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STRIVE TO ENTER IN AT THE STRAIT GATE.

– APRIL 5. – Luke 13:22-30. –

THE question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" our Lord did not answer directly. The time had come for preaching the Kingdom, and inviting those who had "an ear to hear" the call to enter in. The call for the time was limited to the high calling of joint-heirship with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom; and it has so continued ever since. There is but the one call during this age. "Ye are all called in one hope of your calling." The fact that God has in purpose another call, to another class, in the Millennial age, may cheer and comfort us now, and enable us to see harmony and consistency in the divine character and arrangement, but it should not encourage [R1951 : page 58] any one to reject a present call and to hope for another. He who "hears" the present call has no right whatever to hope for another if he spurns what has been put within his reach. As the Apostle said, "How shall we escape [destruction] if we neglect so great salvation?"

Our Lord taught the Apostles much concerning his mission, his Kingdom and its object; but also said to them. "I have many things [yet] to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when he the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you [gradually] into all truth." (John 16:13.) To have answered their question in full would have led to many other questions for whose answers they were not prepared, therefore our Lord wisely avoided their query, and merely told them what was their duty and proper course: "Strive [make great effort] to enter in at the strait [difficult] gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able, when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door."

The illustration is that of an eastern wedding, as represented in the parable of the Ten Virgins. Those who were invited were expected to be ready before the coming of the bridegroom, and to *enter with him*.

When he and his ready, accompanying friends have entered, the door is shut, and for the occasion all outside are treated as strangers, as unknown, and the festivities proceed without them.

In all of his parables our Lord represented the Kingdom promised to his followers as to be gained at the end of the age, when the Nobleman would return from the far country, heaven, to take possession of his kingdom and to share its honors with those faithful to him during his absence. (Luke 19:12-27) Or, under other figures, he represented himself as the bridegroom coming to claim and take home his faithful, waiting, betrothed virgin. He gave them no definite information respecting the time of his coming, so that all might be constantly on the alert, not knowing at what hour their Lord might arrive; – nevertheless assured that all the ready, waiting, watching ones would get word in time and be able to enter in to the marriage.

Hence the coming of the bridegroom, and the shutting of the door at the proper time, has reference to the close of this Gospel age, when the full predestinated number of the Church, the bride of Christ, has been called, **[R1952 : page 58]** chosen and found faithful. Then the "door" or opportunity to become a member of the bride and joint-heir with Christ in his Kingdom will be forever closed. There cannot be one additional member, even as there could not be one less than the predestinated number.

We are down in the end of the age now; the Bridegroom-King has come; the wise virgins are trimming their lamps, examining the evidences of the Scriptures, and going forth as those who acknowledge his presence and avowedly are going to the wedding. Soon the last of this class will have gone in, and the door will be shut. Then the foolish virgins, drowsy and overcharged and lacking sufficient zeal, but nevertheless "*virgins*," will begin to bestir themselves; they will buy the oil in the market of experience; they will begin to realize that the end of the age is upon us, that the Bridegroom has come, and that the Kingdom feast is about to take place. But as they see the storm growing

dark, they will hasten to go to the wedding, and many will find themselves debarred, refused admittance. They will then realize that they have failed to make their calling and election sure by so running as to obtain the prize of joint-heirship with Christ.

"There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." Yes, not alone will there be disappointment in losing the prize offered and sought (but sought too indifferently), but some of the wailing and tribulation will arise from another cause: they will find themselves suddenly in the midst of the great "time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1), a trouble that will be worldwide, and from which there will be no escape except by those who enter in before the door is shut – to whom it was said, "Watch,...that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things. – Luke 21:36.

The angels are holding the "winds" of violence, until the full number of the elect have been sealed and have made their calling and election sure; and when this is finished we may expect that the trouble upon the world will come "as a whirlwind, suddenly."

But the "foolish virgins" who have been of the household of faith, but slack and not "overcomers," are not the only ones who will find themselves shut out of the Kingdom. Many others – *all* workers (servants) of iniquity, whether Jews or Gentiles, will find themselves excluded and denied any part or lot in the Kingdom of God.

In this discourse our Lord does not tell what great blessings are to follow the union of the Heavenly Bridegroom with his bride, but other Scriptures tell us that soon thereafter the whole world will be blessed; for the spirit and the bride will give the invitation, "Come!" and whosoever will (not merely an elect "little flock") may then come and take of the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:17.) Neither does the parable tell what became of the "foolish virgins;" but another Scripture shows them "saved so as by fire. – 1 Cor. 3:15.
