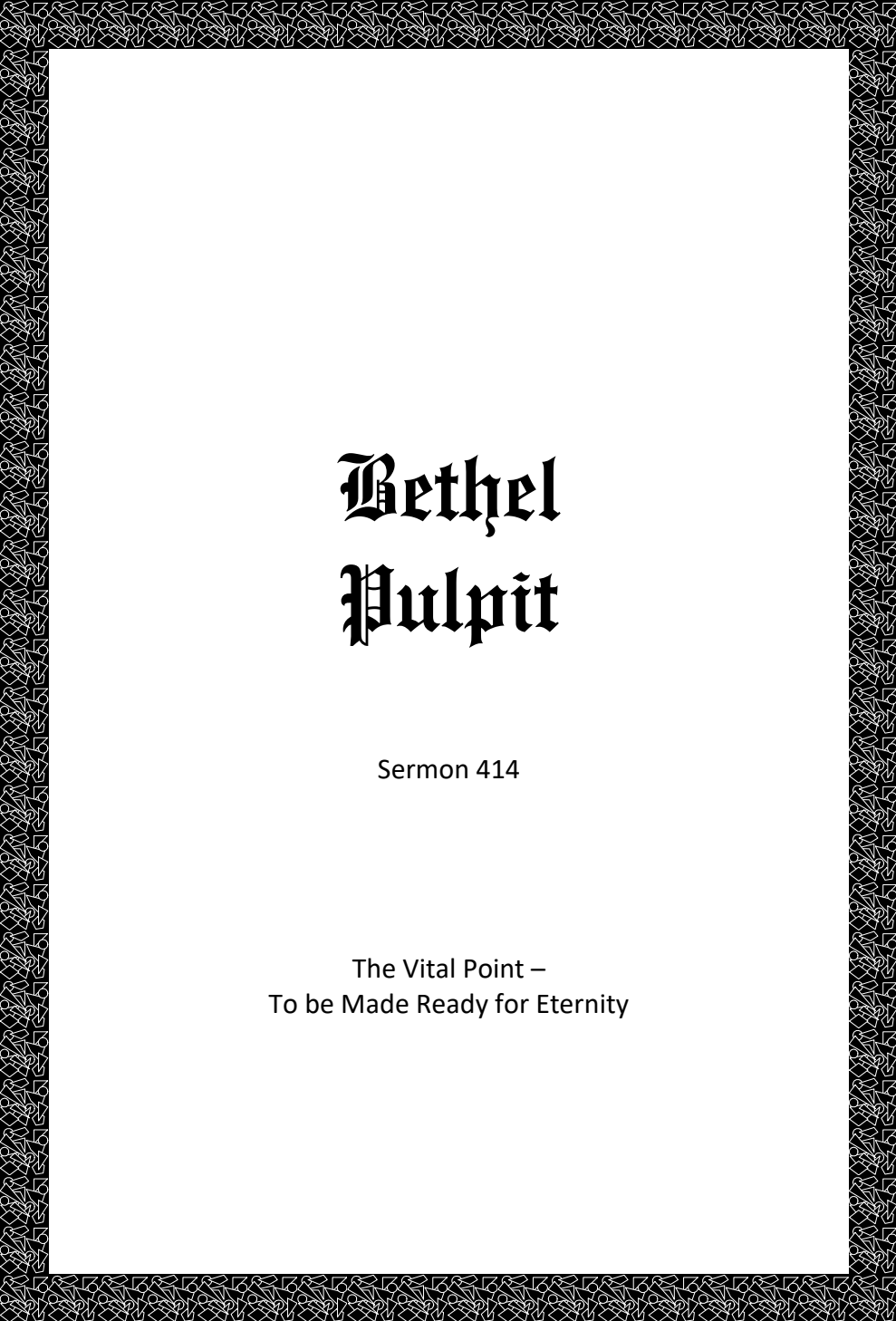




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 414

The Vital Point –
To be Made Ready for Eternity

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 24th November, 2019**

Text: *"And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Matthew 25. 10).*

The words of Matthew chapter 24 (the latter part of which was read) are some of the most solemn words in the whole of Scripture. The Lord Jesus personally tells us about His second coming – the vital need to be found ready. Then this chapter 25 – the wise and foolish virgins – is really a follow-up of the previous chapter. It is a commentary on it in the form of a parable. Because at the end of the preceding chapter we have this verse: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" – the suddenness of the Lord's return to this earth, when it is not being expected, even by the wise, as well as the foolish. So really this verse I have read and the chapter is the Lord's own commentary, His opening-up, His application.

