

Matthew - Commentaries by Herbert Chisholm Anstey

Christian Truth: Volume 36, Parable of the Ten Virgins, The

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Matt. 25:1-13

It is the Lord Jesus Christ, and no other, who is referred to as the bridegroom in this parable. The virgins go out to meet Him; He is the one referred to in the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom!", and those who are ready go in with Him to the marriage. But what is meant by the coming of the Bridegroom, and when does He come? Is the valley of the shadow of death referred to as the Bridegroom's coming? Is that the event pictured here under the joyous figure of a bridegroom and a marriage? No. The coming of the Bridegroom is the coming of Him who said to His sorrowing disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It is the fulfillment of that faithful promise.

Other scriptures abundantly confirm this. The angels witnessed to it as the astonished disciples looked steadfastly up into heaven, their eyes and hearts following their ascending Lord. "This same Jesus," they said, "which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. It was a visible and personal going away; it will be a visible and personal coming again.

The great truth of the Lord's coming in person the second time shines in the pages of inspiration like a great star in the midnight sky. How sad that it has been so forgotten! But the Lord foresaw this and foretold it. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Not only the foolish, but also the wise ceased to watch and wait. In time the coming of the Lord ceased to be an object of joyous hope and expectation, and the promise of His coming was either spiritualized and explained away, or else it dropped out of sight altogether. In the early days of Christianity, however, it was far otherwise. The Lord's return, like a golden thread, was interwoven with all other truth, and the youngest convert was led to look at once for the Savior. As 1 Thess. 1:9, 10 states, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

Some say, We have always believed the Lord Jesus would come in judgment at the end of the world-that is nothing new. We are not speaking, however, of that dread appearing. Without doubt He will come to judge, for we are told that God "hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained." Acts 17:31. When He thus appears, it will be in flaming fire and with the angels of His might to take vengeance on them who know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7, 8). That is solemnly true, but if we were to explain our parable as if it related to Christ's appearing, we should mar its beauty and pervert its meaning, for it refers to the coming of the Bridegroom, not of the Judge. Guilty criminals may hear with alarm of the Judge's approach, knowing in themselves that the hour of punishment is at hand, but the Bridegroom's coming is waited for with earnest desire by those who are assured of His faithful love. Accordingly, at the close of the Revelation, when the Lord Jesus calls Himself the bright and morning star, the Spirit and the bride say to Him, "Come." And the last word spoken by Him from the glory is, "Surely I come quickly." To this assurance, so cheering and sustaining, there is the ready response, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Who could even imagine that such language would be used if we looked for Him as Judge?

"At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." From this we understand that a clear testimony was to go forth immediately before the bridegroom came. Surely that cry has been raised and, whether men will heed it or not, the fact that the Lord is coming again has been sounded out far and wide. At any moment He may come, and then it shall come to pass that "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:16, 17. Then it will be said, The Bridegroom has come, and they that were ready have gone in with Him to the marriage.

If we believe that the midnight cry has gone forth and that the Bridegroom is at the door, how needful it is that we should see that our lamps are well trimmed, so that they may burn with a brighter, purer, steadier flame than ever. "Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Eph. 5:8. Again, the same Spirit by the same servant says to us, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." 1 Thess. 5:5-10. Brethren, we shall do well to heed the Spirit's word of exhortation, calling us, as it does, to watchfulness and sobriety of mind, to the exercise of faith and love and hope in view of our Lord's return.

"A little while-He'll come again; Let us the precious hours redeem; Our only grief to give Him pain, Our joy to serve and follow Him. Watching and ready may we be, As those that wait their Lord to see."

Are you ready for the Bridegroom's coming? Only those who were ready went in with Him to the marriage. "And the door was shut," adds the Lord with terrible significance. The foolish virgins-the professing but Christless multitudes -were not there. They had no oil in their vessels with their lamps, and they only discovered their deficiency when it was too late to supply it, for while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came. How foolish to forget the one thing that would make the lamp of any use at all. Is it so with you? Perhaps at this moment no one but God

knows you have no oil in your vessel, that is, that the Spirit of God does not dwell in you. You have taken your place with the virgins; you carry the lamp of Christian profession, and are enrolled among the followers of Christ, but your lamp has no oil. How serious this is! You can never have oil unless you first receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus, and are born of God. The Holy Spirit only indwells those who trust in Jesus. Ask yourself as under the eye of God, Have I oil in my vessel with my lamp? Is Christ mine? Does the Holy Ghost indwell me? If you cannot say "yes" to these questions, then, as a lost sinner come to Him who still says, "Come, buy... without money and without price." Do not delay for "Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him."

