who hath the ten talents. For to every one who hath shall be given, and he shall be in abundance, but from him who hath not, even what he hath shall be taken away [from him]. And cast out the useless bondman into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (vv. 14-30).

Here it is the Lord working by diversity of gifts. As He is sovereign, so confidence in Him is what severs the “good and faithful” bondmen from the wicked and slothful one, as it was in Matthew 24, a question of prudent or wise fidelity. Zeal according to that confidence was followed by blessing and fruit. Here we have marked variety and individual responsibility in faith, in contrast with unbelief and blindness to grace. When we know Christ (and the unprofitable bondman professed this) such unbelief is profound wickedness, and none in general worse than with such a nominal Christian. When confidence in Him is wanting, all is wrong. It may be shown in fear to use what He had given for profit. Had he truly known the Lord, he would have served Him gladly, especially as he had a gift of power. He thus was judged according to his distrust and the falsehood which unbelief readily yields to. Unbelief receives what flesh says, according to what the evil heart suggests when it listens to Satan's lie.

The Lord deals with the wicked man as his slander deserved. While those who work on in confidence of His grace enter into the joy of their Lord, those who would not work in distrust of Him, shall be consigned to the outer darkness with all its horrors and misery. Bliss with Christ is beyond rewards, though this too has an important place.

The Parable of the Ten Pounds (or, Minas) in Luke 19: 12-27 is also instructive. It is unique to his Gospel and was given before the Lord's last visit to Jerusalem, whereas that of the Talents was given when the visit was drawing to a close. In Luke there is the same gift entrusted to each of the servants, and their responsibility and right use in some was strongly in evidence, yet to have authority over so many cities is the *reward of the Kingdom*, not entrance into their Lord's joy. But how profound

the mistake to set a place of outward honor above sharing the Lord's joy with Himself! The good and faithful also will receive that, both being in the Kingdom. There is responsibility in active service.

If the faithful and wise servant, contrasted with “that evil servant,” set forth the general place in the house, whether faithful or the contrary, the parable of the Talents shows us those who trade with the goods of Christ, and that blessing in this work turns on confidence in Him and His grace.

Chapter 3

THE GENTILE PORTION

Matthew 25: 31-46

This is the third and concluding section of the Lord's prophetic word on the mount. No part of it has been less understood, yet it is clearly defined as distinct from the other two by internal marks which ought to have carried conviction to every believer. But such has been the fate of Scripture, not that God's Word fails in plainness of speech and certainty of meaning, but because it crosses man's will. Man therefore seeks to interpret it according to his own thoughts. Every Scripture is *for* us, and being of God, is also profitable for man, but it is not all *about* us. We can only learn from itself concerning whom it speaks.

1. We have had a believing Jewish remnant, but without the full privileges of Christians, as the Lord addressed those Jewish disciples who then represented it down to the end of the age. Then He appears as the Son of man and in that day delivers not only such, but all the elect of the nation, the “all Israel that shall be saved,” immediately after unparalleled tribulation.

2. Then (without any allusion to Judaea, the city, the temple or any association local or temporal) the discourse takes up what applies directly and exclusively to the Christian profession, sound and unsound, in the three intermediate parables which were therefore couched in general terms. Here “the Son of man” disappears according to the overwhelming testimony of the best manuscripts of Matthew 25: 13.

3. Only the Gentiles remained. Every reader is aware that the mass of mankind is devoted to idols and impostures and has to this day resisted the Christian testimony. But the Lord had intimated in the first part (Matt. 24: 14) that “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the habitable world* for a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end come.” Here He lets us know the fruit of this preaching by the believing Jews of that day, as its place intimates, just before the ends comes.

*Even those who try to limit "the inhabited world" to the Roman Empire are obliged here to abandon it; for they admit that at this very time the Beast and the False Prophet will have banished it hence. We can understand the term employed by the Romans in pride of power, and so cited in scripture as in profane historians, and loosely used by the speakers in Acts 17: 6, Acts 24: 5. But it is not possible so to confine it in Acts 17: 31, Rom. 10: 18, Heb 1: 6, Rev. 3: 10, Rev. 16: 14, any more than in Matt. 24: 14. Compare also Matt. 4: 8 with Luke 4: 5.

