

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

By George Whitefield

Sermon 25

Matthew 25:13 — “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh.” (Text is actually Matt. 25:1–13)

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, informs us, “That it is appointed for all men once to die; after that is the judgment.” And I think, if any consideration be sufficient to awaken a sleeping drowsy world, it must be this, That there will be a day wherein these heavens shall be wrapped up like a scroll, this element melt with fervent heat, the earth and all things therein be burnt up, and every soul, of every nation and language, summoned to appear before the dreadful tribunal of the righteous Judge of quick and dead, to receive rewards and punishments, according to the deeds done in their bodies. The great apostle just mentioned, when brought before Felix, could think of no better means to convert that sinful man, than to reason to temperance, righteousness, and more especially of a judgment to come. The first might in some measure affect, but, I am persuaded, it was the last consideration, a judgment to come, that made him to tremble. And so bad as the world is now grown, yet there are few have their consciences so far seared, as to deny that there will be a reckoning hereafter. The promiscuous dispensations of providence in this life,

wherein we see good men afflicted, destitute, tormented, and the wicked permitted triumphantly to ride over their heads, has been always looked upon as an indisputable argument, by the generality of men, that there will be a day in which God will judge the world in righteousness, and administer equity unto his people.

Some indeed are so bold as to deny it, while they are engaged in the pursuit of the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. But follow them to their death bed, ask them, when their souls are ready to launch into eternity, what they then think of a judgment to come and they will tell you, they dare not give their consciences the lie any longer. They feel a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation in their hearts.

Since then these things are so, does it not highly concern each of us, my brethren, before we come on a bed of sickness, seriously to examine how the account stands between God and our souls, and how it will fare with us in that day? As for the openly profane, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer, and such-like, there is no doubt of what will become of them; without repentance they shall never enter into the kingdom of God and his Christ. No; their damnation slumbereth not; a burning fiery Tophet, kindled by the fury of God's eternal wrath, is prepared for their reception, wherein they must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

Nor is there the least doubt of the state of true believers. For though they are despised and rejected of natural men, yet being born again of God, they are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. They have the earnest of the promised inheritance in their hearts, and are assured that

a new and living way is made open for them, into the holy of holies, by the blood of Jesus Christ, into which an abundant entrance shall be administered to them at the great day of account.

The only question is, what will become of the Almost Christian, one that is content to go, as he thinks, in a middle way to heaven, without being profane on the one hand, or, as he falsely imagines, righteous over-much on the other? Many there are in every congregation, and consequently some here present, of this stamp. And what is worst of all, it is more easy to convince the most notorious publicans and sinners of their being out of a state of salvation, than any of these. Notwithstanding, if Jesus Christ may be our judge, they shall as certainly be rejected and disowned by him at the last day, as though they lived in open defiance of all his laws.

For what says our Lord in the parable of which the words of the text are a conclusion, and which I intend to make the subject of my present discourse. "Then," at the day of judgment, which he had been discoursing of in the foregoing, and prosecutes in this chapter, "shall the kingdom of heaven, (the state of professors in the gospel church) be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." In which words, is a manifest allusion to a custom prevailing in our Lord's time among the Jews, at marriage solemnities, which were generally at night, and at which it was customary for the persons of the bride-chamber to go out in procession, with many lights, to meet the bridegroom. By the bridegroom, you are here to understand Jesus Christ. The church, i.e. true believers, are his Israel; he is united to them by one spirit, even in

this life; but the solemnizing of their sacred nuptials, is reserved till the day of judgment, when he shall come to take them home to himself, and present them before men and angels, as his purchase, to his Father, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

By the ten virgins we are to understand, the professors of Christianity in general. All are called virgins, because all are called to be saints. Whosoever names the name of Christ, is obliged by that profession to depart from all iniquity. But the pure and chaste in heart, are the only persons that will be blessed as to see God. As Christ was born of a virgin, so he can dwell in none but virgins souls, made pure and holy by the cohabitation of his holy Spirit. What says the apostle? "All are not Israel that are of Israel," all are not Christians that are called after the name of Christ.