"They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Let me say a few things first of all concerning the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is one of the vital doctrines, one of the most important doctrines. It is one of the most neglected doctrines in our congregations (and I feel guilty personally concerning this myself). I think the only excuse that can be made: that over the years there have been such fanciful interpretations of the second coming, and people so adamant in their different views, and concerning the details, even some of the most gracious of the Lord's people holding opposite views, different views, that there has been a reaction, a shying in the opposite direction. We do not want to be caught up in this confusion.

I do not want to speak foolishly, but there are gatherings of people. As we hear, there are some, one gathering, believes that the rapture will be before the tribulation, and they split from another who believe the rapture will be after the tribulation, and then a third group splits from them both.

Leaving all that, beloved friends, a lot of these things I believe are Satan, to confuse the Lord's people and draw them aside. Let me be as simple as I can. The Lord Jesus once came to earth, and then He left the earth. He is certainly coming again one day. The point is certain; the point

is fixed; no-one knows when. When He comes the second time, He will come in great power and great majesty and great glory, so different from when He came to Bethlehem. This time He will be seen. “Every eye shall see Him.” And the purpose of His coming will be the end of all things. The earth will be burnt up with fire. As the Lord comes in all that great glory, with all His holy angels with Him, it is to judge the world in righteousness, to make the eternal separation finally between the righteous and the wicked. In the New Testament it is spoken of as a glorious day, a day to which the Lord’s people should ever look forward with joy. But it is going to be a terrible day for the wicked, and the point is, it will be *final*, and it will be for ever and ever.

The Lord Jesus spoke about His second coming so often, not to interest people about all these details, not to satisfy imagination, but on one thing: the awful solemnity of that day and the vital need to be ready, the vital need to be prepared. By nature we are not ready, we are not prepared, neither can we make ourselves ready or prepare ourselves. It must be the work of the Spirit of God. But if our religion is real, we shall all be brought to that point, every one of us:

“When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?”

It is one thing to talk about it in a chapel on the Lord’s day morning; it will be another thing when that day comes.

Now many will still be alive on the earth when this takes place, but many will have already died, the righteous and the wicked. But if we are not spared to the second coming, the day of our death will be the day of judgment for us, the day of the Lord’s second coming for us, for you and me personally. Now just those few points on this very vital matter, this vital truth, the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now here in chapter 25, the Lord applies it in a parable. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven” – then, when the second coming takes place – “be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” The imagery is an eastern wedding in former days. To understand it aright, these weddings took place late at night. Here the analogy was that it was the custom, there were these virgins – we would call them bridesmaids – and they would be waiting at the home of the

bride, and the custom was for the bridegroom to come and collect his bride, and either take her back to his own home for the wedding feast, or to some other place prepared. These bridesmaids, these virgins, when it was heard that the bridegroom was on his way to pick up his bride, they went out to meet him and escorted him as part of the triumphal procession to his bride, and then for all to go together to the wedding feast.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” Five were right; five were wrong. Five were godly; five were ungodly. Five possessed the fear of God; five did not. Now this is the point of the parable: you could not tell the slightest difference, if you looked at them, and neither could any of the virgins, looking at the other virgins, see any difference between the others and themselves. They all had exactly the same appearance. This is the solemnity. They were all virgins. You could not find any fault with their lives. They were living pure lives. Nobody looking at them could find any fault with their lives. They were all carrying lamps. They were all making a profession of the name of the Lord Jesus. You could not tell the slightest difference, looking at the lamps. But if you could have looked inside, there were five completely empty. They were destitute of grace. There was no oil in their lamps. They were destitute of any knowledge of Christ, and it was not made known until the Lord Himself appeared.

“Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” It is a picture of the professing church of God today, waiting for the Lord’s appearing. This is a time when we are waiting for the Lord’s appearing. We know not when it is going to be, but again and again we are told it is going to be unexpected. In one place, the Lord speaks of it like a thief coming in the night. You are not expecting him, or you would be ready.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” This is the condition of the church of God before the Lord returns. The Lord is tarrying now. For how long, we know not. It seems that the early church thought that soon after the Lord had returned to heaven, He was going to come back again. It is clear from the epistles, in Thessalonica some of them had even stopped working. What was the use of it if the Lord might

come tomorrow? Well, two thousand years have rolled away, and still we wait for the Lord's appearing.

"While the bridegroom tarried, they *all* slumbered and slept" – the wise as well as the foolish. Let us be clear, beloved friends: first of all we slumber, and then we sleep. That is why the Lord's application at the end is, "*Watch therefore.*" In other words, do not slumber, do not sleep. In other words, keep awake. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." It is unexpected.

I do not know whether you know that little story. In the 1800s there were those great gatherings by camp fire in the United States. Perhaps there would be ten thousand attending, and some eminent preacher would preach. One was very eccentric [Lorenzo Dow] and he was going to preach on the Lord's second coming, and he was going to speak concerning that text of how the angel would blow the last trumpet, and that blowing of the last trumpet would usher in the end of all things. Now he did a very quaint thing. He got a little boy to hide up in a tree with a trumpet above where they were gathering, and when he gave a certain sign, this little boy had to blow the trumpet. As he spoke very solemnly of the second coming, he spoke of that awful day when the last trumpet shall be blown, and what a dreadful thing if not ready. He spoke like this: we know not how long it might be. It might be any day, any moment. It might be even tonight when the angel shall blow the last trumpet. And he gave a sign to the little boy, and he blew this trumpet up in the tree. Apparently the scenes that followed were dreadful: people screaming, people fleeing, people falling on the floor, kneeling down, crying. The preacher managed to stop it all, and brought the little boy out of the tree. He said, "If a little boy blowing a trumpet in a tree affects you like this, how will you stand in the great day?"

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Now the one thing that is certain is that this day will come, the midnight cry: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Then all these virgins arose and started trimming their lamps. The wick was getting a bit burnt. They all started trimming their lamps, the wise and the foolish. The foolish found that they had no oil. Their lamps had gone out.

But this lamp trimming. I want to speak carefully, but in my long life I have witnessed a lot of lamp trimming. We had at Haslingden a man I had a lot to do with. He was quite a friend of mine. When I was young, he was extremely kind to me. His chapel attendance was a little bit erratic. But then we had a death at Haslingden. Actually, it was his brother-in-law, and it was one of the most triumphant deaths I have ever witnessed [see *Gospel Standard* 1957, p. 350]. I used to go to see this man. He looked like a skeleton. O but the glorious things he was speaking! He never said much during his lifetime. His brother-in-law was so affected. Afterwards he was out at every service. He was out at every prayer meeting. If there was a good minister in the district, he would go there on the week night. He said he would take me anywhere I wanted to go when I was preaching, to be a help. We were all just waiting for him to come forward to be baptized. It was only lamp trimming. Little by little by little it dropped off. The last years of his life, he never attended any place of worship.

May I say it in all love and affection to you: beware of having nothing but a religion of lamp trimming. You hear of someone who dies. Perhaps it is a glorious death. It affects you. Or perhaps it is a close relative dies. It makes you think. Or perhaps there is a baptism. You are very affected by the solemnity. But lamp trimming is not salvation. There is nothing short of a vital, personal knowledge of Christ and Him crucified that will do.

“All those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.” Terrible thing: their lamps had gone completely out. They wanted to borrow some oil. We shall never get to heaven on a borrowed religion. Some try, but it will not avail. “And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so.” We are not like the Roman Catholics, who think when the saints have merits beyond themselves, they can give to others. We do well if we have just enough religion for ourselves.