Hence the last section has its suited uniqueness which differentiates it from both the preceding ones. The specific ground for the King's decision turns on preaching the glad news of the kingdom which only came through His brethren (evidently converted Jews) before “the end,” and is here shown to result among all the nations in some heeding the message and in others despising it. It is therefore

unique in its circumstances as a whole; though no principle is involved which cannot be justified from other Scriptures.

“But when the Son of man shall have come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit down upon His throne of glory, and all the nations shall be gathered before Him; and He shall separate them from one another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats (or, kids); and He will set the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to those on His right, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the world's foundation. For I was hungry, and ye gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick, and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee hungering and fed Thee; or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? and when saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in; or naked, and clothed Thee? and when saw we Thee sick or in prison and came unto Thee? And the King answering shall say to them, Verily I say to you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] to one of the least of these My brethren, ye did [it] to Me. Then shall He say also to those on the left, Go from Me, accursed, into the everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and ye gave Me not to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me not to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and ministered not to Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say to you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of these least, ye did [it] not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life everlasting” (Matt. 25: 31-46).

The Son of man will have already come. His war-judgments are over — not only what He executed by the appearing of His presence (2 Thess. 2: 8), but when He put Himself at the head of His people as in Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 38, Ezekiel 39, Micah 6 and Zechariah 14.

JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

Now the “King” (found here only) enters on the sessional judgment of His throne, before which all the nations must appear, for then all the peoples, nations and languages must serve Him. It is part of that judgment of the living and of the habitable earth by the risen Man whom God appointed. The judgment of living man on the earth, in the midst of his busy, selfish, sordid, and sinful life was much pressed by the Lord and the apostles, as it is in Old and New Testament prophecy, but it has been lost to the living faith even of saints in Christendom. Yet even the creeds confess it, however little it was realized when they were written. As the Jews let slip the judgment of the dead, so Christendom practically forgets the judgment of the living. Here we have judgment applied by the Son of man judicially when He enters on the exercise of His world-kingdom. Hence it is a question of people at large, not Jews and of course not Christians, but of “all the nations” when the Lord is come and sits on the throne of His glory.

This is not “the judgment at the great white throne.” Then the earth and the heaven flee from His gaze and no place is found for them. The “*the dead*,” the great and the small, stand before the throne. Then “the dead” (none else are spoken of) are judged according to their works out of the record of all done in the body, the book of life sealing it by its silence. This white throne judgment is not the coming of the Son of man to reign over the earth (as in Matthew), for the nations are destroyed and the earth fled and even the heavens. On the contrary, Matthew shows the Son of man come to the earth and all the nations gathered before Him. Here they are all living, to whom alone “nations” could apply; there,

the wicked dead alone are indeed, for the righteous dead had been raised long before for the first resurrection. After that, no righteous ones ever die.

In the judgment of all the nations there is no such scrutiny as Romans 2 speaks of for the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by our Lord Jesus before the great white throne. Then it will be that as many as sinned without law shall also perish without law and as many as sinned under law shall be judged by law. Still more terrible will be the doom of those who rejected the gospel or even neglected so great salvation, as other Scriptures declare.

But here it is a simple and single issue which applies only to that living generation of all the nations: how did you treat the King's messengers when they preached this gospel of the kingdom before the end came? The end was now come. The test was an open undeniable fact, but it proved whether they had or had not faith in the coming King. Those who honored the heralds of the kingdom showed their faith by their works, and likewise those who despised them manifested their unbelief. The test was both just and gracious. The King pronounced accordingly. The form was new, as were the circumstances, but the foundation is the same for all the objects of God's mercy on the one hand, and for the objects of wrath on the other. So it was before the deluge, so it will be when the Son of man on His throne of glory on earth shall deal with all the nations. Apart from faith it is impossible to be acceptable, for he who approached God must believe that He is, and becomes a rewarder of those who seek Him out.

So it will be with the blessed of these nations. Their conduct to those who preached the coming kingdom evidenced their faith. The King's grace accepted to their astonishment what they did to His brethren, even to the least, as done to Himself. The trials and sufferings of these "brethren" gave the Gentiles occasion to show their faith working by love, or to show the total absence of it. Rahab the harlot likewise was justified by works when she received the messengers, but her faith is as carefully stated by the apostle Paul: without faith her works would have been evil. She rightly judged that Jehovah and His people were above her king and country. This was a turning point for her; not then only, but to eternity. So it was with the sheep; and the sad reverse was no less true for the goats.