No, says our Lord, in the 2nd verse, "Five of those virgins were wise," true believers, "and five were foolish," formal hypocrites. But why are five said to be wise, and the other five foolish? Hear what our Lord says in the following verses; "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." They that were foolish took their lamps of an outward profession. They would go to church, say over several manuals of prayers, come perhaps into a field to hear a sermon, give at a collection, and receive the sacrament constantly, nay, oftener than once a month. But then here lay the mistake; they had no oil in their lamps, no principle of grace, no living faith in their hearts, without which, though we should give all our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burnt, it would profit us nothing.

In short, they were exact, nay, superstitious bigots as to the form, but all the while they were strangers to, and, in effect, denied the power of godliness in their hearts. They would go to church, but at the same time, think it no harm to go to a ball or an assembly, notwithstanding they promised at their baptism, to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. They were so exceedingly fearful of being righteous over-much, that they would even persecute those that were truly devout, if they attempted to go a step farther than themselves. In one word, they never effectually felt the power of the world to come. They thought they might be Christians without so much inward feeling, and therefore, notwithstanding their high pretensions, had only a name of living.

And now, Sirs, let pause a while, and in the name of God, whom I endeavor to serve in the gospel of his dear Son, give me leave to ask one question. Whilst I have been drawing, though in miniature, the character of these foolish virgins, have not many of your consciences made the application, and with a small, still, though articulate voice, said, Thou man, thou woman, art one of those foolish virgins, for thy sentiments and practice agree thereto? Stifle not, but rather encourage these convictions; and who knows, but that Lord who is rich in mercy to all that call upon him faithfully, may so work upon you even by this foolishness of preaching, as to make you wise virgins before you return home!

What they were you shall know immediately: "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Observe, the wise, the true believers, had their lamps as well as the foolish virgins; for Christianity does not

require us to cast off all outward forms; we may use forms, and yet not be formal: for instance, it is possible to worship God in a set form of prayer, and yet worship him in spirit and in truth. And therefore, brethren, let us not judge one another. The wise virgins had their lamps; herein did not lie the difference between them and the foolish, that one worshipped God with a form, and the other did not. No: as the Pharisee and Publican went up to the temple to pray, so these wise and foolish virgins might go to the same place of worship, and sit under the same ministry; but then the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps; they kept up the form, but did not rest in it; their words in prayer were the language of their hearts, and they were no strangers to inward feelings; they were not afraid of searching doctrines, nor affronted when ministers told them they deserved to be damned; they were not self-righteous, but were willing that Jesus Christ should have all the glory of their salvation; they were convinced that the merits of Jesus Christ were to be apprehended only by faith; but yet were they as careful to maintain good works, as though they were to be justified by them: in short, their obedience flowed from love and gratitude, and was cheerful, constant, uniform, universal, like that obedience which the holy angels pay our Father in heaven.

Here then let me exhort you to pause again; and if any of you can faithfully apply these characters to your hearts, give God the glory, and take the comfort to your own souls; you are not false but true believers. Jesus Christ has been made of God to you wisdom, even that wisdom, whereby you shall be made wise unto salvation. God

sees a difference between you and foolish virgins, if natural men will not. You need not be uneasy, though one chance and fate in this may happen to you both. I say, once chance and fate; for, ver. 5 “while the bridegroom tarried,” in the space of time which passed between our Lord's ascension and his coming again to judgment, “they all slumbered and slept.” The wise as well as foolish died, for dust we are, and to dust we must return. It is no reflection at all upon the divine goodness, that believers, as well as hypocrites, must pass through the valley of the shadow of death; for Christ has taken away the sting of death, so that we need fear no evil. It is to them a passage to everlasting life. Death is only terrible to those who have no hope, because they live without faith in the world. Whosoever there are amongst you, that have received the first-fruits of the spirit, I am persuaded you are ready to cry out, we would not live here always, we long to be dissolved, that we may be with Jesus Christ; and though worms must destroy our bodies as well as others, yet we are content, being assured that our Redeemer liveth, that he will stand at the latter days upon the earth, and that in our flesh we shall see God.