"The heavenly Bridegroom soon will come, To claim His bride and take her home, To dwell with Him on high. The Bridegroom comes, let no man doubt; Alas! for those whose lamps are out, They'll find no oil to buy."

Christian Truth: Volume 14, Little Child, A

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The Lord's reply to the question asked in Matt. 18:1, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" is full of practical instruction for us in these last days when lukewarmness is everywhere prevalent. In the preceding chapter there had been given them a glimpse of the "Son of man" coming in His kingdom—a little foreshadowing of His glories which, as Son of man, are yet to come. Would one who gazed thereon seek to place any being on an equality with Him? Yes, but no sooner was the proposal made than the voice of the Father was heard interrupting the vain desire. "This is MY BELOVED SON, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye HIM." From the excellent glory He is thus declared beyond comparison, glorious and beloved, the center of all, greatest and highest. Thus Peter's voice was hushed; and though there with Him and the eyewitness of His majesty, as he afterward declares, yet He is God's Center, the only One who in Himself has title to be there. In the day of the manifestation of that glory, we who believe will be with Him too, our voices hushed in the contemplation of Him who is God's Center—a day which will see the fulfillment of His prayer in John 17: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

Descending from the glory where they had heard the testimony of the Father as to the Son of His bosom, they asked the question already quoted, Which of us shall be next to Him? And what a reply comes from those gracious lips—a reply for each heart to weigh the import of then, and a lesson for us to ponder still. Does He deny that there is such a place? Does He assert that we shall be all equal in that day? No, He does neither; but, exposing by contrast their love of self with what will be the true ground of exaltation, personal love, and devotedness to Himself, He replies, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." We cannot understand a little child humbling itself, because one who is in the place, who is that, needs not to come down to it; for already he is a little child. The Lord's words are rather, You must become as this little child if you desire the highest place in the day of My kingdom glory. This expression of infant helplessness, a "little child," is the same as the Apostle John delights to use in his first epistle, chapter 2, when distinguishing "fathers," "young men," and "little children" (babes). This is the word he uses in verses 13 and 18. It describes the infant, the youngest in the household.

Such is the attainment, my reader, which the Lord Jesus proposes to each of us to aim at and to reach—a "little child." Do we ask why? It is because we are not in heart and spirit, and ways and affection, such; the disciples betrayed it in their question; and do we not betray it in ourselves day by day? May I then draw your attention to two or three things seen prominently in the model before us, seen in a "little child"?

Watch him in the nursery (picture of this world wherein we grow up, and where the child of God now is); not a fear, not an anxiety, not a care has he! Dependent for food, and shelter, and raiment, and everything he wants or possesses, on another, while in himself without plan, or thought, or resources, and with no ability to make his wants known save to one who alone can understand the baby language that he speaks—such is our model. Is he happy? Generally he is. (Sometimes he may be neglected by human hands and have cause to fret. Our God never forgets or neglects His own.) But while his feebleness is thus before us, we must remember that he has a consciousness, young as he is—a consciousness that only deepens and increases with the lapse of years—that consciousness is that he is beloved, beloved by one to whom he belongs. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. That person who loves fills the whole range of his vision—a person, my reader, not a place. And is it so today? Is it so with each of us? One, as He walked on this earth, has borne the marks of it. "One thing I do... that I may win Christ, and be found in Him." "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." A Person filled the sphere of Paul's vision. He was beloved, and he knew it. He "loved me, and gave Himself for me." Reader, do you know it? Can you say it? and has it power over you as it had over him?

But the nursery time is passing away with all of us. Let our model, a "little child," be brought then from the nursery into all the light and brilliance of that day of the coming glory for which we wait. Let the assembled company stand back to make way for the approach of a "little child." "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 19:14. Why amid the brilliant throng does the eye of a little child wander timidly from one to another? Is there not enough in the grandeur of all around to engage his attention? No; the place is naught to him, while all the grandeur and all the dignity do but distress him. He seeks for one whose heart's affections are twined around him, and whose love he has learned and proved; passing by all else, he hastens to the arms and bosom of love.

And thus it shall be in the day of the kingdom glory; and THUS has the "little child" reached the highest place, even the bosom of that One to whom it shall be confessed in that day, that fast-coming day of His glory, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Rev. 5:12.

Reader, who will occupy the place of the little child? If you occupy it now, He declares you shall occupy it then. O for more of the spirit of a little child!

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