There is another element overlooked by those who confound Matthew 25: 31-46 with Revelation 20: 11-15. In the judgment of the dead only one class is stated — the dead who were not in the resurrection of the just. Hence only the unjust appear, and they are judged according to their works in all their life. Here appear not only the sheep and the goats, but the King's brethren, a third and highly honored class, none of them dead or risen, but all alive. Can there be a more striking contrast? The resurrection-state must exclude what we find herein. With the judgment of the living, and in particular of "all the nations," all here is harmonious. At the end "of the age" He comes; at the end "of the world" He does not. There is then no world to come to. It is all gone, to appear afterwards made new for eternity.

The decision is final. The decision of Revelation 20 also is final. But the one is at the beginning of the thousand years' reign, and the other at its end.

The righteous, though they had faith in the kingdom and therefore treated its preachers as became the truth, were evidently poorly instructed. We see how little their intelligence rose above that of their unbelieving countrymen. But their heart was right by grace, as the King knew perfectly, who from the first separated these to the right and the others to the left. He allowed this ignorance to come out that He might give to all a profound lesson never to be forgotten. This is quite compatible with the righteous as alive in their natural bodies. But is such lack of intelligence consistent with the risen condition? When that which is perfect is come (and it surely comes at the resurrection of the just), that

which is in part shall be done away. This was not at all the state as yet of these sheep, the righteous Gentiles; and the King only communicates to them before His throne what every Christian may be assumed now to know, with much more quite beyond them. Yet was the kingdom prepared for these, as for the righteous generally, from the world's foundation.

Noticed also that the everlasting fire to which the unbelieving Gentiles of that epoch are consigned is said to have been "*prepared* for the devil and his angels," not for the goats, except that they fitted themselves for it by their evil ways. Compare also Romans 9: 22. The devil and his angels were not yet cast into the lake of fire. This will only be after Satan's last effort at the end of the Millennium, as Revelation 20: 10 tells us. But here the goats have now their portion, as the Beast and the False Prophet had a little before them, as we read in Revelation 20, and that while alive too.

It must be borne in mind that stupendous events had just taken place before all the nations are gathered here; facts all-important for understanding the position. The vast hosts of the west will have been destroyed from above at a stroke when the Beast and the False Prophet meet their doom. Soon after the eastern hordes led by the Assyrian of the prophets (Daniel's king of the north) will have been dissipated like the chaff. Edom will have met its final judgment (Isa. 63) and so will Gog with his numerous allies (Ezek. 38-39). The Jews and Christendom will have been judged, as we see in this discourse. Hence "all the nations" here summoned are composed of what remains after these other executions of judgment. From the nature of the case, they must needs be exclusively living people who were placed under the responsibility of having heard "this gospel of the kingdom" preached by God-fearing Jews, whom the Lord sent for that express purpose before the end come.

This alone explains the unique criterion by which "the righteous" were marked off from their unbelieving fellows. It was His grace that blessed those who received these glad tidings, and now they hear of their blessed portion from the lips of the King. They were as amazed to learn His estimate of their faith working by love, as the hardened were to meet their awful end. We have no reason to believe that either the sheep or the goats ever heard the full gospel of God such as was preached by the Christian witnesses, or that the converted Jews knew it as we do. We must leave room for the sovereign ways of God, dealing variously in His wisdom with the future as with the past. But for every sinful person there must be faith for eternal life, and faith is from a report and the report through God's Word. Thus only can any fallen person be brought into living relation with Him. The measure has differed greatly at different times, as it will, but the principle is the same. This of course applies only to those who hear.

Particularly note that there is no allusion to resurrection here for either "the righteous" or "the accursed." On both sides they were Gentiles living in their natural bodies, for they are expressly said to be "all the nations" when they were gathered before the glorious throne of the Son of man.

He had said that this gospel of the kingdom should go forth "in all the habitable world for a witness to all the nations." Some had shown, not merely benevolence or self denial or moral excellence in any marked degree, but love in varied ways to the servants who preached in the King's name the same truth which He had preached at the beginning of His public ministry. But it was faith which wrought in their love. If the King and His coming Kingdom only had been a myth in their eyes, they would have at least ignored His messengers as impostors. They believed the message to be of God and therefore treated its preachers with kindness, and are to enjoy the gracious result. It was not good done even to the sheep, but specifically to "My brethren," even the least of them.