But it is not so with hypocrites and unbelievers beyond the grave; for what says our Lord? “And at midnight.” Observe, at midnight, when all was hushed and quiet, and no one dreaming of any such thing, “a cry was made;” the voice of the arch-angel and the trump of God was heard sounding this general alarm; to things in heaven, to things in earth, and to things in the waters under the earth, “Behold!” mark how this awful summons is ushered in with the word behold, to engage our attention! “Behold the bridegroom cometh!” even Jesus Christ, the

desire of nations, the bridegroom of his spouse the church. Because he tarried for a while to exercise the faith of saints, and give sinners space to repent, scoffers were apt to cry out, "Where is the promise of his coming? But the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as these men account slackness." For behold, he that was to come, now cometh, and will not tarry any longer. He cometh to be glorified in his saints, and to take vengeance on them that know not God, and have not obeyed his gospel. He cometh not as a poor despised Galilean; not be laid in a stinking manger; not to be despised and rejected of men; not to be blindfolded, spit upon, and buffeted; not to be nailed to an accursed tree; he cometh not as the Son of man, but as he really was, the eternal Son of the eternal God. He cometh riding on the wings of the wind, in the glory of the Father and his holy angels, and to be had in everlasting reverence of all that shall be round about him. "Go ye forth to meet him;" arise, ye dead, ye foolish, as well as wise virgins, arise and come to judgment.

Multitudes, not doubt, that hear this awakening cry, would rejoice if the rocks might fall on, and the hills cover them from the presence of the Lamb. What would they give, if as they lived as beasts, they might now die like the beasts that perish? How would they rejoice, if those same excuses which they made on this side eternity for not attending on holy ordinances, would serve to keep them from appearing before the heavenly bridegroom! But as Adam, notwithstanding his fig-leaves, and the trees of the garden, could not hide himself from God, when arrested with an "Adam, where art thou?" So now the decree is gone forth, and the trump of God has given its last sound; all tongues,

people, nations, and languages, both wise and foolish virgins, must come into his presence, and bow beneath his footstool; even Pontius Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas; even the proud persecuting high-priests and Pharisees of this generation, must appear before him. For, says our Lord, “then, (when the cry was made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh!) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the graves were opened, the sea gave up its dead, and “all those virgins, both wise and foolish, arose and trimmed their lamp,” or endeavored to put themselves in a proper posture to meet the bridegroom.

But how may we imagine the foolish virgins were surprised, when, notwithstanding their high thoughts and proud imaginations of their security, they now find themselves wholly naked, and void of that inward holiness and purity of heart, without which no man living at that day shall comfortably meet the Lord! I doubt not, but many of these foolish virgins, whilst in this world, were clothed in purple and fine linen, fared sumptuously every day, and disdained to set the wise virgins, some of whom might be as poor as Lazarus, even with the dogs of their flock. These were looked upon by them as enthusiasts and madmen, as persons that were righteous over- much, and who intended to turn the world upside down. But now death hath opened their eyes, and convinced them, to their eternal sorrow, that he is not a true Christian, who is only one outwardly. Now they find (though, alas! too late) they, and not the wise virgins, had been beside themselves. Now their proud hearts are made to stoop, their lofty looks are brought low; and as Dives entreated that Lazarus might dip the tip of his finger in water, and be sent to cool his tongue, so these

foolish virgins, these formal hypocrites, are obliged to turn beggars to those whom they once despised: "Give us of your oil;" O! impart to us a little of that grace and Holy Spirit, for the insisting on which we fools accounted your lives madness; for alas! "our lamps are gone out." We had only the form of godliness; we were whited sepulchers; we were heart-hypocrites; we contented ourselves with desiring to be good; and though confident of salvation whilst we lived, yet our hope is entirely gone, now God has taken away our souls. Give us therefore, O! give us, though we once despised you, give us of your oil, for our lamps of an outward profession, and transient convictions, are quite gone out.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith the Lord." My brethren in Christ, hear what the foolish say to the wise virgins, and learn in patience to possess your souls. If you are true followers of the lowly Jesus, I am persuaded you have your names cast out, and all manner of evil spoken falsely against you, for his name's sake; for no one ever did or will live godly in Christ Jesus, without suffering persecution. Nay, I doubt not but your chief foes are those of your own household: tell me, do not your carnal relations and friends vex your tender souls day by day, in bidding you spare yourselves, and take heed lest you go too far. And as you passed along to come and hear the word of God, have you not heard many a Pharisee cry out, Here comes another troop of his followers? Brethren, be not surprised, Christ's servants were always the world's fools; you know it hated him before it hated you. Rejoice and be exceeding glad. Yet a little while, and behold the bridegroom cometh, and then shall you hear these formal scoffing

