

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B.A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,  
VICAR OF STRADBROKE, SUFFOLK;  
*Author of "Home Truths," etc.*

ST. MATTHEW.

LONDON:  
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,  
CAVENDISH SQUARE.  
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

[this edition published after 1861AD and before 1880AD.]

first published 1856AD

MATTHEW XXV. 1–13.

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

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

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

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

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

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

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

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

9 But the wise answered, saying, *Not so;* lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

THE chapter we have now begun is a continuation of our Lord's prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives. The time to which it refers is plain and unmistakable: from first to last, there is a continual reference to the second advent of Christ, and the end of the world. The whole chapter contains three great divisions. In the first, our Lord uses His own second coming as an argument for watchfulness and heart-religion: this He does by the parable of the ten virgins. In the second, He uses His own second coming as an argument for diligence and faithfulness: this He does by the parable of the talents. In the third, He winds up all by a description of the great day of judgment: a passage which for majesty and beauty stands unequalled in the New Testament.

The parable of the ten virgins, which we have now read, contains lessons peculiarly solemn and awakening.

Let us see what they are.

We see, for one thing, that *the second coming of Christ will find His Church a mixed body, containing evil as well as good.*

The professing Church is compared to "ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom:" all of them had lamps, but only five had oil in their vessels to feed the flame; all of them professed to have one object in view, but five only were truly "wise," and the rest were foolish. The visible Church of Christ is just in the same condition. All its members are baptized in the name of Christ, but not all really hear His voice and follow Him. All are called Christians, and profess to be of the Christian religion, but not all have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, and really are

what they profess to be. Our own eyes tell us that it is so now. The Lord Jesus tells us that it will be so, when He comes again.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us mark well this description. It is a humbling picture. After all our preaching and praying,—after all our visiting and teaching,—after all our missionary exertions abroad, and means of grace at home, many will be found at last dead in trespasses and sins!” The wickedness and unbelief of human nature is a subject about which we all have much to learn.

We see, for another thing, that *Christ’s second coming, whenever it may be, will take men by surprise.*

This is a truth which is set before us in the parable, in a very striking manner. “At midnight,” when the virgins were slumbering and sleeping, there was a cry, “The bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him.” It will be just the same when Jesus returns to the world. He will find the vast majority of mankind utterly unbelieving and unprepared. He will find the bulk of His believing people in a sleepy and indolent state of soul. Business will be going on in town and country just as it does now; politics, trades, farming, buying, selling, pleasure-seeking, will be taking up men’s attention, just as they do now; rich men will still be faring sumptuously, and poor men murmuring and complaining; Churches will still be full of divisions, or wrangling about trifles; theological controversies will be still raging; ministers will still be calling men to repent, and the vast majority in all congregations will be still putting off the day of decision.—In the midst of all this, the Lord Jesus Himself shall suddenly appear. In an hour when no man thinketh, the startled world shall be summoned to break off all its employments, and to stand before its lawful King. There is something unspeakably awful in the idea: but thus it is written, and thus it shall be. Well might a dying minister say, “We are none of us more than half-awake.”

---

<sup>1</sup> I think it is fair to say that a different view of this parable is held by some interpreters. They consider that all the ten virgins represent true believers, and that the five foolish ones are believers that fall away,—or believers that are only shut out from certain privileges at the Lord’s return, and are finally saved.

I cannot admit the correctness of this view. It appears to me to do great violence to the plain meaning of the conclusion of the parable, to be out of keeping with the general tenor of our Lord’s discourse in this place, and to contradict many texts of Scripture.

I believe that the ten virgins represent the two great classes which compose the visible Church of Christ,—the converted and the unconverted,—the false professors and the real Christians,—the hypocrites and the true believers,—the foolish builders and the wise builders,—the good fish and the bad,—the living and the dead,—the wheat and the tares.

This view is neither new nor uncommon. It is held, in the main, by the following commentators:—Bullinger, Brentius, Gualter, Pellican, Beza, Ferus, Paræus, Piscator, Musculus, Leigh, Baxter, Quesnel, Poole, Manton, Henry, Burkitt, Doddridge, Gill, and Scott.