“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.” Where they went, I do not know. It is only the heavenly Bridegroom who could supply the oil. J.K. Popham said that they went in the wrong direction.

“And while they went to buy.” It is that suddenness of it, the unexpectedness of it. “And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.” The New Testament speaks so much, this is the hope of the Christian church. This is the glorious prospect. “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” “And they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.” There are two words here which to me stand out above almost everything else in the chapter: “*With Him.*” Because you will never get into heaven without Him.

“They that were ready went in with Him.” They went in *with Him* to the marriage, to the marriage feast. And the point is, they were ready. That is true wisdom, to seek to be ready. And the foolish virgins, with all their carrying of their lamps, and trimming their lamps, and everything else, they were not ready. It is the vital point, because by nature we are not ready to go into the marriage. We are most unready, and the awful thing is we do not want to be ready, or sometimes when our hearts are touched by the preaching, we do want to be ready, but not yet; there is plenty of time; leave it till later.

What is it to be ready? It is not making ourselves ready by any goodness or anything we have done. In that beautiful account of the marriage supper of the Lamb – and do not forget, it was introduced by them singing the hallelujah chorus: “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” – we read this: “For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Now that is the only way we can be made ready, to be taught our need of a preparation not our own, to be shown that “our best is stained and dyed with sin, our all is nothing worth.” We cannot get in with the filthy garments of our own creature, covenant-of-works righteousness. We must be clothed in the pure linen, clean and white. We spoke of this last Lord’s day evening (Ezekiel 16. 14). How did you get on with that closing hymn? It was like heaven on earth to some of us.

“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

It was beautiful, wasn't it! Did some of you think about what you were singing, or did some of you sing about it just carelessly, or did some of you forget about it when you got home? "Bold shall I stand in that great day." You know what I was brought up on at Haslingden: "Bold shall I stand in that great day" – Will you? It will be a terrible day for you to stand bold.

O but, "They that were ready," clothed in the Saviour's righteousness and washed in His precious, sin-atonement blood, and if there is a sinner convinced of sin and unbelief and feeling the greatness of your need, the gospel says,

"Fly, then, awakened sinners, fly;
Your case admits no stay;
The fountain's opened now for sin;
Come, wash your guilt away."

It is the Holy Spirit's work. It is the divine enabling.

"And they that were ready went in with Him." Of course, in the parable here, the readiness was having oil in their lamps and their lamps trimmed and burning. We do not like over-spiritualising and making this mean that, but you must all know that oil throughout the whole Word of God is a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit and His saving work. So if you want to change the analogy into plain, simple things, these foolish virgins were strangers to the Holy Spirit's work. That is the preparation. That is to be made ready. "Ye must be born again." That is the Holy Spirit's work. You must as a sinner be brought to Christ. That is the Holy Spirit's work. You must have Christ made known as your only hope. That is the Holy Spirit's work. "They that were ready." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." There is a separation here, and it is an eternal separation.

"They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage." I think this is one of the most awful scriptures, solemn scriptures in the Word of God: "And the door was shut," and it was shut eternally, and it was shut for ever. There were some eternally shut in and there were some eternally shut out. I can think of nothing worse than this. "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us." It will be too late, beloved friends, then. The day of grace will be past then. "Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Awful thought, to be shut out for ever.

“Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace;
Be Thou, dear Lord, my hiding-place,
In this the accepted day.”

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

“And the door was shut.” O but the blessedness for ever and ever
of the Lord’s chosen, redeemed, effectually-called people, those with oil in
their lamps!

“Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut it.”

“And they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and
the door was shut.”

* * *

Lo! He comes, with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain,
Thousand, thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train,
And with pleasure,
Magnify His awful name!

Every eye shall now behold Him,
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold Him,
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
Deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.

Every island, sea, and mountain –
Heaven and earth, shall flee away;
All who hate Him must, confounded,
Hear the trump proclaim the day;
Come to judgment!
Come to judgment! come away!

Now redemption, long expected,
See in solemn pomp appear!
All His saints, by man rejected,
Now shall meet Him in the air!
Hallelujah!
See the day of God appear!

J. Cennick, C. Wesley and M. Madan