Pharisees saying unto you, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." When you are reviled, revile not again. When you suffer, threaten not; commit your souls into the hands of him that judgeth righteously: for behold the day cometh, when the children of God shall speak for themselves.

The wise virgins, in the parable, no doubt endured the same cruel mockings as you may do, but as the lamb before the shearers is dumb, so in this life opened they not their mouths; but now we find they can give their enemies an answer. "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." These words are not to be understood as though they were spoken in an insulting manner; for true charity teaches us to use the worst of sinners, and our most bitter enemies, with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Though Dives was in hell, yet Abraham does not say, Thou villain, but only, "Son, remember:" and I am persuaded, had it been in the power of these wise virgins, they would have dealt with the foolish virgins, as God knows, I would willingly deal with my most inveterate enemies, not only give them of their oil, but also exalt them to the right hand of God.

It was not then for want of love, but the fear of wanting a sufficiency for themselves, that made them return this answer, "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you." For they that have most grace, have none to spare; none but self-righteous, foolish virgins think they are good enough, or have already attained. Those who are truly wise are always most distrustful of themselves, pressing forwards to the things

that are before, and think it well if after they have done all, they can make their calling and election sure.

“Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” These words indeed seem to be spoken in a triumphant, but certainly they were uttered in the most compassionate manner; “go ye to them that sell, and buy for yourselves;” unhappy virgins! you accounted our lives folly; whilst with you in the body, how often have you condemned us for our zeal in running to hear the word of God, and looked upon us as enthusiasts, for talking and affirming, that we must be led by the spirit, and walk by the spirit, and feel the spirit of God witnessing with our spirits, that we are his children? But now you would be glad to be partakers of this privilege, but it is not ours to give. You contented yourselves with seeking, when you should have been striving to enter in at the strait gate. And now go to them that sell, if you can, and buy for yourselves.

And what say you to this, ye foolish formal professors? For I doubt not but curiosity and novelty hath brought many such, even to this despised place, to hear a sermon. Can you hear this reply to the foolish virgins, and yet not tremble? Why, yet a little while, and thus it shall be done to you. Rejoice and bolster yourselves up in your duties and forms; endeavor to cover your nakedness with the fig-leaves of an outward profession and a legal righteousness, and despise the true servants of Christ as much as you please, yet know, that all your hopes will fail you when God brings you into judgment. For not he who commendeth himself is justified, but he whom the Lord commendeth.

But to return; we do not hear of any reply that the foolish virgins make: No, their consciences condemned them; like the person without a wedding-garment, they are struck dumb, and are now filled with anxious thoughts how they shall buy oil, that they may lift up their heads before the bridegroom. “But whilst they went to buy,” ver. 10, whilst they were thinking what they should do, the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, the king, the husband of his spouse the church, cometh, attended with thousands and twenty times then thousands of saints and angels, publicly to count up his jewels; “and they that were ready,” the wise virgins who had oil in their lamp, and were sealed by his spirit to the day of redemption, these having on the wedding garment of an imputed righteousness, and a new nature, “went in with him to the marriage.”

But who can express the transports that these wise virgins felt, when they were thus admitted, in holy triumph, into the presence and full enjoyment of him, whom their souls hungered and thirsted after! No doubt they had tasted of his love, and by faith had often fed on him in their hearts, when sitting down to commemorate his last supper here on earth; but how full may we think their hearts and tongues were of his praises, when they see themselves seated together to eat bread in his heavenly kingdom. And what was best of all, “the door was shut, and shut them in, to enjoy the ever blessed God, and the company of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, without interruption for evermore. I say, without interruption; for in this life, their eyes often gushed out with water, because men kept not God's law; and they could never come to appear before the Lord, or to hear his word,

but Satan and his emissaries would come also to disturb them. But now “the door is shut.” Now there is a perfect communion of saints, which they in vain longed for in this lower world; not tares no longer grow up with the wheat; not one single hypocrite or unbeliever can screen himself amongst them. “Now the wicked cease from troubling, and now their weary souls enjoy an everlasting rest.”