We see, in the next place, that *when the Lord comes again many will find out the value of saving religion too late.*

The parable tells us that when the bridegroom came, the foolish virgins said unto the wise, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." It tells us further, that as the wise had no oil to spare, the foolish went to "buy for themselves." It tells us finally, that they came when the door was shut, and asked in vain for admission: "Lord, Lord," they cried, "open unto us." All these expressions are striking emblems of things to come. Let us take heed that we do not find them true by experience, to our own eternal ruin.

We may settle it in our minds that there will be an entire change of opinion one day as to the necessity of decided Christianity. At present, we must all be aware, the vast majority of professing Christians care nothing at all about it. They have no sense of sin; they have no love towards Christ; they know nothing of being born again. Repentance, and faith, and grace, and holiness, are mere "words and names" to them. They are subjects which they either dislike, or about which they feel no concern. But this state of things shall one day come to an end. Knowledge, conviction, the value of the soul, the need of a Saviour, shall all burst on men's minds one day like a flash of lightning. But it will be too late! It will be too late to be buying oil when the Lord returns. The mistakes that are not found out till that day are irretrievable.

Are we ever mocked, and persecuted, and thought foolish because of our religion? Let us bear it patiently and pray for those who persecute us. They know not what they are doing. They will certainly alter their minds one day. We may yet hear them confessing that we were "wise" and they were "foolish." The whole world shall one day acknowledge that the saints of God made a wise choice.

We see, lastly, in this parable, *that when Christ returns true Christians shall receive a rich reward for all they have suffered for their Masters sake.* We are told that when the bridegroom came, "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."

True Christians shall alone be found ready at the second advent. Washed in the blood of atonement, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by the Spirit, they shall meet their Lord with boldness, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, to go out no more. Surely this is a blessed prospect.

They shall be with their Lord: with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them; with Him who bore with them, and carried them through their earthly pilgrimage; with Him whom they loved truly and followed faithfully

on earth, though with much weakness, and many a tear. Surely this is also a blessed prospect.

The door shall be shut at last: shut on all pain and sorrow; shut on an ill-natured and wicked world; shut on a tempting devil; shut on all doubts and fears; shut, to be opened again no more. Surely we may again say, this is a blessed prospect.

Let us remember these things. They will bear meditation. They are all true. The believer may have much tribulation, but he has before him abounding consolations. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm xxx. 5.) The day of Christ's return shall surely make amends for all.

Let us leave this parable with a settled determination never to be content with anything short of indwelling grace in our hearts. The lamp and the name of Christian, the profession and the ordinances of Christianity, are all well in their way, but they are not the "one thing needful." Let us never rest till we know that we have the oil of the Spirit in our hearts.

MATTHEW XXV. 14–30.

14 For *the kingdom of heaven is* as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that* is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give *it* unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THE parable of the talents, which we have now read, is near akin to that of the ten virgins. Both direct our minds to the same important event: the second advent of Jesus Christ. Both bring before us the same persons: the members of the professing Church of Christ. The virgins and the servants are one and the same people,—but the same people regarded from a different point, and viewed on different sides. The practical lesson of each parable is the main point of difference: vigilance is the key note of the first parable; diligence that of the second. The story of the virgins calls on the Church to watch. The story of the talents calls on the Church to work.

We learn, in the first place, from this parable, *that all professing Christians have received something from God.* We are all God's "servants:" we have all "talents" entrusted to our charge.

The word “talents” is an expression that has been curiously turned aside from its original meaning. It is generally applied to none but people of remarkable ability or gifts. They are called “talented” people. Such a use of the expression is a mere modern invention. In the sense in which our Lord used the word in this parable, it applies to all baptized persons without distinction. We have all “talents” in God’s sight: we are all talented people.

Anything whereby we may glorify God is “a talent.” Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible,—all, all are talents. Whence came these things? What hand bestowed them? Why are we what we are? Why are we not the worms that crawl on the earth? There is only one answer to these questions. All that we have is a loan from God. We are God’s stewards. We are God’s debtors. Let this thought sink deeply into our hearts.

We learn, in the second place, that *many make a bad use of the privileges and mercies they receive from God*. We are told in the parable of one who “dugged in the earth and hid his Lord’s money.” That man represents a large class of mankind.