So the King puts the difference of the two classes on the only ground that could apply to "all the nations" then before His earthly throne, after such a preaching as had by grace reached them before the

end. Now it had come: the new age had begun. The King had done what none else could: He separated them all individually and with unfailing discernment. Instead of their giving account to Him, He recounts to them why He set some on His right and some on the left. It turned on faith that it might be according to grace, or sadly, on unbelief where there was no grace, but only self. Hence He said to the wondering righteous, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it to Me." How awful on the other hand for the unjust to hear, in answer to their more hurried summary, "Inasmuch as ye did[it] not to one of these least, neither did ye [it] to Me."

Thus all rests on Christ, though His grace makes the most of what to others might seem trivial. The faith working by love in the one class, and the utter unconcern of the other, laid bare respectively their fitness or unfitness for inheriting the kingdom. In all cases of saints, works are the evidence, faith of the Word the instrument, Christ's work the ground, and God's grace the source.

The King does not call them adopted sons, as is the portion of Christians (Gal. 3: 26) nor do they exhibit the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is characteristic of Christians. He calls them "blessed" of *His* Father, but does not say "your Father" for this was not their privilege to know, as it is ours. Nor does He speak of the blessings according to God's counsels for us in the heavenlies, to which He chose us in Christ *before* the world's foundation. The King bade them inherit the kingdom prepared for them *from* the world's foundation. They are elect and born of God, as all saints must be, but they do not reign with Christ in that day, any more than even "His brethren" among the Jews who survived the tribulation crisis before the kingdom, whereas those slain for His name at the "time of the end" will be raised to reign with Him as shown in Revelation 20: 4. But those saved of Gentiles like the saved of Israel will have a distinctive place of honor over those born during the millennial reign, as we may gather from Revelation 7 and 14. As elect Jews will have known "flesh saved" from the tribulation which is to befall the rebellious people, so elect Gentiles *emerge* out of "the great tribulation," distinguished from the Church which the Lord declares He will keep *out of* the hour of trial that is about to come on the whole habitable world to try those who dwell on the earth (Rev. 3: 10).

During the many years that precede this extraordinary mission to all the habitable world, the ground of statement as stated in Romans 2: 12 is for mankind generally wholly different. There is no respect of persons with God, who will then judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, which can scarce apply to this scene. Hence, while there is a resurrection of life for such as (hearing the word of Jesus and believing God who sent Him) have eternal life, there will be at length also a resurrection of judgment for those who, believing not, produced only evil works. This is the judgment in Revelation 20: 11, etc., where all had been dead but were raised and judged according to their works, and are therefore lost. But it is a total contrast with the King's decision about the living Gentiles, to whom His brethren (the converted of the Jews) are to preach before the end, and who will be proved righteous or reprobate as to how they behaved to words the bearers of "this gospel of the kingdom"

Clearly the test here employed by the King suits only the living Gentiles who had treated well or ill His brethren with whom they are confronted, because of their faith or unbelief in the King who pronounces on both. The character is unique and necessarily determined by the brief* mission of "this gospel of the kingdom" before the end. It was in no sense the end of the *world*, but of the *age*, when the King had not yet come to reign over the earth. This appraisal of all the Gentiles is when He shall have come in His glory and shall sit on His throne. It will thus be plain that Revelation 20 in the two resurrections exactly agrees with the Lord's discourse in John 5: 21-29; while Matthew 25: 31-46, though equally true, widely differs from both.

We may see an interesting link between Matthew 24: 14 and Matthew 25: 40,45. "His brethren"

were those who at the time of the end carried “this gospel of the kingdom” to all the nations, which are blessed or cursed by the King's decree according to their behavior toward those who thus and then brought the word of God. It was not brethren of the intervening Christian character, but of the converted Jews to the Gentiles. And as these brethren are thus honored by the King, so are the Gentiles blessed who received and treated them well, the Son of man being come and reigning over both. It is the age to come, not the judgment of the dead. The ground on which the solemn decision depended fits into no time or circumstances of the Gentiles, except the eventful mission by a future remnant of godly Jews who preach the gospel of the kingdom just before the Son of man comes to enforce and establish it.

Thus we have here a deeply interesting and momentous judgment which the Lord is to execute over all the nations who only heard “this gospel of the kingdom” before the end comes and He returns to bring in His kingdom. Applied as it often is by the theologians, it enfeebles and darkens what Scripture declares of the judgment before the Great White Throne in Revelation 20. And its own true application is effaced. A gap is thus created in the revelation of God which no other Scripture can fill, while the attempt to fit it into the last judgment after the Millennium is over, and the subsequent destruction of the insurgent rebels, causes nothing but confusion. Give this judgment its place at the beginning of the Millennium a fresh light shines without obstruction.