Once more, O believers, let me exhort you in patience to possess your souls. God, if he has freely justified you by faith in his son, and given you his spirit, has sealed you to be his; and has secured you, as surely as he secured Noah, when he locked him in the ark. But though heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, and neither men nor devils can pluck you out of your heavenly Father's hand, yet you must be tossed about with manifold temptations. However, lift up your heads, the day of your perfect, complete redemption draweth nigh. Behold the bridegroom cometh to take you to himself, the door shall be shut, and you shall be for ever with the Lord.

But I even tremble to tell you, O nominal Christians, that the door will be shut, I mean the door of mercy, never, never to be opened to give you admission, though you should continue knocking to all eternity. For thus speaks our Lord, v. 11. “Afterwards,” after those that were ready went in, and the door was shut; after they had, to their sorrow, found that no oil was to be bought, no grace to be procured, “came also the other virgins;” and as Esau, after Jacob had gotten the blessing, cried with an exceeding bitter cry, “Bless me, even me also, O my father;” so they came saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” Observe the importunity of these foolish virgins, implied in the words, “Lord,

Lord.” Whilst in the body, I suppose they only read, did not pray over their prayers. If you now tell them, they should “pray without ceasing,” they should pray from their hearts, and feel the want of what they pray for; they would answer, they could not tell what you mean by inward feelings; that God did not require us to be always on our knees, but if a man did justly, and loved mercy, and did as the church forms required him, it was as much as the Lord required at his hands.

I fear, sirs, too many among us are of this mind. Nay, I fear there are many so polite, so void of the love of God, as to think it too great a piece of self-denial, to rise early to offer up a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. If any such, by the good providence of God, are brought hither this morning, I beseech you to consider your ways, and remember, if you are not awakened out of your spiritual lethargy, and live a life of prayer here, you shall but in vain cry out with the foolish virgins, “Lord, Lord, open unto us,” hereafter.

Observe farther, the impudence, as well as importunity of these other virgins; “Lord, Lord,” say they, as though they were intimately acquainted with the holy Jesus. Like numbers among us, who because they go to church, repeat their creeds, and receive the blessed sacrament, think they have a right to call Jesus their Savior, and dare call God their Father, when they put up the Lord's prayer. But Jesus is not your Savior. The devil, not God, is your father, unless your hearts are purified by faith, and you are born again from above. It is not merely being baptized by water, but being born again of the Holy Ghost that must qualify you for salvation; and it will do you no

service at the great day, to say unto Christ, Lord, my name is in the register of such and such a parish.

I am persuaded, the foolish virgins could say this and more; but what answer did Jesus make? He answered and said, ver. 12, “Verily, I say unto you:” He puts the verily, to assure them he was in earnest. “I say unto you,” I who am truth itself, I whom you have owned in words, but in works denied, “verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” These words must not be understood literally; for whatever Arians and Socinians may say to the contrary, yet we affirm, that Jesus Christ is God, God blessed for ever, and therefore knoweth all things. He saw Nathaniel, when under the fig-tree. He sees, and is looking down from heaven his dwelling-place, upon us, to see how we behave in these fields. Brethren, I know nothing of the thoughts and intents of your hearts, in coming hither; but Jesus Christ knows who came like new-born babes, desirous to be fed with the sincere milk of the word; and he knows who came to hear what the babbler says, and to run away with part of a broken sentence, that they may have whereof to accuse him. This expression then, “I know you not,” must not be understood literally; no, it implies a knowledge of approbation, as though Christ has said, “You call me, Lord, Lord, but you have not done the things that I have said; you desire me to open the door, but how can you come in hither not having on a wedding garment? Alas, you are naked! Where is my outward righteousness imputed to you? Where is my divine image stamped upon your souls? How dare you call me Lord, Lord, when you have not received the Holy Ghost, whereby I

seal all that are truly mine? “Verily, I know you not; depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