To hide our talent is to neglect opportunities of glorifying God, when we have them. The baptized Bible-despiser, the prayer-neglecter, and the Sabbath-breaker; the unbelieving, the sensual, and the earthly-minded; the trifler, the thoughtless and the pleasure-seeker; the money-lover, the covetous, and the self-indulgent,—all, all are alike burying their Lord’s money in the ground. They have all light that they do not use. They might all be better than they are. But they are all daily robbing God. He has lent them much, and they make Him no return. The words of Daniel to Belshazzar are strictly applicable to every unconverted person: “The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.” (Dan. v. 23.)

We learn, in the third place, that *all professing Christians must one day have a reckoning with God*. The parable tells us that “after a long time the Lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them.”

There is a judgment before us all. Words have no meaning in the Bible, if there is none: it is mere trifling with Scripture to deny it. There is a judgment before us according to our works,—certain, strict, and unavoidable. High or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, we shall all have to stand at the bar of God and receive our eternal sentence. There will be no escape: concealment will be impossible. We and God must at last meet face to face. We shall have to render an account of every privilege that was granted to us,

and of every ray of light that we enjoyed. We shall find that we are dealt with as accountable and responsible creatures, and that to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required. Let us remember this every day we live: let us “judge ourselves that we be not condemned of the Lord.” (1 Cor. ii. 31.)

We learn, in the fourth place, *that true Christians will receive an abundant reward in the great day of reckoning.* The parable tells us that the servants who had used their Lord’s money well, were commended as “good and faithful,” and told to “enter into the joy of their Lord.” These words are full of comfort to all believers, and may well fill us with wonder and surprise. The best of Christians is a poor frail creature, and needs the blood of atonement every day that he lives; but the least and lowest of believers will find that he is counted among Christ’s servants, and that his labour has not been in vain in the Lord. He will discover, to his amazement, that his Master’s eye saw more beauty in his efforts to please Him, than he ever saw himself; he will find that every hour spent in Christ’s service, and every word spoken on Christ’s behalf, has been written in a book of remembrance. Let believers remember these things and take courage.—The cross may be heavy now, but the glorious reward shall make amends for all. Well says Leighton, “Here some drops of joy enter into us, but there we shall enter into joy.”

We learn, in the last place, that all *unfruitful members of Christ’s Church will be condemned and cast away in the day of judgment.* The parable tells us that the servant who buried his master’s money, was reminded that he “knew” his master’s character and requirements, and was therefore without excuse. It tells us that he was condemned as “wicked,” “slothful,” and “unprofitable,” and cast into “outer darkness:” and our Lord adds the solemn words, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There will be no excuse for an unconverted Christian at the last day. The reasons with which he now pretends to satisfy himself will prove useless and vain. The Judge of all the earth will be found to have done right. The ruin of the lost soul will be found to be his own fault. Those words of our Lord, “thou knewest,” are words that ought to ring loudly in many a man’s ears, and prick him to the heart. Thousands are living at this day “without Christ” and without conversion, and yet pretending that they cannot help it! And all this time they “*know*,” in their own conscience, that they are guilty. They are burying their talent: they are not doing what they can. Happy are they who find this out betimes! It will all come out at the last day.

Let us leave this parable with a solemn determination, by God’s grace, never to be content with a profession of Christianity without practice. Let us

not only *talk* about religion, but act; let us not only *feel* the importance of religion, but do something too. We are not told that the unprofitable servant was a murderer, or a thief, or even a waster of his Lord's money: but he *did nothing*,—and this was his ruin! Let us beware of a do-nothing Christianity: such Christianity does not come from the Spirit of God. “To do no harm,” says Baxter, “is the praise of a stone, not of a man.”

MATTHEW XXV. 31–46.

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee?* or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee?*

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 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.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

IN these verses our Lord Jesus Christ describes the judgment-day, and some of its leading circumstances. There are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-searching than this. May we read it with the deep and serious attention which it deserves.

Let us mark, in the first place, *who will be the Judge in the last day.* We read that it will be “the Son of man:” Jesus Christ Himself.

That same Jesus who was born in the manger of Bethlehem, and took upon Him the form of a servant; who was despised and rejected of men, and often had not where to lay His head; who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross,—that same Jesus shall Himself judge the world, when He comes in His glory. To Him the Father hath committed all judgment. (John v. 22.) To Him at last every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. (Philip. ii. 10, 11.)