Chapter 4

THE FUTURE TRIBULATION

The Christian is to expect suffering, scorn, injury, persecution and tribulation of every sort in and from the world, as that grace has given him the richest privileges in Christ. “These things I have spoken to you,” says our Lord, “that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye have (not merely “ye shall have”) tribulation, but be of good courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16: 33). Also in Acts 14: 22, for establishing the disciples and exhorting them to abide in the faith, the word is that “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” So the great apostle could say on the one hand, “I ask that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” (Eph. 3: 13) and on the other, “to you it was granted in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which ye saw in me and now hear of in me” (Phil. 1: 29, 30). “Faithful the word [is], for it we died with [Him], we shall also live together, if we endure we shall also reign together” (2 Tim. 2: 11, 12). We may not all be called to suffer *for* Him, but if we do not suffer *with* Him, can we look to be glorified together? (Rom. 8: 17). It is here that we differ essentially from the saints born in the millennial age who are reigned over instead of reigning with Christ.

Who then are the saints who pass through and come out of the great tribulation? The answer can only be given by the light God has given us in the prophetic word. The answer is plain, not only on the positive side, but even on the negative.

First, and chiefly, the Old Testament is explicit that “at the time of the end,” when “Michael shall stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy (Daniel's) people,” “there shall be a time of trouble (or, tribulation) such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.” It will far exceed even what accompanied the idolatrous effort of Antiochus Epiphanes of whom Daniel 11: 31-32 speaks. We do hear of an “abomination that maketh desolate” then set up, but not of the tribulation without parallel which Daniel 12 predicts for the end when the abomination that maketh desolate will be set up again and for the last time. Here it is incontestable that we hear only of Daniel's people, the

Jews, who “at that time shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book” — the future elect and godly remnant.*

In Matthew 24 our Lord refers to this abomination standing in a holy place *for those in Judaea* to flee to the mountains, and to the great trouble that is to follow, in even stronger terms than used by Daniel. The context is just as plain and certain as that of Daniel. The Lord also contemplates Jewish disciples whom He will deliver by appearing in glory as the Son of man to the discomfort of their enemies, but also to the discriminating judgment of Israel. His elect, not merely of the Jews (v. 22), but of His entire people Israel (v. 31), shall be gathered together from the four winds (where are still scattered these of the ten tribes undiscerned), from one end of the heavens to the other. The Lord addresses His disciples here in a personal way, which does not apply to the intermediate part, still less to what He tells us of “all the nations” in Matthew 25: 31-46.

The same fact is observed in Mark 13 which give substance the first section of our Lord's prophecy as in Matthew's Gospel, but with those characteristic additions of Mark on the service of His name. See verses 9-12 and 34. But there is no difference in the relevant intimation that in the future crisis only “those in Judaea” are concerned and that it is a question here of “flesh” being saved and of “this generation,” etc., not of resurrection and rapture on high. Jewish disciples only are in question, and deliverance coming down to the earth in displayed power and glory, instead of saints caught up by the Lord and to be with Him as in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Luke 21: 20-24 contains unique truth not found in Matthew or Mark — an explicit prediction of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and resulting great distress upon the land and upon this people. Only Luke mentions their being led captive into all the nations as also the remarkable and still continued sentence of Jerusalem to be trodden down by Gentiles until their assigned times be fulfilled. He speaks of “days of vengeance” as indeed they were then, and he leaves room for more at the close when he speaks of distress of nations and men fainting for fear. This is in character with the design of the third Gospel which entirely omits the abomination of desolation and the unequalled tribulation, so prominent in the two preceding Gospels. From verse 25 Luke coalesces with his predecessors in what belongs to the time of the end. Verses 20-24 are special to him.

Secondly, Revelation 7: 9-17 presents the vision of a great crowd which none could number (distinguished from the 144,000 sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel). The crowd was out of every nation and of tribes and peoples and tongues. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb. They have a wholly different position from the crowned and enthroned elders and the four living creatures; so much so that one of the elders explains to the prophet who they are and from where they came. “And he said to me, These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Here we have clear evidence that grace will deliver a vast crowd of believing Gentiles out of “the great tribulation” at the time of the end. They are therefore, as a special gathering out at the close, distinct from those heavenly saints of all times symbolized in the same scene.