And now, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear what manner of persons these were, whom Jesus Christ dismissed with this answer. Remember, I entreat you, remember they are not sent away for being fornicators, swearers, Sabbath-breakers, or prodigals. No, in all probability, as I observed before, they were, touching the outward observance of the moral law, blameless; they were constant as to the form of religion; and if they did no good, yet no one could say, they did any one any harm. The only thing for which they were condemned, and eternally banished from the presence of the Lord, (for so much is implied in “I know you not”) was this, they had no oil in their lamps, no principle of a true living faith and holiness in their hearts. And if persons may go to church, receive the sacrament, lead honest moral lives, and yet be sent to hell at the last day, as they certainly will be if they advance no farther, Where wilt thou, O drunkard? Where wilt thou, O swearer? Where wilt thou, O Sabbath-breaker? Where wilt thou that deniest divine revelation, and even the form of godliness? Where wilt you, and such like sinners appear? I know very well. You must appear before the dreadful tribunal of Jesus Christ; however you may, like Felix, put off the prosecution of your convictions, yet you, as well as others, must arise after death, and appear in judgment; you will then find, to your eternal sorrow, what I just hinted at in the beginning of this discourse, that your damnation slumbereth not. Sin has blinded your hearts, and hardened your foreheads now, but yet a little while, and our Lord will ease him of his

adversaries. Methinks, by faith, I see the heavens opened, and the holy Jesus coming, with his face brighter than ten thousand suns, darting fury upon you from his eyes! Methinks I see you rising from your graves, trembling and astonished, and crying out, who can abide this day of his coming!

And now what inference shall I draw from what has been delivered? Our Lord, in the words of the text, has drawn one for me; “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

“Watch,” that is, be upon your guard, and keep your graces in continual exercise. For as when we are commanded to watch unto prayer, it signifies that we should continue instant in that duty; so when we are required to watch in general, it means that we should put on the whole armor of God, and live every day as though it was our last. And O that the Lord may now enable me to lift up my voice like a trumpet! For had I a thousand tongues, or could I speak so loud that the whole world might hear me, I could not sound a more useful alarm than that which is contained in the text. Watch therefore, my brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, watch; be upon your guard; awake, ye that sleep in the dust: for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. Perhaps today, perhaps this midnight, the cry may be made: “for in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trump is to sound.”

However, supposing the final day of judgment may yet be a great way off, the day of death is certainly near at hand. For what is our life? “It

is but a vapor," but a span long, soon passeth it away, and we are gone. Blessed be God, we are all here well; but who, out of this great multitude, dares say, I shall go home to my house in safety? Who knows, but whilst I am speaking, God may commission his ministering spirits immediately to call some of you away by a sudden stroke, to give an account with what attention you have heard this sermon. You know, my brethren, some such instances we have lately had. And what angel or spirit hath assured us, that some of you shall not be the next? "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man will come." And it is chiefly for this reason, that God has hidden the day of our deaths from us. For since I know not but I may die to morrow, why, O my soul, may each of us say, wilt thou not watch to day? Since I know not but I may die the next moment, why wilt thou not prepare for dying?

Many such reflections as these, my brethren, crowd in upon my mind. At present, blessed be the Lord, who delights to magnify his strength in a poor worm's weakness, I am at a stand, not so much about what I shall say, as what I shall leave unsaid. My belly, like Elihu's, is, as it were, full of new wines; "out of the abundance of my heart my mouth speaketh." The seeing so great a multitude standing before me; a sense of the infinite majesty of that God in whose name I preach, and before whom I as well as you must appear, to give an account, and the uncertainty there is whether I shall live another day, to speak to you any more: these considerations, especially the presence of God, which I feel upon my soul, furnishes me with so much matter, that I scarce know where to begin, or where to end my application. However, for

method-sake, by the divine assistance, I will branch it into three particulars.