Let believers think of this, and take comfort. He that sits upon the throne in that great and dreadful day will be their Saviour, their Shepherd, their

High Priest, their elder Brother, their Friend. When they see Him, they will have no cause to be alarmed.

Let unconverted people think of this, and be afraid. Their Judge will be that very Christ, whose Gospel they now despise, and whose gracious invitations they refuse to hear. How great will be their confusion at last, if they go on in unbelief and die in their sins! To be condemned in the day of judgment by anyone would be awful; but to be condemned by Him who would have saved them will be awful indeed. Well may the psalmist say, “Kiss the Son lest He be angry.” (Psalm ii. 12.)

Let us mark, in the second place, *who will be judged in the last day*. We read that before Christ “shall be gathered all nations.”

All that have ever lived shall one day give account of themselves at the bar of Christ. All must obey the summons of the great King, and come forward to receive their sentence. Those who would not come to worship Christ on earth, will find they must come to His great assize, when He returns to judge the world.

All that are judged will be divided into two great classes. There will no longer be any distinction between kings and subjects, or masters and servants, or dissenters and churchmen. There will be no mention of ranks and denominations, for the former things will have passed away. Grace or no grace, conversion or unconversion, faith or no faith, will be the only distinction at the last day. All that are found in Christ will be placed among the sheep “on His right hand;” all that are not found in Christ will be placed among the goats “on the left.” Well says Sherlock: “Our separations will avail us nothing, unless we take care to be found in the number of Christ’s sheep, when He comes to judgment.”

Let us mark, in the third place, *in what manner the judgment will be conducted in the last day*. We read of several striking particulars on this point: let us see what they are.

The last judgment will be a judgment according to evidence. The works of men are the witnesses which will be brought forward, and above all their works of charity. The question to be ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did: not merely what we professed, but what we practised. Our works unquestionably will not justify us: we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law; but the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. Faith which hath not works is dead, being alone. (James ii. 11.)

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring joy to all true believers. They will hear those precious words, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom;” they will be owned and confessed by their Mas-

ter before His Father and the holy angels. They shall find that the wages He gives to His faithful servants are nothing less than “a kingdom.” The least, and lowest, and poorest of the family of God, shall have a crown of glory, and be a king!

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring confusion on all unconverted people. They will hear those awful words, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;” they will be disowned by the great Head of the Church before the assembled world. They will find that as they would “sow to the flesh,” so of the flesh they must “reap corruption.” (Gal. vi. 8.) They would not hear Christ, when He said, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest,” and now they must hear Him say, “Depart into everlasting fire:” they would not carry His cross, and so they can have no place in His kingdom.

The last judgment will be a judgment that will strikingly bring out the characters both of the lost and saved. They on the right hand, who are Christ’s sheep, will still be “clothed with humility” (1 Pet. v. 5): they will marvel to hear any work of theirs brought forward and commended.—They on the left hand, who are not Christ’s, will still be blind and self-righteous. They will not be sensible of any neglect of Christ: “Lord,” they say, “when saw we Thee,—and did not minister unto Thee?” Let this thought sink down into our hearts. Characters on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come: with the same heart that men die, with that heart they will rise again.

Let us mark, in the last place, *what will be the final remits of the judgment day*. We are told this in words that ought never to be forgotten: “The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.”

The state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike for ever. Let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture: the eternity of God, and heaven, and hell, all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day.

Who shall describe the blessedness of eternal life? It passes the power of man to conceive. It can only be measured by contrast and comparison. An eternal rest, after warfare and conflict; the eternal company of saints, after buffeting with an evil world; an eternally glorious and painless body, after struggling with weakness and infirmity; an eternal sight of Jesus face to face, after only hearing and believing,—all this is blessedness indeed. And yet the half of it remains untold.

Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future,—all this is misery indeed: it is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold. And yet this picture is nothing compared to the reality.

Let us close these verses with serious self-inquiry. Let us ask ourselves on which side of Christ we are likely to be at the last day. Shall we be on the right hand, or shall we be on the left? Happy is he who never rests till he can give a satisfactory answer to this question.