The extreme severity of the future tribulation will fall in and round Jerusalem, but there is no reason to doubt that it awaits all nations, if in lesser measure. It is “*the* great tribulation,” perhaps implied in Luke's description of “distress of nations” at that very time. Gentile saints, as well as Jews, will emerge from it in that day, not forming one body as now in the Church, but expressly distinct from it and from one another, as Revelation 7 plainly attests.

Thirdly, there is the promise, most appropriate to the overcomers of the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3: 10), though surely not for them exclusively, “Because thou didst keep the word of My

patience, I also will keep thee (not during, but) out of the *hour* of trial that is about to come upon the whole habitable earth, to try those who dwell upon the earth.” That hour may include more than “the great tribulation”: no intelligent Christian thinks it covers less. The promise is to keep the faithful, the Christian saints, out of that hour. The refuge is not simply geographical because that hour of trial will befall the whole habitable world. The heavenly saints (1 Cor. 15: 43) will be caught up before that crisis comes, which is retributive for the lawlessness of the Jews and the Gentiles — a wholly different kind of trouble from what is our portion as Christians.

There is no evidence that the Church, the Christian body, will pass through the great coming tribulation before this age ends. The proof-texts concerning that time apply expressly and exclusively to Jews and Gentiles, with the striking exemption from that hour of those who keep the patience of Christ. Though pledged to the Philadelphian overcomers, no prophetically intelligent saint would limit Revelation 3: 10 to such, any more than other words of comfort similarly promised to the various seven churches.

Some argue that because all Scripture is *for us*, for our edification and use, it is therefore *about us*. Any serious consideration must assuredly shatter such an assumption. Is it then left to uncertainty or guesswork? In no way. Nor is time the great interpreter, or history: it is the Holy Spirit. Inasmuch as He inspired to write it, so does He give understanding of God's mind to those who wait in dependence on the Lord for it. Therefore, weigh well not only the text but the context, and all other Scriptures converging on the same point.

Suffering for righteousness' sake and yet more for Christ's name is a high privilege. God has given it in the fullest measure to the members of Christ, though in spirit to all saints from the beginning. Our Lord was here as in all else supreme, and as He said, The disciple is not above his Master, but every one perfected shall be as his Master. Yes, adds the great apostle Paul, and all who will live piously in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted. Hence the faithful, not of the world as Christ is not, should be prepared for persecution beyond all, throughout their pilgrimage.

But the future tribulation has a very different source and character. In its most terrible form it will be a penal infliction of God on the consummation of Jewish apostasy when the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. Those who rejected and by hand of lawless men crucified their own Messiah, the Son of God, will worship the Antichrist in the temple of God, showing that he himself is God. If without parallel for severity of judicial woe, it is because of his unparalleled audacity of lawlessness, and Satan's power in the Beast of the west joining the False Prophet of the east in contempt of Jehovah and His Christ. What has this specific crisis to do with *our* being granted to suffer for Christ's sake?

Indeed the Lord Jesus (instead of calling on the godly Jews to stay and suffer when God is thus visiting His guilty people, because of their final apostasy and their bowing down to the man of sin as the true God in His house) bids the godly remnant to immediately flee, regardless even of clothes or anything else, to save their lives. So in the minor case of the days of vengeance that befell Jerusalem when the Lord's murderers were destroyed and their city burnt, it was no question of suffering as a privilege, but of a retributive dealing of God. The Lord therefore directed those who heeded His words to escape when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies.

It will be a short time of unexampled trial. We also know that there will be martyrdom once more, and a later group answering to a former one, as Revelation 20: 4 concisely assures us. Those who died for rejecting the Beast, like the earlier faithful (cf. Rev. 6: 9-11), shall rise in the blessed resurrection and reign with Christ. Those whose lives were spared shall enjoy the kingdom under

Christ. Daniel (Dan. 7: 18, 27) had already pointed out the distinction of the saints of the high places (or, the heavenlies) from “the people” of those saints: the one receiving the kingdom in an absolute way and possessing the kingdom for ever; the other having simply the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom “under the whole heaven” given to them. They both consist of godly Jews with converted Gentiles at the time of the end, but there is no union in one body like the Church, which at this time of the completion of the age, is only seen symbolically and on high.