And First, I would remind you that are notoriously ungodly, of what our Lord says in the text: For though I have said that your damnation slumbereth not, whilst you continue in an impenitent state; yet that was only to set you upon your watch, to convince you of your danger, and excite you to cry out, “What shall we do to be saved?” I appeal to all that hear me, whether I have said, the door of mercy should be shut against you, if you believe on Jesus Christ. No, if you are the chief of sinners; if you are murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers; if you are emphatically the dung and offscouring of all things; yet if you believe on Jesus Christ, and cry unto him with the same faith as the expiring thief, “Lord, remember me, now thou art in thy kingdom;” I will pawn my eternal salvation upon it, if he does not shortly translate you to his heavenly paradise.

Wonder not at my speaking with so much assurance: For I know “it is a faithful and true saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save (all truly affected and believing) sinners. “Nay, so great is his love, that I am persuaded, was it necessary, he would come again into the world, and die a second time for them on the cross. But, blessed be God, when our Lord bowed down his head, and gave up the ghost, our redemption was finished. It is not our sins, but our want of a lively faith in his blood, that will prove our condemnation. If you draw near to him by faith, though ye are the worst of sinners, yet he will not say unto you, “Verily I know you not.” No, a door of mercy shall be opened to you. Look then, look

then, by an eye of faith, to that God-man whom ye have pierced. Behold him bleeding, panting, dying upon the cross, with arms stretched out ready to embrace you all. Hark! How he groans! See how all nature is in agony! The rocks rend, the graves open; the sun withdraws its light, ashamed as it were to see the God of nature suffer; and all this to usher in man's great redemption. Nay, the Holy Jesus, in the very agonies and pangs of death, prays for his very murderers; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If then you have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame, yet do not despair, only believe, and even this shall be forgiven. You have read, at least you have heard, no doubt, how three thousand were converted at St. Peter's preaching one single sermon, after our Lord's ascension into heaven; and many of those who crucified the Lord of glory undoubtedly were amongst them, and why should you despair? For "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

The Holy Ghost shall be sent down on you, as well as on them, if you do but believe; for Christ ascended up on high to receive this gift even for the vilest of men. Come then, all ye that are weary and heavy laden with the sense of your sins, lay hold on Christ by faith, and he will give you rest; for salvation is the free gift of God to all them that believe. And though you may think this too good news to be true, yet I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, this is the gospel, this is the glad tidings which we are commissioned to preach to every creature. Be not faithless then, but believing. Let not the devil lead you captive at his will any longer; for all the wages he gives his servants is death,

death often in this life, death everlasting in the next. But the free gift of God, is eternal life to all that believe in Jesus Christ.

Pharisees are and will be offended at my coming here, and offering you salvation on such cheap terms; but the more they bid me hold my peace, the more will I cry out and proclaim to convicted sinners, that Jesus, David's Son according to the flesh, but David's Lord as he was God, will have mercy upon all that by a living faith truly turn to him. If this is to be vile, I pray God, I may be more vile. If they will not let me preach Christ crucified, and offer salvation to poor sinners in a church, I will preach him in the lanes, streets, highways and hedges; and nothing pleases me better, than to think I am now in one of the devil's strongest holds. Surely, the Lord has not sent me and all you hither for nothing; no, blessed be God, the fields are white ready unto harvest, and many souls I hope will be gathered into his heavenly garner. It is true, it is the midnight of the church, especially the poor church of England, but God has lately sent forth his servants to cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." I beseech you, O sinners, hearken unto the voice! Let me espouse you by faith to my dear master; and henceforward "watch and pray," that you may be ready to go forth to meet him.

Secondly, I would apply myself to those amongst you, that are not openly profane, but by depending on a formal round of duties, deceive your own souls, and are only foolish virgins. But I must speak to your conviction, rather than your comfort. My dear brethren, do not deceive your own souls. You have heard how far the foolish virgins went, and yet were answered with "Verily I know you not." The

reason is, because none but such who have a living faith in Jesus Christ, and are truly born again, can possibly enter into the kingdom of heaven. You may, perhaps, live honest and outwardly moral lives, but if you depend on that morality, or join your works with your faith, in order to justify you before God, you have no lot or share in Christ's redemption. For what is this but to deny the Lord that has bought you? What is this but making yourselves your own Saviors? Taking the crown from Jesus Christ, and putting it on your own heads? The crime of the devil, some have supposed, consisted in this, that he would not bow to Jesus Christ, when the Father commanded all the angels to worship him; and what do you less? You will not own and submit to his righteousness; and though you pretend to worship him with your lips, yet your hearts are far from him; besides you, in effect, deny the operations of his blessed spirit, you mistake common for effectual grace; you hope to be saved, because you have good desires, and a few short convictions; and what is this, but to give God, his word, and all his saints, the lie? A Jew, a Turk, has equally as good grounds whereon to build his hopes of salvation. Need I not then to cry out to you, ye foolish virgins, watch. Beg of God to convince you of your self-righteousness, and the secret unbelief of your hearts; or otherwise, whensoever the cry shall be made, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," you will find yourselves utterly unprepared to go forth to meet him. You may cry "Lord, Lord;" but the answer will be, "Verily, I know you not."

Thirdly, I would speak a word or two by way of exhortation to those who are wise virgins, and are assured that they have on a wedding

garment. That there are many such amongst you, who by grace have renounced your own righteousness, and know that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus is imputed to you, I make no doubts. God has his secret ones in the worst of times; and I am persuaded he has not let so loud a gospel cry to be made amongst his people, as of late has been heard, for nothing. No, I am confident, the Holy Ghost has been given to many at the preaching of faith, and has powerfully fallen upon many, whilst they have been hearing the word. You are now then no longer foolish, but wise virgins; notwithstanding, I beseech you also to suffer the word of exhortation, for wise virgins are too apt, whilst the bridegroom tarries, to slumber and sleep. Watch therefore, my dear brethren, watch and pray, at this time especially; for perhaps a time of suffering is at hand. The ark of the Lord begins already to be driven into the wilderness. Be ye therefore upon your watch, and still persevere in following your Lord, even without the camp, bearing his reproach; the cry that has been lately made, has awakened the devil and his servants. They begin to rage horribly; and well they may; for I hope their kingdom is in danger. Watch therefore, for if we are not always upon our guard, a time of trial may overtake us unawares; and instead of owning, like Peter we may be tempted to deny our master. Set death and eternity often before you. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, and consider how little a while it will be, ere he comes to judgment; and then our reproach shall be wiped away; the accusers of us and our brethren shall be cast down, and we all shall be lodged in heaven for ever, with our dear Lord Jesus.

Lastly, what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch; high and low, rich and poor, young and old, one with another, I beseech you, by the mercies of Jesus, to be upon your guard. Fly, fly to Jesus Christ, that heavenly bridegroom; behold he desires to take you to himself, miserable, poor, blind and naked as you are; he is willing to clothe you with his everlasting righteousness, and make you partakers of that glory, which he enjoyed with the Father before the world began. Do not turn a deaf ear to me; do not reject the message on account of the meanness of the messenger. I am a child; but the Lord has chosen me, that the glory might be all his own. Had he sent to invite you by a learned rabbi, you might have been tempted to think the man had done something; but now God has sent a child, that the excellency of the power may be seen not to be of man, but of God. Let the learned Pharisees then despise my youth: I care not how vile I appear in the sight of such men; I glory in it. And I am persuaded, if any of you should be married to Christ by this preaching, you will have no reason to repent, when you come to heaven, that God sent a child to cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh!" O! my brethren, the thought of being instrumental in bringing one of you to glory, fills me with fresh zeal. Once more I entreat you, "Watch, watch and pray." For the Lord Jesus will receive all that call upon him faithfully. Let that cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," be continually sounding in your ears; and begin now to live, as though you were assured, this night you were to "go forth to meet him."

I could say more, but the other business and duties of the day oblige me to stop. May the Lord give you all an hearing ear, and obedient

heart, and so closely unite you to himself by one spirit, that when he shall come in terrible majesty, to judge mankind, you may be found having on a wedding garment, and ready to go in with him to the marriage.

Grant this, O Lord, for thy dear Son's sake!